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Learning English as a Second Language

Edited by
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Anne Burns
Jack C. Richards

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INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a Second Language

Anne Burns and Jack C. Richards

RATIONALE FOR THE BOOK

In modern society, the majority of the world's citizens speak one or more second languages and learning a second or third language in childhood is a normal part of the lives of many people. In many countries, such as Singapore, Indonesia, Finland, India and Nigeria, it is often an aspect of socialization typical of a multilingual and multicultural environment. The bilingual or multilingual communicative repertoire that many people make use of in such settings is an important part of their identities. For many others, learning a second language may commence later in life, either at primary or secondary school, and may be essential for education, employment or social survival, as well as many other purposes. Fluency in a second language, particularly an international language such as English, is now mandated by educational policies in many countries, and the teaching of second languages requires a considerable investment of resources at many different levels, including investment in policy and curriculum development, teaching and teacher training, textbook development, technology, and assessment.

While it is now important to be cognizant of the plurilingual nature of language learning and use, and the increasing relevance of translanguaging in multicultural education (e.g., García and Wei, 2014), a key focus is on the learning of English as a second or additional language. The learning of English has been the subject of a considerable amount of research and theorizing in applied linguistics for over half a century, particularly since the research domain of second language acquisition (SLA) emerged in the 1970s. A great deal has been researched and written since then within SLA studies, from cognitive, interactionist, and sociocultural perspectives. Much of this research has focused on the acquisition of the grammatical system of English as a second or additional language and on the role of input and output in promoting grammatical development, as well as the contribution of individual factors such as age, motivation, aptitude, affect, and personality. The benchmark for acquisition has typically been the monolingual native speaker of the target language. Missing from the SLA perspective, however, has been a broader view of the

nature of second language knowledge and use – one, for example, that considers the second language in its own terms as a component of the speaker’s bilingual or multilingual competence, rather than being a defective form of the native-speaker’s language. In addition, the SLA paradigm has typically excluded a focus on other dimensions of language knowledge and use apart from grammar, such as the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, pronunciation and vocabulary, as well as the acquisition of pragmatic and intercultural second features of language use. This gap in the literature prompted the present book.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

The chapters in this collection seek to move the study of learning English as a second language beyond its typical narrow focus and to provide a more comprehensive overview of learning. To do this, we invited a number of scholars and applied linguists to contribute chapters on language learning processes as they occur across a wide range of domains of language use. The intention was to provide a variety of different perspectives, since no single learning theory can account for all aspects of the development of English as a second language.

The book is aimed at an audience of pre-service and in-service teachers and teacher educators who are seeking a comprehensive coverage of the field, as well as graduate and postgraduate students wishing to gain an authoritative and up-to-date starting point for their studies or research. To that end, the book offers tasks for further reflection and suggestions for essential reading, as well as coverage of the various topics included.

The contributors were asked to address three main areas:

1. The nature of the domain/construct/skill: a brief overview of the topic of the chapter and its key dimensions.
2. The key learning issues for this domain: the issues covered would depend on the topic, but could include:
 - factors that influence the development of proficiency in the domain;
 - how development is characterized;
 - differences between novices and experts;
 - links to proficiency frameworks.
3. The implications for teaching and assessment.

Contributors were invited to use the areas above as a framework for their chapter, or to adapt this structure according to the domain they wrote about. While, as we have mentioned, the focus of the book is primarily on the learning of English, several authors also included the learning of other languages in relation to English. This book may also be relevant, therefore, to readers whose interests lie in languages other than English.

The guide contains nine sections, which aim to organize and reflect different dimensions of the diverse and complex scope of learning English as a second or additional language.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AN UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

The chapters contained in the various sections of the book present a wide and diverse range of perspectives on the learning of English. Nevertheless, there are themes and implications that permeate the chapters as a whole, and we outline four of the major themes below.

LEARNING AND LEARNERS

One major motif that runs throughout the guide is the focus on who language learners are, as the authors reflect on:

LEARNERS AS EMERGENT BILINGUALS OR MULTILINGUALS

Discussion of L2 learners' language development and use has traditionally foregrounded the monolingual native speaker as the reference point. The target of learning has been narrowly defined and referenced to L1 norms, failing to acknowledge the distinct role that the L2 and other languages may play in shaping learners' multilingual and multicultural identities. Many of the contributors argue that a second or additional language forms part of the learner's multilingual competence (or translanguage competence). Second language learners can more appropriately be described as emergent bilinguals or multilinguals who integrate their use of an additional language with other languages they know.

