

HOW SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUIRED AT SCHOOL: SOME FACTORS INFLUENCING L2 ACQUISITION

Fajar Susanto

Dosen Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya
dawn.susanto@yahoo.com

Abstract: The aim of this article is to discuss how children acquire the second language at school from psycholinguistic perspective. Second Language (L2) is a language that is acquired after a child has acquired the first language (L1). A child will grow up with a social environment and with a language he uses. If a child lives in a bilingual or multilingual society he may speak more than one language. But how can a child acquire a second language after the first language? As we know that language acquisition is not an easy process. It may be said it is a complicated process although humans sometimes are not conscious with this condition. Language acquisition according to Ellis can occur naturally or formally. L2 acquisition is also influenced by some factors such as motivation, age, formal presentation, first language, and environment. Besides that, teacher's language also has some important roles for the learners in learning a second language.

Keywords: *acquisition, naturalistic language learning, formal language learning, language environment*

Introduction

We may never think that speaking, in fact, is a very complicated skill. However, this is never thought by human beings because they can use their native language naturally through their environment. The use of language is regarded very normal without being considered and learnt since human beings were born. Language acquisition will develop along with their growing. We can see that the process of first language acquisition is very natural in which human beings can speak language with their social environment. But it is very different from second language acquisition process for students at school. How can children learn L2 at school?

From this article the writer tries to discuss how psycholinguistics can show us how children acquire language, use language to speak and understand one another, and how the brain works. Language acquisition is an interesting study for human development.

Children acquire knowledge of the language or languages around them in a relatively brief time, and with little apparent effort. Fernández and Cairns (2011: 97) said that there are "two crucial ingredients, a biologically based predisposition to acquire language, and experience with language in the environment".

Language Acquisition Device (LAD)

Behaviorists state that a language acquired by children is influenced by their environment. The environment has formed them gradually. Their competences and performances of the language are acquired through their experiences and learning processes. However, this theory is opposed by mentalism. Chomsky, one of the prominent figures of mentalist, states that each child who is born has been given Language Acquisition Device (LAD) that enables the humans to be able to speak a language. Furthermore, Chomsky insists that humans and animals are different because humans are given this device that enables humans to speak, but animals are not. One knows that animals have

brains but they do not have Language Acquisition Device so that they cannot speak a language. Therefore, although they are given a language lesson, or they are trained to speak, animals will not speak a language like humans. However one can see that there are some animals being able to imitate language sounds that are usually uttered by humans.

What has been explained by Chomsky in terms of LAD for each child has strengthened some views of linguists about language acquisition, that is, each child after being born to the world has been given an ability to acquire a mother tongue. It can be seen when the inputs that are received by the children as utterances that are not complete, wrong sentences, or maybe in unstructured and ungrammatical sentences, the children can acquire their mother tongue. From this view it can be perceived that mother tongue can be acquired by children in different kinds of situations and patterns. Based on this case, Clark cited by Chaer (2003: 170) argued that children may not be able to acquire the syntax of a language if they do not have a particular mechanism of language.

Language acquisition process not only occurs on first language, but it also happens in L2 acquisition for adults although the result is not as good as children. The children are better than adults in L2 acquisition because they still have critical period in which in this period the children can learn L2 easier like the way the native speakers do. The term 'acquisition' is used a lot by linguists like Nurhadi and Roekhan (1990). They use L2 acquisition instead of L2 learning. They may regard that L2 constitutes something that can be acquired whether formally or informally. It is greatly possible that L2 acquisition can occur in bilingual or multilingual societies, like in the suburb of Jakarta where Betawi language gets overlaps with Sundanese language. In this case, many children in these suburbs acquire two languages altogether e.g., Jakarta dialect and Sundanese dialect. The same thing also happens in the societies of Montreal, Canada, in which the children are able to acquire English and French altogether (Chair, 2003: 242).

Language is a means of communication to interact with other people. Language is used to convey some purposes or ideas. However, people interact not only in the environment where they use their language but sometimes they also interact with other people from different countries. That's why many people learn L2 in order to be able to communicate with different people from other countries in different setting. Language learnt by the people can be called L2 or foreign language. The development of L2 not only grows in the societies but it is also learnt formally in the school. The different processes of acquiring the first language and second language will be debatable topics amongs the experts.

