



Concept Revision of Age, Motivation, and Error Correction in Second Language Learning

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Abstract

The current review article investigates some variables contributing to English language teaching and learning. Three factors of age, motivation and error correction have been of importance in English language curricula in language centres. Some studies have been conducted to investigate various effects of these three components on English language acquisition, those studies, however, may lack discussing these factors to make them easier to understand for the second language learners. To be specific, the purpose of this review is to reflect on, first, some major concepts correspondent to interaction, imitation and comprehensible input and output, and also some notions in accordance with age, motivation and error correction. The authors revisited nine notions about second language learning according to above mentioned factors, which have been theorised by scholars in this field. At the end of this review the authors included their positions about stereotypes in age, motivation and error correction of the second language learners.

Keywords: Age, Critical period hypothesis, Error correction, Second language learning, Zone of proximal development

INTRODUCTION

English language acquisition learning and teaching has stimulated many educators to do extensive research in this field. Many books and articles are published about how to learn and teach a second language. The first part of this review provides an overview of key concepts and issues regarding some English acquisition notions. We offer introductory definitions of a range of terms, and try to help readers understand the goals and claims of particular theories in second language

learning and teaching. It is accompanied with some linguists' beliefs in relevance with interaction; as traditionally, linguists believe the language as a 'complex communication system' (Mitchell, Myles & Marsden, 2013, p.6). We, however, take some account of growing research interest in three components of age, motivation and error correction. For Mitchell and Myles and Marsden (2013), "'second languages' are any languages learned later than in earliest childhood. As for motivation, it has been an essential 'field of study' in second language acquisition (SLA) for around fifty years. Since then, it has drowned

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attentions toward the fact that motivation is perhaps “an important individual difference characteristic” which assists explanation why some competent language learners are more confident than less competent ones (Burns & Richards, 2012, p 77). According to them, motivation, similarly, has been a profound matter of ‘classroom pedagogy and practice’.

Revisoins

Notion 1

‘Teachers should use materials that expose students to only those language structures they had already been taught’

Language acquisition can happen both inside and outside the classroom. Students should thus be exposed to a variety of language structures either inside or outside the classroom. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, and his ZPD (zone of proximal development), which are about the social interaction advocates the falsehood of the notion by introducing parents, peers and generally people around students contributing their language acquisition (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Two other theorists, Krashen (1993) with his input hypothesis ($i+1$) and also Swain’s (2000) output hypothesis and ‘collaborative dialogue’ (which is done in ‘problem solving’ and ‘knowledge building’ inside and outside the classroom)) perhaps prove that learning will not only happen inside the classroom. Swain (1995) (as cited in Swain, 2000) even introduces ‘output’ more functional than ‘input’ in the language acquisition as it fosters language processing of speaking and writing skills. Majority of language modification may occur with interaction outside the classroom as Long believed that modification in interaction leads to acquisition, and Piaget believed language knowledge as a ‘symbol system’, which is obtained through interaction (as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2006). These two internationalists (Long & Piaget) probably strived to convince that a high ratio of the language acquisition essentially happens outside the class (in social interaction). On the other side, to support input as well as output, long’s

(1983) (as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2006) claims that “comprehensible input is necessary for language acquisition” (p. 43). Bruner and his colleagues, in 1976 brought ‘Scaffolding’, which participates any kind of assistance (either output or input) to contribute in the child’s learning process. Lantolf (2006) addresses many researchers who believe that the social interaction plays a significant role in language use, which probably boosts language acquisition. Ellis (1997) (cited in Lantolf, 2006) introduces the term ‘autonomous learner’ for the ones associated with society to learn a language. Somewhere else Lantolf (2006) inspires Vygotsky’s SCT (sociocultural theory) hypothesis and concludes that “development depends indispensably on the participation in our lives of other individuals who mediate our relationship to the world and to ourselves” (p. 720). In conclusion, learning a language is extended not only in the classroom, but also outside the class will bring so much learning experiences for learners.