THE ROLE OF AGENCY AND IDENTITY

Agency has been defined as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn, 2001: 112). Kalaja, Alanen, Palviainen, and Dufva (2011: 47) comment: “L2 learners are no longer viewed as individuals working on their own to construct the target language, but very much as social agents collaborating with other people and using the tools and resources available to them in their surrounding environment”. In many of the examples in this collection, the learners are engaged actively and purposefully in their language-using experiences. The learners set goals for themselves and make use of the situation and resources available to them to achieve their goals.

Identity refers to how learners position themselves in relation to speakers of other languages, and how this positioning is shaped by their experience of self in their other language or languages. L2 learners, particularly adults, are often positioned as novices, despite the fact that they may be proficient in several other languages. In the case of learning in academic contexts, L2 learning involves entry into a community of practice and the development of a disciplinary identity as learners acquire disciplinary knowledge.

LEARNING AND LANGUAGE

Language is viewed by contributors to this book as a complex and dynamic phenomenon. Language learning thus involves taking account of:

THE SITUATED NATURE OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Second language learning takes place in a diversity of both formal and informal contexts, each of which reflects a different configuration of elements that shape the nature of interactions learners are engaged in. Contexts include the home, classrooms, workplaces, social situations, heritage learner environments and technology-enhanced learning contexts, each of which involve different roles, participants and power structures, as well as different purposes and means for using a second language.

A DYNAMIC RATHER THAN A STATIC UNDERSTANDING OF LANGUAGE

As summarized by Pennington (2015: 149), this view of language involves a shift in perspective “from monocompetence, defined as knowledge of an autonomous, unvarying, and uniform system acquired in a homogeneous speech community, to multicompetence, defined here as use of an interactive, variable, and non-uniform system acquired in a heterogeneous world of intersecting groups and individuals”.

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AS MORE THAN THE ACQUISITION OF GRAMMAR

Contributors demonstrate the need to broaden the focus of research well beyond the acquisition of the grammatical system of language. In contrast to the traditional SLA approach to learning, which focuses on the acquisition of grammatical rules that develop in a linear fashion, language learning is no longer viewed simply as a cognitive issue involving mastery of the linguistic system. Instead, it is seen to involve a multidimensional change in both the resources learners use to fulfill socio-communicative goals and the affordances beyond the traditional classroom space they make use of in acquiring them (Jenks, 2010).

MULTIMODAL INTERACTIONS IN DIVERSE SITUATIONS THAT MERGE TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF LANGUAGE AS SEPARATE SKILLS

The spoken and written texts learners encounter and use are increasingly integrated and multimodal. Pedagogical approaches for developing literacy and communication skills described by many of the contributors are based on a view of language as social practice, i.e. one in which the different skills are often 'merged' through learners' participation in real-world activities that involve multimodal forms of communication.

LEARNING AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

As many of the contributions reflect, there is a need to broaden current concepts of language learning to expand understanding of:

THE NATURE OF 'DEVELOPMENT' IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

No single theory of development or acquisition can account for how learners progress in their language learning trajectories. Perspectives in this guide view development in a number of ways: as incremental improvement in proficiency as determined by greater fluency, accuracy and pragmatic effectiveness, as well as growing confidence and risk-taking; as a movement from novice to expert language user; as a transition from outsider to insider within a community of practice; as acquiring an expanding range of learning resources and affordances; as developing membership of different kinds of communities through social media; as developing a metalanguage for talking about language and texts; making a transition from collaborative and independent practice; as reconstructing one's understanding and view of the world and one's place in it; and as the ability to transfer learning from one context (e.g., the classroom) to the workplace.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Contributors emphasize the need to recognize the multifaceted nature of language learning and of language use. Atkinson (2011) emphasizes that second language acquisition is a very complex phenomenon with many different dimensions. It requires multiple theories of second language acquisition to provide a complete understanding of it. Contributors to this book refer to different views of learning to explain dimensions of L2 language learning: incidental learning; scaffolded learning; learning as socialization; learning through participation and apprenticeship within social groups; learning through observation and participation in social practices; autonomous and self-directed learning; learning through modeling and guidance from experts; and language learning as the negotiation and development of identities.

LEARNING AND LEARNING CONTEXTS

The role of context is highly significant in language learning. New perspectives offered in these chapters highlight the need to consider language learning contexts in terms of:

THE NEGOTIATION OF CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

A second or additional language is a resource for participation in cross-cultural encounters and experiences and for the development of intercultural communicative competence. This involves the ability to mediate and translate between languages and cultures in diverse settings involving speakers with multiple linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

CHANGING LEARNING AFFORDANCES

The new opportunities or ‘affordances’ for language learning that are available through technology, the internet and the media, and the resulting shift from classroom-based learning to out-of-class learning as a primary source of both input and output for many second language users, has prompted the need to reconceptualize the nature of second language learning. New learning affordances provide opportunities for different kinds of interaction and language use, as well as access to different learning processes that are available in classroom-based teaching.

