SEVEN FACTORS INFLUENCING LANGUAGE LEARNER SYSTEMS

Nirna Nirmala[1], Ashri Shollina[2] , Muhammad Zen Masruri[3]

[1]English Language Education, FKIP, Universitas Islam Syekh Yusuf
email: nnirmala@unis.ac.id
[2]STIT Muhammadiyah Tanjung Redeb Berau
email: ashri82@gmail.com
[3]Akuntansi Syariah, Fakultas Ekonomi dan Bisnis Syariah, IAIN Tulungagung
email: mzenmasruri@gmail.com

Abstract

The concept of second language acquisition and how it is described and understood has been widely debated. This paper provides an overview on the field of error analysis. It shows the interesting perspective in learner English to earlier research on second language learning. Study of the child learner's errors emphasizes on the types of cognitive and linguistic processes that appear to be part of the language learning process. In line with the acquisition of second language, there are seven factors that may influence and characterize the language learner systems, i.e. language transfer, intralingual interference, sociolinguistic situation, modality, age, successions of approximative systems, and universal hierrchy of difficulty. Considering the approximative systems of language learners not as pathologies to be eradicated but as necessary stages in the gradual acquisition of the target system may result in a deeper understanding of language in general and a more humane approach to language teaching.

Keywords: language learner system, second language acquisition

Abstrak

Konsep penguasaan bahasa kedua dan bagaimana mendeskripsikan dan memahaminya telah banyak diperdebatan. Artikel ini membahas tentang penguasaan bahasa kedua yang berfokus pada *error analysis*. Ulasan ini menunjukkan perspektif yang menarik dalam pelajar bahasa Inggris untuk penelitian sebelumnya tentang pembelajaran bahasa kedua. Studi tentang *error* pada anak pelajar menekankan pada jenis proses kognitif dan linguistik yang tampaknya menjadi bagian dari proses pembelajaran bahasa. Sejalan dengan akuisisi bahasa kedua, ada tujuh faktor yang dapat mempengaruhi dan mengkarakterisasi sistem pembelajar bahasa, yaitu transfer bahasa, gangguan intralingual, situasi sosiolinguistik, modalitas, usia, suksesi sistem aproksimasi, dan hierarki kesulitan yang universal. Mempertimbangkan sistem pendekatan pembelajar bahasa bukan sebagai patologi yang harus diberantas tetapi sebagai tahap yang diperlukan dalam perolehan bertahap dari sistem target dapat menghasilkan pemahaman yang lebih dalam tentang bahasa secara umum dan pendekatan yang lebih manusiawi dalam pengajaran bahasa.

Kata Kunci: penguasaan bahasa, sistem pembelajar bahasa

1. Introduction

The concept of second language acquisition and how it is described and understood has been widely debated. The theories of second language acquisition traditionally supplemented by insights of psychology. However, there are lack of linguistic paradigm for second language research. Knowing it, some linguists in second language learning may be compelled to develop new theories under that investigation.

This paper provides an overview of the field of error analysis. It also shows the interesting perspective in learner English to earlier research on second language learning. Study of the child learner's errors emphasizes on the types of cognitive and

linguistic processes that appear to be part of the language learning process. In second language learning, as stated by Corder (Richards 1997) learner's errors depend on both the learner's knowledge and the ways in which a second language is learned. Talking of the acquisition of second language, there are seven factors that may influence and characterize the language learner systems, i.e. language transfer, intralingual interference, sociolinguistic situation, modality, age, successions of approximative systems, and universal hierrchy of difficulty.

2. The Study of Learners' Approximative System

Many researchers involved in describing how children acquire second language. The old review of observation in second language learning is pointed out by Boaz. Boaz (1889) pointed out the apparent fluctuations in learners' (linguists') perceptions of sound in new languages. He suggests that learners perceived sounds in new languages in terms of their native language or other languages to which they had earlier been exposed (Richards 1997).

With the importance of the notion of language as a system, however it is better to understand both language systems of first language and second language. Those language systems can lead to a new super system combined features of both systems. The notion of both language systems is interested enough to be emphasized by Lado (1957). He tends to analyze the contrast between two languages, so called contrastive analysis (CA). However, CA is not the only one factor involved in second language learning. Some linguists refer to error analysis (EA). Stevens (1969) pointed out that errors should not be viewed as problems to be overcome, but rather as

normal and inevitable features indicating the strategies that learners use.