Notion 2

‘When learners are allowed to interact freely (for example, in group or pair activities), they copy each other’s mistakes’

The new emergence of pedagogical approaches in teaching e.g. CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) present group or pair works activities in which learners benefit each other to develop their pragmatic or rhetorical competence. The writers believe that learners’ group or pair activities improve learning if it becomes systematic. It means that the participants should be investigated carefully by teacher, and also the students should be provided with the appropriate comprehensible input and the target language resources. In addition, in order to promote learning, there should be less distance in language level of group participants. In this case, the researchers developed his understanding by focusing on the Vygotsky’s developmental theories (SCT and the Zone of Proximal Theory) about how peers (as mediation) could play a significant role in learning. He realized that how pair activities assist learners “to

regulate their own behaviour” (Lantolf & Throne, 2007, p. 199) or to pass the stage of ‘other regulation’ (in which peers, the teacher and parents contribute) to approach the ‘self-regulation’ stage, which is accomplished by ‘internalization’ and no support (learners will be independent on that specific level of learning and gain confidence) (Lantolf & Throne, 2007).

Notion 3

‘Languages are learned mainly through imitation’

Lantolf and Throne (2007) and some other researchers who have recently found that ‘imitation plays an important role in language acquisition ‘and also for Tomasello’s ‘usage-based model’ (as cited in Lantolf & Throne, 2007), “imitation plays a central role in child language acquisition” (p. 204). Behaviourists believe in ‘imitation’ and ‘practice’ as two major elements for the language acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). For example, Skinner adds three other factors as input, reinforcement and habit formation for the indication that imitation stimulates learning (as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Meltzoff (2002, as cited in Lantolf & Throne, 2007) hypothesises that imitation is classified in to ‘immediate’ and ‘delayed’: the ‘immediate imitation’ is not essentially the exact repetition of the utterance; it may be a part, and the ‘delayed imitation’ refers to utilising the acquired imitative input after a day or more. In case of children, when they grow older, as Lantolf and Throne (2007) claims, blind imitation (mimicry) will be changed in to the controlled one since the child will plan how to use imitation in interaction. Some educators oppose imitation as an element of learning in children. For example, Lightbown & Spada (2006) agree that children are notable to learn with imitation and Chomsky-an innatist- (as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2006) believed that the children’s mind is not the same as a blank canvas to be infused by imitation and children’s brain is a ‘programmed mechanism’. Consequently, the writers tend to agree with the educators who sup-

port imitation as a boost for the child’s language acquisition.

Notion 4

‘The most important predictor of success in second language acquisition is motivation’

Motivation is not the only key factor toward English acquisition, according to Lightbown and Spada (2006), it should be combined with ‘a willingness to keep learning’ (p.63). In addition, Gardner (1985) advocates that ‘the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes toward learning the language’ (p. 10). Lightbown & Spada’s (2006) also purport that ‘Learners who are successful may indeed be highly motivated’ (p.56). With the anchor for stimulation of further studies, Lightbown and Spada (2006) conclude that motivation can be one of the most evident contributions in learning a second language. They also claim motivation should be based on the learners’ enthusiasm in order to join the target language groups. In addition, they believe motivated students who maintain active participation in class and pay attention to the lesson and conduct profound studies as good learners. Pedagogical (or psychological point of view, according to Burns & Richards, 2012), motivation is divided into to a ‘classic distinction’; intrinsic and extrinsic. They maintain that intrinsic motivation means the “self-sustaining pleasurable rewards of enjoyment, interest, challenge, or skill and knowledge development”, which is “doing something as an end in itself” (p. 79). On the other hand, for them, the extrinsic one is a means toward a different outcome; achieving qualification, having a good job, satisfying the teacher or avoiding punishment. Being intrinsic or extrinsic is not as important as whether it is self-determined (inside the learner), or whether it is accepted by the others (e.g., parents, teachers, curriculum) (Burns & Richards, 2012).