RECONFIGURATIONS OF THE NATURE OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

While from a cognitive perspective it was often suggested that a language was not teachable but could be ‘acquired’ through experientially based learning, drawing on implicit rather than explicit instruction, contributors to this guide offer different perspectives on instructional contexts. Contributors describe a variety of roles for explicit classroom-based instruction, including strategy training, modeling expert language use, comparing pragmatic features of languages, and translation activities, as well as activities that involve implicit learning. Explicit and implicit teaching are seen to tap into different learning processes.

CONCLUSION

This introductory chapter foregrounds our aim in editing this book – to expand the range of current perspectives on what it means to learn English as a second or additional language. Our intention in the following pages is to provide readers with a broad and composite set of accounts of language learning, written by authors well-versed in the topics that are covered, that can be used as a starting point for further reflection, reading and investigation. In compiling this collection, we stressed to the contributors that they did not need to take any particular theoretical stance on language learning, but to offer their own theoretical frameworks and perspectives. In this respect, we hope that the book opens up many avenues for further discussion, exploration and research in an area that is of the utmost importance for the field of English language teaching.

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SECTION I

LEARNERS AND LEARNING ENGLISH

The first section focuses on who second language (L2) learners are, which, in the case of English, is becoming increasingly diversified across the world, as learners begin their learning at a variety of different ages and with a multiplicity of learning and language(s) backgrounds and repertoires.

In the first chapter on the language learner, **Yuko Goto Butler** examines features of L2 learning in children, comparing first language (L1) and L2 learning, as well as differences between young and older learners. She highlights the different contexts in which young learners acquire additional languages, and discusses how context impacts the goals and processes of a learner of English as an L2. She also describes how age factors relate to the learning of phonology, vocabulary, morphosyntax and literacy, and reviews the role of implicit learning, explicit learning, and learning strategies.

In the next chapter, **Tracey Costley** explores the different contexts in which adolescents learn L2s, and the particular attributes and dispositions that influence both their understanding or ‘idea’ of English and their approaches to learning. She highlights the role of social contexts and maturational factors on L2 learning, discusses how age, gender and language-learning background influence language learning in adolescents, and points out the implications of these factors for the teaching of adolescent learners.

In their chapter on language learning among adults, **Carol Griffiths** and **Adem Soruç** review research findings on adult learners and outline the characteristics and dispositions of this group of learners. They discuss neurological, psycho-affective, sociocultural and other factors that affect the English language learning outcomes of adult learners, and suggest that research findings prompt a rethinking of the common assumption that adults are often unsuccessful in their attempts to learn additional languages.

In the next chapter, **Judit Kormos** examines the impact of specific learning difficulties on L2 development, particularly those difficulties that are neurological in origin and often inherited, rather than those that reflect socio-environmental dimensions. She discusses factors that may influence many components of English language proficiency, including grammar, vocabulary and reading, writing and listening skills.

John Witney and **Jean-Marc Dewaele** examine how learners acquiring a third language can draw both on metalinguistic awareness and on familiarity with learning strategies developed from learning previous languages. They suggest that learners acquiring a third or further language have greater metalinguistic awareness, make use of a great number of learning strategies and use them more frequently.

The chapters in this section draw our attention to the very extensive range of learner factors that need to be considered in L2 learning. They highlight the importance of being cognizant of, and sensitive to, these factors in determining the goals and needs of learners at different points in their life trajectories, and also the kinds of linguistic and learning resources they bring with them, whether their learning takes place in actual or virtual settings.

CHAPTER |

Learning as a Child

Yuko Goto Butler

INTRODUCTION

For children, learning a second language (L2) differs in important ways from learning a first language (L1), as well as from learning an L2 as an adult. After all, children are still in the process of their cognitive, social-affective, and linguistic (L1) development, which in turn influences their L2 learning in various ways. Educators must consider such differences when teaching and assessing children who are learning an L2. Although the research on children's L2 learning still remains relatively limited, this chapter summarizes researchers' current understanding of children's L2 learning, so that educators can make use of this emerging knowledge. To that end, I begin by describing who young L2 learners are and their varying L2-learning contexts and needs. I then discuss key characteristics of child L2 learning. I conclude by suggesting ways that educators can put these findings to work for teaching and assessing young L2 learners.

OVERVIEW

WHO ARE YOUNG L2 LEARNERS?