On the other hand, Nemser (1971) in his work aimed at the collection and evaluation of relevant interference data between languages which stressed in errors. Errors which did not fit systematically into the native language or target language systems were mostly ignored. Current research tends to focus on the learner himself as the generator of the grammar, therefore; the terminologies developed such as error analysis, idiosyncratic dialects, interlanguage, approximative systems, transitional competence, and dialects. Those terminologies look very similar in meaning. According to Harsono (2009), each of the terms refers to the learner language that is neither his native language nor his target language, the language that the learner is learning. The learner language, therefore, lies between the native language and the target language of the learner.

Relating to the study of learners' approximative systems, Nemser (1971) defines approximative systems as "the deviant linguistic system which the learner employs when trying to use the target language. The learner passes through a number of 'approximative systems' on the way to acquiring full target language proficiency. The more the learner learns and masters the target language the nearer the learner language approaches the target language. That is why Nemser named this particular learner language 'approximative systems'. He believed that at a particular point of time a successful language learner will reach the perfect achievement of the target language. There is only approximately 5% of this kind of absolute successful learners out of the whole language learners. Interlanguage, idiosyncratic dialects, and transitional

competence are different from Nemser's approximative systems in that they do not necessarily mean approaching the target language (Harsono 2009).

In line with this, Cook (1999) also states that one form of the independent grammars assumption in L2 learning was Nemser's idea of approximative system: 'Learner speech at a given time is the patterned product of a linguistic system, La [approximative language], distinct from Ls [source language] and Lt [target language] and internally structured' (Nemser, 1971). Learners have a knowledge of language that is neither L1 nor L2 but is something of its own, a true independent grammar. The approximative system approximate to the target native speaker system; that is to say, the learner's system is still defined by reference to the target; L2 learners are moving towards native competence (Cook 1999).

Richards (1997: 54) mentions the small amount of research and speculation about learners' approximative systems and suggests that there are seven factors may influence and characterize these second language learner systems. They are:

a. **Language Transfer**

The first factor is language transfer. Sentences in the target language may exhibit interference from the mother tongue. Interference analysis tend to be from the deviant sentence back to the mother tongue (Richards, 1997: 5).

Language transfer is the process of using knowledge of the first language in learning a second language. Transfer can be positive or negative. Language transfer is considered positive when a first language pattern identical with a target-language pattern is transferred. Language transfer is considered negative when a first-language pattern different from the target-language pattern is transferred. This negative transfer hinders the language learner to master the target language successfully. Thus the learner language cannot achieve the target language (Harsono 2009).

b. **Intralingual Interference**

(Richards 1997) outlines the second factor that influence and characterize the second language learner systems is intralingual interference. It refers to items produced by the learner which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue, but generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language. In line with this (Bordag 2004) writes the definition of intralingual interference by Richards (1971) as the reflection of the general characteristics of rule learning such as a faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply. A typical manifestation of an intralingual interference is thus overgeneralization.

c. **Sociolinguistic Situation**

A third factor is sociolinguistic situation. Different settings for language use result in different degrees and types of language learning. These may be distinguished in terms of the effects of socio-cultural setting on the learner's language and in terms of the relationship holding between the learner and the target language community and the respective linguistic markers of these relations and identities. They includes the effects of the learner's particular motivations for learning the second language as well as the effects of the socio-cultural setting.

Ervin and Osgood (1997: 7) rest upon an assumption that different settings for language learning may motivate different processes of language learning. For example, two languages may be learned in the same socio-cultural setting or in two different settings. If the languages are learned in the same setting, the learner may develop a given type of semantic structure. Imagine the case of a child raised bilingually in the home. English *door* and Indonesia *pintu* might be identified with the single concept (compound bilingualism).

On the other hand, the two lexemes might be stored separately (co-ordinate bilingualism). Although, it has been criticized as too simple a model to explain real linguistic differences, it is still found useful for sociolinguistic. More generally however the focus on the relationship between the opportunities for learning and the learner's developing system is a useful one, since it leads to such distinctions as to whether the learning opportunities are limited to those provided by the school course (English as a foreign language) or are mainly outside of the school program (English as second language) and to a consideration of the effects of these differences on the learner's language.