Motivation requires to be conducted in a cooperative rather than a competitive environment, and also teachers (in order to lead students to be more motivated) should inspire students to utilise

the variety of materials and language input to achieve a more successful learning outcome (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). They emphasise that this strategy is to be done in a constant way. Instrumental motivation is rooted around the pragmatic target and Integrative motivation' relates to personal and cultural beliefs. (Gardner & Lamb as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Another terms regarding to motivation are introduced by Dornyei (cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2006); 'choice motivation' (that is the learners decision of what to do) and 'executive motivation' (which is about the maintenance of motivation in the selected goal), and finally the 'motivation retrospection' (the personal evaluation of the performed task). As implementation of the language in variety of purposes may indicate high motivation, for Foss (1988) motivation is 'the foundation of the model', and it probably means 'the difference between communicating and not communicating'. (p. 442). Gardner (2001 a: 5, as cited in Lamb, 2004) brought the term 'integrativeness' to introduce 'integratively motivated' L2 learners who acquire a language 'to become closer to the other language community' (p. 4& 5).The 'integrativeness' is for the ones with the eagerness of attending in learning environment, and also for the ones manipulating learning with endeavour and joy (Lamb, 2004).Accordingly, he also considers a distinguish between the two contexts of ESL and EFL and proposes that 'integrative motivation' in ESL setting is more effective than the EFL - where the exposure to language is not high enough as in the former one. Concerning with childrens' motivation in English acquisition, Lamb (2004) hypothesises on the 'powerful discourse' (which is contributed by parents, schools and the media).Finally, perhaps the element of context familiarity will result in much motivation. In relevance, Ellis (1997) introduces two other terminologies, which are the notions (or adjectives) of "subject of" (the one holding context issues familiarity) and "subject to" (the one unfamiliar with the context matter) (p. 41). Therefore, being 'subject of' the context may raise motivation to learn the language. According

to Ellis (1997) 'Learning [being] successful when learners are able to summon up or construct an identity that enables them to impose their right to be heard and thus become the subject of the discourse' (p.42).

Notion 5

'The best way to learn vocabulary is through reading'

Through reading, a learner can become familiar with semantic areas of connotation and denotation of words, and also become aware of semantic relationship of words such as synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy (Wray& Bloomer, 2012, p. 80). They exemplify the journalist' lexical and syntactic choices in a newspaper, which indicates his/her 'ideological standpoint'; how the journalist states a murderer (a 'freeman fighter', a sniper or marksman').

Krashen's comprehensible hypothesis (as cited in Lightbown&Spada, 2006) and also in more details in Lightbown (2000) implies that reading intensifies vocabulary acquisition. Krashen in Lightbown (2000) introduces extensive reading (especially reading for pleasure) as a source of comprehensible input, which accelerates improving vocabulary. Probably, Stephen Krashen is the most famous linguist of the requirement for reading as well as 'Sustained Silent Reading', Reading for Pleasure and Extensive Reading. Richards and Renandya (2002) divide reading in to intensive and extensive, and define the former as a tool to reinforce the reading strategies e.g. scanning, skimming and the identification of main idea. For the later one, they allege it as an extraordinary means to achieve competency in some parts of the language e.g. vocabulary and grammar. Perhaps they advocated Stephen Krashen' comprehensible input. Reading is the only way, that 'we can become good readers, develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary, advanced grammar, and the only way we become good spellers' (1993, p. 23). Krashen emphasised that simply reading is possibly the only effective way to improve vocabulary, while there would be less people voice such an extreme

view. Hulstijn (1988) investigates the portion of vocabulary acquisition only by reading versus the amount of learnt vocabulary through additional vocabulary activities. The result of Hulstijn (1988) research indicates that other skills e.g. speaking and writing should be employed to support vocabulary learning. According to Renandya, Rajan, and Jacobs (1999, cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002, p, 299) 'the effectiveness of ER (extensive reading) may be further enhanced by such means as students engaging in activities in which they talk and write about what they have read and will read'. The variables of speaking and writing accompanied with ER possibly will result reading more comprehensible. Richards and Renandya (2002) believe that by making an integration of extensive reading, speaking and writing skills, students enjoy reading. Also the contribution of writing and speaking can be a conducive for students to shift from the receptive language competence required for reading toward high demanding productive competence needed for speaking and writing, as Richards and Renandya (2002) mentioned. Waring and Nation (2004) agrees with the contribution of other strategies with reading, and states that intentional learning is the superior, as it is more effective and beneficial than incidental learning. Waring and Nation allege that both incidental and intentional learning should contribute each other to support vocabulary learning through reading.