Two Types of Language Learning

Ellis (1986: 215) mentioned two types of language learning, that is, Naturalistic Language Learning and Formal Language Learning in the class.

a. Naturalistic Language Learning

Naturalistic Language Learning proposed by Ellis naturally constitutes language learning without guidance of teachers and deliberateness. This learning usually occurs through the environment in which the societies live. In bilingual and multilingual societies, naturalistic language learning will be found a lot in the societies. A child in her/his family environment just use L1 (X), but when she/he gets along with her/his friends, she/he uses different language (Y), she/he tries to use the language (Y). This occurrence can be seen in the university students who are from outside Java where they try to speak Javanese language for the first time. But, because their environment is Javanese, they try to use Javanese language. When they use Javanese for the first time, they use their accent, not Javanese accent. But gradually their accent will be less or may have taken away. So, naturalistic language learning have the same process as L1 learning process where it naturally happens in an environment where the children live. However, there is difference between a child and a dult in his/her acquisition

of the language. The children who are in critical periode will acquire L2 better than the adults. In this case, the adults are influenced by their mother tongue in learning L2.

b. Formal Language Learning

Formal Language Learning is formal learning process occurring in the class along with the teachers, materials, and teaching and learning equipments that have been prepared. According to Chaer (2003: 244), the result of formal learning process achieved in the class should be much better than the result achieved in naturalistic learning. In fact, the result of language learning process in Indonesia does not make happy although the cause has been identified and has been done improvement but the result is not satisfied.

Chaer (2003: 244) asserts that One of the causes of unsatisfied result in language learning process is discipline factor. In colonial era, L2 learning 'Dutch Language' had run well because the teachers who teach the Dutch Language can speak the Dutch fluently. Whereas teaching English at the present is done without good discipline, strong motivation, and is taught by the teachers who do not have good qualities in speaking the language. Although upgrading courses and training programs have been done a lot, the results are not satisfied yet because the upgrading courses and training programs may not be maximally planned.

Determinant Factors in L2 Learning

L2 learning is adequately complicated process. There are many factors, variables, and barriers that determine the successfulness in L2 learning. The factors will be elaborated as follows:

a) Motivation Factor

In L2 learning there is an assumption that people who have desires, encouragements, or purposes to be achieved in learning L2 tend to be more succesful than people who do not have desires, encouragements, purposes, or motivations in learning L2. Lambert and Gardner (1972), Brown (1980), and Ellis (1986)

cited in Chaer (2003: 251) agreed that if the learners of L2 have certain motivations in themselves, they will be more successful in studying L2.

The question is what is motivation? The experts state that motivation is desires, encouragements, reasons, or purposes that motivate a person to do something. Brown (1981) cited in Chaer (2003: 251) states that motivation is an encouragement from the inside, temporary encouragement, emotion, or desire that motivates a person to do something. Lambert (1972) states that motivation is the reason to achieve a goal. So, motivation in L2 learning can be defined as an encouragement derived from the inside of the learners themselves that causes the learners have strong desire to learn L2.

In terms of L2 learning, motivation has two functions namely integrative and instrumental functions.

1. Integrative function

Motivation functions as integrative function if the motivation encourages a person to learn a language because of the desire to communicate with the people who use the language (foreigners or the native speaker) and he wants to be a part of the society.

2. Instrumental Function

Motivation functions as instrumental function if the motivation encourages a person to have desire to learn L2 because of the useful purpose or to get a job or social mobility in high stratification in the society (Gardner and Lambert 1972: 3).

Some experts argue that the role of motivation in L2 learning process cannot still be ensured. However, this factor takes an important role for a learner who is learning L2 and to achieve the goal, he will study the language diligently.

b) Age Factor

Generally speaking, in L2 learning, children are better learners and they usually get more successful than adults do. Children seem to be easier to acquire new language, while adults seem to get difficulties to acquire new language and to speak the language fluently. In

this case, hypothesis is proposed that there is critical age or critical period in which learners can learn L2 better (Lamberg, 1967; Oyama, 1976) and a number of arguments have been put forward related to biology, cognitive, and affective to support the hypothesis.

The results of a lot of researches in terms of age factor in L2 learning show as follows:

1. In the sequence of acquisition it seems that age factor does not really take a role because the sequence of acquisition between the children and adults look the same (Fathman, 1975; Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, 1982).
2. In terms of the promptness and successfulness of L2 learning it can be concluded that (1) children are more successful than adults in acquiring phonological system and pronunciation; even among of them can pronounce like the natives; (2) adults seem to be faster than children in terms of morphological and syntactical system, at least in the beginning of learning; (3) children are more successful but are not faster than adults.

From this factor it can be concluded that the factor of age has influence in L2 learning. The difference of age affects on the promptness and successfulness in learning L2 in phonology aspect, morphology aspect, and syntactic aspect, but it does not influence on the sequence of acquisition.

c) Formal Presentation Factor

The formal language learning definitely has an influence towards the achievement in acquiring the second language because some kinds of factors and variables have been deliberately prepared. In addition, the environment of L2 learning in the class is totally different from the environment of L2 learning by nature. Stenberg (1979) mentioned five characteristics of language learning environment in the class:

1. Language learning environment in the class is determined by psychological factor of social class including the adaptations, disciplines, and procedures.