Consideration of the sociolinguistic situation also leads to inclusion of the general motivational variable which influence language learning. Psychologists have related the types of language learning achieved to the role of the language in relation to the learner's needs and perceptions. The instrumental type of motivation is described as that motivating a learner to study a language for largely utilitarian purposes, and not as a means for integration with members of another cultural linguistic group. It is said to be appropriate for short term goals but inappropriate for the laborious task of acquiring a language for which an integrative motivation is necessary. In the focusing on the type of relationship holding between the learner and the target language community it would be appropriate to consider no-standard dialect, and immigrant language learning as illustration of the influence of social processes on the transmission and use of language.

The phenomenon of simplification in some language contact situations, represented by the absence of the copula, reduction of morphological and inflectional systems, and grammatical simplification, may likewise be socially motivated. When the need is for communication of simple information with the help of non-linguistic clues, vocabulary items and word order may be the most crucial elements to be acquired, as the experience of tourists in foreign countries.

The influence of the mother tongue on the learner's language may also vary according to the sociolinguistic situation. In describing interference one must account for variation according to the medium, style, or register in which the speaker is operating.

d. Modality

The modality is exposure to the target language and the modality of production. Production and perception may involve the acquisition of two partially overlapping systems. Vildomec observed that interference between the bilingual's languages is generally on the productive rather than receptive side. People often report instances of intrusion f elements of their mother tongue in speech production, but rarely in their understanding of another language.

There is two different systems may be internalized in the target language depending on the modality. In the productive modality, phonological replacement differed depending on whether the learner was imitating utterances, he heard or producing speech spontaneously. In fact, in first language acquisition has proposed that some phonological features exist because their acoustic correlates 'match' a particular neural acoustic detector.

Other features exist because it is easy to produce a particular articulatory man oeuvre with the human vocal apparatus; the features 'match' an articulatory constraint. Still other features may have articulatory correlates that are easy to produce and result in acoustic correlates that are readily perceptible. It is not therefore unrealistic to assume that second language learners acquire some distinctions on the basis of auditory cues, some on the basis of articulatory cues, and other on the basis of a combination of these cues. George describes learning difficulties derived from audio-lingual introduction to is

and has, in unstressed position, which may be realized as /z/, leading to identification as a single lexical item and to such sentences, e.g. She is a book, Her name has Sita.

e. Age

Some aspects of the child's l earning capacities change as he grows older and these may affect language learning. The child's memory span increases with age. He acquires a greater number of abstract concepts, and he uses these to interpret his experience. Lenneberg notes a period of primary language acquisition, postulated to be biologically determined, beginning when the child starts to walk and continuing until puberty.

Some of the characteristics of child language have been attributed to the particular nature of his memory and processing strategies in childhood. Brown and Bellugi relate aspects of children language to limitations on the length of utterances imposed by the child's inability to plan ahead more than a view words. Hence in some ways adult are better prepared for language learning then children. Adult have better memories, a larger store of abstract concept that can be used in learning, and a greater ability to form a new concept. Children; however, are better imitators of speech sounds. Adult other tongue development is primarily in terms of vocabulary. The adult's strategies of language learning may be more vocabulary oriented than syntactic.

A model that suggested separated sets of rules for each code would be a common core of rules with those specific to a particular code

tagged as such through a process of differentiation. In learning the rule of the English negative system he produced sentences like those produced by children learning English as a mother tongue(e.g. I not like that) although the Norwegian type would be with the negative element after the verb (e.g. I like that not). In learning the question system he began with data from two languages, deals with them at times independently and at time as single code. Children who are going through natural developmental stages in acquisition of their native language could thus be expected to use processes in second language acquisition similar to those they utilize in mother tongue acquisition. Mother tongue acquisition is a long process which may last until age 10 or later.

f. Successions of Approximative Systems

The sixth factor that may influence and characterize the second language learner systems is the succession of approximative systems. According to Richards (1984: 11), such systems are usually unstable in given individuals, since the individuals always continue to improve in learning the target language. In addition, the new language acquisition of one individual is different to the other individuals. It means that the acquisition of new lexical, phonological, and syntactic items varies from one individual to another. This exists because the circumstances for individual language learning are never identical.