Notion 6

'Teachers should respond to students errors by correctly rephrasing what they said rather than by explicitly pointing out the error'

Teachers should be cautious with their students' error correction. Overcorrecting the student's errors may result in frustration. That probably will lead learners to become demotivated and desperate to maintain learning. To make a benefit of learning, and also to reduce learners' frustration, recognising the type of error correction will be considered crucial. Lyster and Ranta (1997) gave five strategies for error correction other than recast (i.e., explicit correction, clarification re-

quests, metalinguistic information, elicitation and repetition), whereas Lightbown and Spada (2006) added one more (i.e., implicit) and Panova and Lyster (2002) added another one (i.e., translation).

According to Lightbown and Spada (2006), recasts (teachers correcting students by making or uttering the correct form after the students' errors) are used more, and repetition of error by teacher (with a question mark at the end) is the least frequent feedback provided. The 'Explicit correction', as may be the least teachers' error correction favourite, is provided for teachers to correct their students by saying; 'You mean ...', 'You should say...' or 'Use this word' ... (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

With the caution of usage, both implicit and explicit error correction may be more appropriate, as Alcon-Solar (2009) argues that 'both explicit and implicit feedback seems to provide learners with opportunities with noticing' (p. 347). Schmidt (1990- 2001) postulates that input never achieves success in language acquisition unless it is noticed, i.e., consciously registered. He, in his strong noticing hypothesis, insists that noticing the input will boost learning. According to Schmidt (1990- 2001), although notifying the error is not the only way for language acquisition, it facilitates learning. Noticing and understanding probably enhance perceiving the variety of feedback.

Giving feedback to learners also will pave the way for language acquisition. Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis indicates that the feedback provided during conversation may foster interlanguage (IL) development. Providing feedback in a classroom interaction establishes a connection among input, output, learner's learning capacity and learner's attention and these may consequently lead to a better learning condition (Long, 1996). Han (2002) argues that Long's interaction Hypothesis has attracted the majority of L2 researches on recast. The interaction hypothesis was introduced by Long both in 1980s and 1996s (in an updated version). The Long's hypothesis presents interaction, communication and negotia-

tion of meaning as a pavement of salient language acquisition.

Notion 7

‘Learners’ error should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits’

In terms of responding to students’ errors, different ways of error correction approach are suggested in teaching methodology. In Audio-lingual, it is essential to impede students from making errors; errors lead to the formation of bad habits (Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Relatively they believe errors should be corrected by the teacher immediately after they have occurred. In contrast, in CLT (communicative language teaching), as fluency in the language is targeted, errors are to some extent tolerated; they may be noted later in the class (not at the immediate time).

The application of the error correction strategy needs to be carefully done. The writers believe that teachers somewhat should provide the students with the opportunity of having their own side to meditate; to correct themselves sometime. According to Lightbown (2000), error correction could be beneficial if it is done with caution. She also claims, “Learner’s inter-language behaviour does not change suddenly when they are told that they made an error- (p.446). With the advent of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) pedagogy with its focusing on meaning rather than form, it is suggested that the feedback should be on form and structure of the sentence more than on meaning (Lightbown, 2000).

Notion 8

‘Most of the mistakes that second language learners make are due to interference from their first language’

This notion can be correct only on the first stages of the language acquisition, because when the learners pass the developmental stages, the mistakes may become isolated from the impact of L1. As Corder (1967, cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2007) asserts, language learners’ errors are not a reflection of the native language (L1), but rather

were reflective of the learners’ underlying L2 competence. In elementary level, learners may assume that there could be numerous similarities between their L1 and the target language and ‘the nature of UG’ (universal grammar). Therefore, the influence of L1 is indispensable, but in their learning future the errors may be changed in to the nature of L2. Three terms such as ‘idiosyncratic dialect’ (Corder, 1971), ‘approximative system’ (Nemser, 1971), and ‘inter-language’ (Skinner, 1972) were introduced to highlight that L2 learners hold their own “linguistic system in its own right, replete with forms” that is utilised with specific ‘cognitive strategies’ (Larsen-Freeman, 2007, p.774). Also Larsen-Freeman (2007) introduces another term and put the name of ‘overgeneralization errors’ for the errors made by L2 learners.