2. In the class, teacher has done the preselection based on the curriculum.
3. The grammatical rules are explained explicitly to enhance the ability of the students in using the language. It will never be found in naturalistic environment of language learning.
4. Artificial language situations are often created, and are not like natural language situation.
5. Some learning media are provided in the class to support the language learning process such as textbook, tasks and other media that are relevant in the L2 learning.

With this typical condition of class environment in L2 learning, there will be obviously influence towards the achievements of L2 learning. These achievements can be detailed as follows:

1. Competence
The formal situation in the class tends to focus on how to acquire the principles and linguistic forms consciously, i.e., in English Language learning, students are asked for acquiring how to use the articles *a* and *an*, how to use prepositions such as *at*, *in*, *on* or how to use *some* and *any* and etc. However, this competence is so much influenced by the roles played by the students in the formal situation.
2. Performance Quality
Performance is the representation of language competence possessed by a speaker (Ellis, 1986). A formal language learning in the class can ensure the quality of inputs received by the learners. When the inputs received by the learners have high qualities, then the outputs or the performances made up will also have high qualities. Although there will be differences individually.
3. Acquisition sequence
The acquisition sequences of grammatical morpheme obtained formally in language learning are not different from the learners who learn naturally.

4. Acquisition speed

The acquisition speed is the promptness in obtaining the inputs and using these inputs as the learners' language vocabularies. This acquisition speed is relative and it depends a lot to other factors such as intelligence, behavior, talent, motivation, and other external factors (Ellis, 1986: 99).

d) First Language Factor

Some experts of L2 learning are generally believed that first language (mother tongue) has an influence to the process of learner's second language acquisition (Ellis, 1986: 19). Even, the first language has been regarded as a barrier for a long time in the process of L2 learning. Therefore, a L2 learner usually transfers the elements of first language into second language consciously or unconsciously. As a result, interference occurs in this process such as code-switchings or code-mixings or errors.

According to the theories, those things can be explained as follows. Firstly, according to stimulus-response presented by behaviorisms, language is the behavioral result of stimulus-responses. For that reason, when a learner wants to be able to use many utterances, the learner must get many stimuli. Therefore, the role of environment as the sources of stimuli becomes dominant and very important to help the process of L2 learning. Furthermore, behaviorisms argued that language acquisition process is a habitual process. Secondly, constructivisms stated that the achievements of L2 learning is much determined by the linguistic states of learner's language acquired before (Klein, 1986: 5). Having L2 is the process of transfer. Then, if the grammatical structure (first language) acquired has in common with the language being studied, the learner will get easiness in the process of transfer. On the contrary, if the grammatical structure of both languages have differences, there will be some difficulties for the learner to acquire the second language. According to constructive theory, the bigger the difference has between F1 and L2, the more difficult the learner acquires the second language.

e) Environmental Factor

The quality of environment is very influential for a learner to be able to succeed in acquiring a new language. What is meant with language environment is everything seen and heard by the learner in relation to L2 being studied. What included in language environment is such as the situation at restaurant, conversation with workmates or colleagues, watching tv, reading newspaper, and etc. The quality of this environment is very important for the learner to obtain the achievement in acquiring L2. The language environment can be divided into formal environment and informal environment.

1. Formal Environment

Formal environment is a situation in language learning that focuses on the acquisition language rules being learnt consciously (Ellis, 1986: 297). In line with this, Krashen (1983: 36) states that formal environment has three characteristics, that is, (a) it is artificial, (b) it is part of the whole language teaching in the school, and (c) the learner is led to do activities of language that present the rules of language being learnt. Actually, language formal environment is not limited to the class because the most important thing in formal environment is the learners are able to consciously know the second language rules either from a teacher in the class, grammar books, or from other people outside the class.

2. Informal Environment

Informal environment is a natural condition and is not artificial. The informal environment includes the language used by the classmates, guardians or parents, a group of people or ethnics, teachers in the class or outside the class. In relation to teacher's language, Krashen (1987: 5) stated that the teacher's language is similar to the guardians. Teachers tend to use brief or simple sentences when they are speaking to their students. The parents'

environment just becomes role models in the L1 acquisition. In the L2 learning it seems not to have a role, unless the parents set down as teachers in formal environment. Native speakers also take a role as communication development and learning model.

The competence expected in the formal environment is the ability to speak formal language or standard language. While in informal environment the learner is expected to acquire the informal varieties and used in informal situation. But in fact, the ability to speak informal language is more rapidly acquired than formal language. It occurs because the chance to use informal language is bigger than to use formal language.