Most studies of second language learners systems deal with the learner's production rather than his comprehension of language. This causes a question whether the grammar by the learner understands speech is the same as that by which he produces speech as it is explained above that modality may influence the type of developed system. It may be useful to assume the learner that hears and understands the Standard English produces a significant number of deviant sentences. It means that there is a distinction between his receptive competence (the rules he understand) and his productive competence (the rules he uses). Besides, in the development of a second language rule system, many elements are observed to go through a stage where they are sometimes used and sometimes omitted. It means that a grammar for such features might contain the rule but specify that it was optional.

Furthermore, according to Nemser (1969), evidence suggests that the speech behavior of language learners may be structurally organized and that the contact situation should be described not only by reference to the source (SL) and target (TL) languages of the learner, but also by reference to a learner system (AL). Investigation of such learner systems is crucial to the development of contrastive analysis theory and to its application to language teaching. However, these systems also merit investigation in their own right through their implications for general linguistic theory.

g. Universal Hierarchy of Difficult

This factor deals with the inherent difficulty for man of certain phonological, syntactic, or semantic items and structures. In the language acquisition, there is a hierarchy

involved in the acquisition of features when adults and children are acquiring another language. It is related to the way in which a language encodes a particular category and it determines a natural order of emergence of features (Bell and Gilbert).

There are some forms that may be inherently difficult to learn for the learners of any background. For example there are English pairs of phonemes that are hard to distinguish for both native and non-native speakers; those are /v/ -- /ð/ and /f/ -- /θ/. Those forms may be called as universal hierarchy of difficulty as Richards (1984: 13) stated that a universal hierarchy of difficulty may be taken into account if it is postulated for learners of a given language background.

The concept of difficulty may be presumed to affect the learner's learning strategy and his communication strategy. The learning strategy refers to the learner's organization of what he perceives, while the communication strategy refers to the organization of what he produces. Richards (1984: 13) explains that focusing on learning strategies directs attention to the cues which the learner uses to identify many elements in the new language. For example is the existence of cognates, derivatives, and loan words which may make the identification of certain elements in the new language easier, likewise where the target language follows a structure in the mother tongue.

Besides, what the learner finds difficult will also depend on the degree and nature of what he has acquired of the second language. The second language knowledge itself is the part of the data by which the learner infers the meaning of new elements (plural markers, tense markers, word order constraints etc.).

Furthermore, difficulty in language learning has been defined by psycho-linguists in terms of such factors as sentence length, processing time required, derivational complexity, types of embedding, number of transformations, and semantic complexity. However, experimental evidence has not confirmed a direct relationship between ease of comprehension of an utterance by an adult listener and the number of rules used by the linguists in describing the utterance.

`The next is about learner's comprehension and efforts at comprehension that may be compared with his production. Learners may avoid a word or structure they find difficult (in production) such as he will say "*I'm going to telephone you tonight*" instead of saying "*I'll telephone you tonight*". Facility and economy of effort may explain why first learned words/structures tend to be overused and may resist replacement by latter taught one. For example the use of simple present or present continuous. Once the present continuous (or simple present) is introduced, it is often used more frequently than necessary.

In line with these, Richards (1984: 14) adds that patterns learned first have priority over patterns learned at a later date because of the convenient simplicity of these first basic structures. This kind of intrastructural interference will take place even against an inter structural contrastive background.

3. Conclussion

In short, the seven factors discussed above suggest that the approximative systems of language learners are much richer in linguistic, pedagogic and social significance than heretofore suspected. While approximative systems of language learners may be studied as entities worthy of attention in and of themselves, the results of such study should also provide feedback to language teaching practice and to general linguistic theory.

In addition, the description and analysis of learning modalities and strategies will help with the development of teaching procedures that make optimal use of the learner's way of learning. Then, at the level of pragmatic classroom experience, error analysis will continue to provide one means by which the teacher assesses learning and teaching and determines priorities for future effort.

In summary, viewing the approximative systems of language learners not as pathologies to be eradicated but as necessary stages in the gradual acquisition of the target system may result in a deeper understanding of language in general and a more humane approach to language teaching.

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