Notion 9

‘The earlier a second language is introduced in school programmes, the greater the likelihood of success in learning’

Some researchers may disagree (or being cautious) with the notion of superiority of early age in language acquisition. For example, Munoz (2011) believes that “no study has yet observed early-starting pupils surpassing late-starting pupils” (p. 118). At the same research, Munoz (2011) maintains that the children with keeping their study of the target language to their older age and also with exposing to the native-like environment could achieve native-like mastery. Some people owning the proficiency of the target language, after asking them how they could reach the fluency, they answered, that they have studied it since childhood, even before elementary school. The low age children, compared to late learners, probably will show more capacity in learning. The three-year-old children have the capability of learning even two languages simultaneously (simultaneous bilinguals) with even the accuracy of pronouncing the vowel sounds rather than late learners (MacLeod & Gammon, 2010). They also contend that “early bilinguals show evidence of reorganization to enhance perceptual

distinctions, whereas late bilinguals do not” (p. 404). Educators in language acquisition study have proposed different ideas regarding appropriate age for acquiring a language. For instance, Penfield and Robert (1959) claim the age of 9, and Krashen (1973) believes the age of 5 years, Mack (2003) proposes the years between ‘birth to the age of 4’ as the best to begin (as cited in MacLeod & Stoel-Gammon, 2010, p. 401).

The ample of L2 acquisition can be pertinent to CPH (Critical Period Hypothesis); if CPH comes to a close, it will be less chance to the goal of native-like language competency. To define CPH, Hoffman (1991) asserts that it is the process when brain is to be simulated during a determined period of time to function correctly; in that period, brain is well receptive to new input. Lenneberg (1967) proposes that if language acquisition (through exposure) happens, during critical period, it is then considered natural (ages 2- puberty). Lenneberg maintains that the age of 2 is the beginning of SLA, when the brain is developed adequately and has lost “plasticity”_ receptive to new input according to Hoffman (1991) - and also when “lateralisation” of the language function is completed (1987). Newport (1993) holds this idea that the adult language learners compared to young language learners offer different abilities in using the language. Adults may not reach competency of the language which is possibly of the brain’s lateralization at puberty, and the loss of “plasticity”, as coined by Lenneberg (1991). In contrast, Lightbown and Spada (2006); Munoz (2011) claim that learning can be more effective in adolescence because of “using the meta-linguistic knowledge, memory strategies and problem solving skills” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 69). Moreover, Krashen (as cited in Munoz, 2011) confirms that older learners are superior in learning of “morpho-syntactic” rather than Youngers (p. 114). In addition, surprisingly, Munoz (2011) continues that the learners between the ages of ten to thirty are not very late learners due to not being “cognitive declined” (p. 129). Penfield & Roberts (1959) also make a good comparison between and young and adults

learners; plasticity is considered a “superior ability” for children to acquire language, on the contrary “the older learner is seen to have the advantage in vocabulary expansion”. Age can influence on learners’ language usage and its subordinates; “Age effects appear to be influenced by the speaker’s patterns of language use, which can be dynamic and change across time and also across contexts” (MacLeod & Stoel-Gammon, 2010, p. 402).

Conclusion

This review study provides our reflection on some notions about the factors that are known as the important lens to investigate while speaking about language learning. We, however, do not delineate specific concept in language learning, our reflection for age may be support a sensitive period that proposes declines in plasticity and increases of variations in L2 outcomes with increasing ages of learning. Other conclusion emerged from our overview is that, motivation can indeed be a multifaceted rather than a uniform factor and no available theory has yet managed to represent it in its total complexity. With motivation being as important a factor in learning success as argued earlier through the concepts, teacher skills in motivating learners should be seen as central to teaching effectiveness. We also need to note that teachers need to be cautious in relation to their error correction strategies. Over-correcting can be results in students lose their motivation and teachers may even destroy the flow of the class by butting in and correcting every single mistake.

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