The Roles of Teachers in L2 Learning

Teacher has very important roles in the process of L2 acquisition. Baradja (1990: 10) stated that teacher's language is the language produced by the teacher while interacting with his students. The teacher's language has characteristics, that is, formal and interactional. It indirectly becomes the model of target language although the influence is not as big as classmates language. Therefore, teacher must know the language used in the class. The teacher's language can be the input for the development of L2 learning and child language. Ellis (1986: 128) mentioned three views in terms of child's language acquisition.

1. Behaviorisms regard that learner is "a language producing machine" and language environment is an important part in process of L2 acquisition.
2. Nativisms regard that internal factors of the learners are the most important.
3. Interactionism regard that language acquisition is the input of teacher's internal mechanism.

Chaudron (1988: 56-64) states that the teacher's language is different from one teacher to other teachers. The differences can be seen from phonology, lexical, syntax and discourse. The differences are caused by different contexts and conditions. Whether the language of a teacher is good or not depends on the teacher

understanding towards the teaching objectives, contexts, and learning objectives. The function of the language of teachers in pedagogy activities is application, order, question, feedback, etc.

Chaudron (1988: 55) states that teacher in L2 teaching in the class has two forms of language. The forms of language are the teacher's natural language and didactic language. Teacher must be able to take the two roles in using his language, that is, when a teacher becomes a native speaker or when a teacher is an L2 speaker. It must be clear and do not make the learners confused. Hence, Chaudron (1988: 70) asserts that the most important thing in the language of a teacher is the way in using intonation, articulation, and stress adjusted with the contexts, conditions, and discourse. If such things are considered appropriately, the roles of teacher will be effective.

Baradja (1990: 10-12) argues that the language of a teacher has some important roles for the achievements in teaching and learning of second language.

1. Formal adaptation occurs in all levels, that is, beginner level, intermediate level, and advance level. Teacher usually uses simple sentences when he speaks to advance-level students.
2. What is uttered by the teacher is not against to appropriate language.
3. Teacher language has to be adjusted to interactional forms.

In addition, the language of a teacher must be able to arouse the learner's motivation in learning second language. Thus, the learners will be more enthusiastic to learn the second language because they see how their teacher uses the language in the class. So that, the difficulties faced by the learners of a second language can be solved and they are motivated to develop their language ability.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that L2 acquisition is a complicated activity. Therefore, the learners must have high motivation in order that they can acquire the

second language and use it appropriately and correctly in the formal and informal condition.

In order that the learners can acquire the L2 well, they need a supporting environment. Environment in L2 learning has important role for the learners' achievements in learning and acquiring the second language, especially in the environment of formal language acquisition in which it is more difficult than informal language acquisition.

References

- Baradja, M.F. 1990. *Perkembangan Teori Pemerolehan Bahasa kedua dalam Kaitannya dengan Proses Belajar Mengajar (pidato pengukuhan Guru Besar)*. Malang: IKIP Malang.
- Brown, Douglas, H. 1980. *Principle of Language Learning and Teaching*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc.
- Chaer, Abdul. 2003. *Psikolinguistik. Kajian Teoritik*. Jakarta: Reneka Cipta.
- Chaudron, Craig. 1988. *Second Language Classrooms: Research on Teaching and Learning*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Chomsky. 1986. *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origine, and Use*. New York: Praeger.
- Chomsky. 1999. *On Nature, Use, and Acquisition of Language*. Dalam Ritchie and Bathia.
- Dardjowidjojo, Soenjono. 2005. *Psikolinguistik. Pengantar Pemahaman Bahasa Manusia*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia.
- Ellis, Rod. 1986. *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- , 1990. *Instructed Second Language Acquisition: Learning in the Classroom*. Cambridge: Basil Black.
- Fernández, Eva M, and Cairns, Helen Smith. 2011. *Fundamentals of Psycholinguistics*. United Kingdom. John Weley and Sons.
- Klein, Wolfgang. 1986. *Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Krashen, Stephen. D. 1982. *Principle and Practise in Second Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Lenneberg, Eric H. 1969. *Biological Foundation of Language*. New York: Wiley and Son.
- Nurhadi, dan Roekhan. 1990. *Dimens-dimensi dalam Belajar Bahasa kedua (ed.)* Bandung: Sinar Baru.
- Stenberg, Danny D. 1990. *Psikolinguistik. Bahasa, Akal Budi, dan Dunia*. Terjemahan Azhar M Simin dari *Psycholinguistics: Language, Mind, and World*. Kuala Lumpur; Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Kementrian Pendidikan Malaysia.
- Subyakto-Nababan, Sri Utari. 1992. *Psikolinguistik. Suatu Pengantar*. Jakarta: Gramedia.