

Lecture 04: Approaches in Applied Linguistics 3

1. Interlanguage

- Applied linguists had a new look at learners' performance because of the following:
 - A shift in psychology from behaviouristic to cognitive theories.
 - Dissatisfaction with L1 transfer as the main objective of CA.
 - Finding actual errors at a given point in time by the EA approach.
- “This new approach is no longer based on deviation (i.e. error) from the L2 norm at a given point in time, but on the processes of L2 development (i.e. at all levels: phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic) as a whole in different stages. Attention is paid to the developmental processes and how one could account for both systematicity and variability in the learner's language. ”
- “The hypothesis of this new approach was developed from the observation that adult learners of an L2 produce speech which is different from the acceptable L2 forms, and it is not always attributed to L1 transfer. The claim does not deny the possibility of both positive and negative transfers. This new approach is seen as a separate linguistic system from the L1 and the L2. This linguistic system has been called different terms, such as ‘approximative systems’ (Nemser 1971), ‘interlanguage’(Selinker 1969) and ‘transitional competence’ (Corder 1967). The most popular term is ‘interlanguage’ (IL) which represents the intermediate status of the learner's system between his L1 and the L2.”
- Selinker (1972) argued that IL is the product of five central cognitive processes involved in L2 learning:
 1. L1 transfer.
 2. Transfer of training, which comes from learners' teachers.
 3. Strategies of L2 learning, which are approaches by learners to the elements to be learned.
 4. Strategies of L2 communication, which are ways of communicating with the native speakers of the L2.
 5. Overgeneralization of L2 rules, which is a process by which a learner extends the L2 rule beyond its acceptable use.

On the basis of these cognitive processes, IL rules or descriptions should be made in consideration of the individual variations of learners and psychological (i.e. in 1, 3 and 5) and social (i.e. in 2 and 4) processes in L2 learning and teaching.
- IL assumes that:
 1. Learners internally construct a linguistic system, which is different from both the learner's L1 and the L2, but it is based on L2 input that they receive.
 2. At successive stages of learning, learners rely on their own linguistic system for reconstructing and approximating a certain variety of L2 that rarely becomes identical to the L2 norm.

1. EA Vs CA

Similarities

1. IL is assumed to be systematic (i.e. governed by rules 'rule-governed behaviour'), such as SVO in English, but not VSO as in Arabic, and Adj. + N in English, but not N + Adj. as in Arabic, etc.
2. IL shows evidence of internal consistency since it is a linguistic system in its own right with forms that neither belong to the native language nor the target language.
3. IL obeys universal constraints at all levels (i.e. phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic) which occur in all natural languages, such as the following: languages have singulars and plurals; when there is a dual, there should be a plural; sentences have both deep structures and surface structures with which the surface structure is derived by one or more than one transformation, etc.

Differences

Reduced systems: ILs are reduced systems with regard to the number and complexity of different rules (i.e. rules of phonology, morphology, lexis, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics).

Permeability: IL rules are typically permeable in the sense that they are by nature incomplete and in a state of flux because learners may use a rule or a form from their L1 and they may distort or over generalize a rule from the L2 in an attempt to convey the intended meaning. On the basis of this view, the rules of natural languages are relatively stable.

Fossilization: The cognitive representation is fixed in which aspects of pronunciation, vocabulary usage, and grammatical rules become a permanent part of the way a learner speaks or writes the L2, no matter if there is more exposure to the L2 or new teaching. Selinker and Lamendella (1978) stated the possible causes for fossilization:

- Low motivation of L2 learning for psychological and social reasons.
- Age with which old learners usually retain a recognizable foreign accent.
- Limited range of L2 input with respect to its quality and quantity.

3. IL Methodology

Selinker (1972:214) identified the essential components for IL analysis in:

1. L1 utterances produced by the learner.
 2. IL utterances produced by the learner (the learner's version of L2).
 3. L2 utterances used by its native speakers. In this way, IL methodology incorporates the assumptions of CA and EA. CA contrasts the learner's L1 and the L2, whereas EA basically contrasts the learner's performance and the L2.
- The teacher of an L2 can get a clearer picture of the learner's transitional competence, which are not only the errors that are made at a particular time, as in the case of the EA approach.
 - Plans for teaching are done for the different stages of development.
 - Psychological and linguistic processes of L2 learning may be inferred from the descriptions of the learner's IL, as these descriptions develop and change through various attempts of learning the L2

Notes

4. IL Criticism

IL's are mainly criticized for:

1. No concrete assertions are made in the IL literature on how to describe the changing linguistic systems in IL.
2. A large body of data is needed to ascertain a linguistic rule in the learner's IL. This is only achieved through longitudinal studies, which take a long period of time (i.e. years) in order to follow the development of a language phenomenon.
3. Observation of the most truly systematic form of a learner's IL is not an easy process since it needs a number of considerations related to the social status of the learners and the researcher, the topic of discourse, the spoken or written language, a naturalistic or experimental task, the physical surroundings (e.g. classroom, home, office, etc.), and monitored or unmonitored speech.

Further reading

Khansir, A. A. (2012). Error analysis and second language acquisition. *Theory and practice in language studies*, 2(5), 1027-1032. doi:10.4304/tpls.2.5.1027-1032