Young L2 learners are often defined as children of preschool and primary school age who are learning a second language. Although the exact age range for preschool and primary school differs depending on educational systems, it is generally between 4 and 12 years old. I should note, however, that young L2 learners can be defined in alternative ways. Researchers who subscribe to some notion of a critical period in L2 acquisition – a hypothesis that one can no longer acquire 'native-like' proficiency in the target language once they reach a certain age – may argue that young L2 learners should be defined as children who are exposed to their L2 sometime after birth but before the critical period ends. However, the existence of a critical period is debated among researchers, and even among supporters the exact range of such a period in L2 is controversial. Some researchers also distinguish

young L2 learners from children who have regular contact with two languages from very early in their lives; such children, sometimes referred to as simultaneous bilingual children, are considered to have two L1s. Here again, however, the cut-off point – the age children need to be exposed to two languages to qualify as speaking two L1s – is not clear: it ranges from two months to three years of age (Unsworth and Blom, 2010). So, while acknowledging that the age range of four to twelve years old for young L2 learners has some critics, this is the range frequently used within the pedagogic and policy community, and it is the range I use here.

VARYING LEARNING CONTEXTS AND GOALS OF YOUNG L2 LEARNERS

Young learners are by no means homogenous, and the contexts of their L2 learning differ greatly. Young L2 learners include language minority children who have a minority language (or languages; see Chapter 5) at home and learn a majority language in the community and school as their L2. Depending on circumstances (e.g., their home language became a less dominant language), children's home language can be considered an L2, in the form of a heritage language to be maintained or relearned. Young L2 learners also include children who have a majority language as their home language but are enrolled in an immersion program and receive academic instruction (at least partially) through their non-home language (L2). Lastly, children learning a foreign language (FL) are also considered to be young L2 learners, and this type of young L2 learner is growing rapidly in number worldwide. In principle, FL-learning children are assumed to have limited exposure to the target language outside of the classroom, but the amount and quality of children's exposure to the target language vary substantially by region and by socio-economic status.

Reflecting such variability in learning contexts, the goals of L2 learning differ substantially – not only across the above-mentioned L2 groups but also within any given group. While sometimes the goal of young L2 learning is to develop age-appropriate basic linguistic knowledge and skills that allow children to converse daily with target-language speakers, at other times the goal is to develop high L2 proficiency in academic contexts (i.e., academic language) so that learners can acquire content subject knowledge (e.g., mathematics and science) through the target language. Academic language is generally considered to be “the vocabulary, sentence structures, and discourse associated with language used to teach academic content as well as the language used to navigate the school setting more generally” (Bailey and Huang, 2011: 343); however, it is important to note that researchers disagree about what constitutes academic language abilities and, further, that the relationship between academic language abilities and content subject learning is not yet well-understood.

KEY LEARNING ISSUES

Considering such diversity of learning contexts and goals of L2 learning for young learners, we can expect that learning outcomes vary as well. Various social contextual factors, as well as individual factors (e.g., motivation, aptitude, etc.; see Chapters 6 and 7), influence their L2 development. As mentioned already, it remains controversial if the ultimate attainment of L2 is affected by the onset of first exposure to L2; researchers debate if a critical period exists, and if it does, when it is and what domains are affected by it. In FL contexts, learning L2 from a very young age may not be most effective. In this section, I sketch major aspects of young L2 learning that we know so far, first in the domain of language development and then in the domains of learning styles and strategies (see Chapter 9).

PHONOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

Among the general public, there is a widespread belief that children can acquire ‘native-like’ sounds in their L2/FL with ease. Researchers have found, however, that the influence of a child’s L1 is persistent and observable. Although research directly examining phonological development among young L2 learners remains very limited, retrospective research has shown that non-native accents can be perceived, at least in some properties, even among learners who started being exposed to their L2 before the age of three. Researchers have proposed models for phonology development that may explain the reason for the persistence of non-native accents even among those who started learning L2 at a very young age (see Chapter 17). One such model is Flege’s Speech Learning Model. According to this model, both L1 and L2 share a common phonetic space, and L2 learners perceive new L2 sounds based on their existing L1 phonetic categories, either through assimilating or disassimilating the L1 categories, depending on similarities and dissimilarities between novel L2 sounds and L1 sounds (Flege, 1999).

A number of studies have examined the relationship between the age of onset of L2 and the ultimate L2 phonology acquisition, as measured by perceived accent ratings, as well as by physical phonetic and phonemic properties (e.g., voice onset time). Such studies have generally found correlations between the age of onset and phonology acquisition. However, researchers disagree on whether there is any cut-off point in the course of phonology development (i.e., a critical period) and, if so, when exactly the critical period is.

In addition to the age young learners are first exposed to the target language, a few other factors have been suggested as influencing their L2 phonology acquisition. Most notably, the amount and type of L2 input (which is usually negatively correlated with the amount of use of L1) has been found to be an important predictor of L2 phonology attainment. Also influential are the learner’s desire to acquire ‘native’ sounds in L2, and how the learner identifies himself or herself in relation to his or her L1 and L2. Moreover, phonological differences between L1 and L2 cannot be ignored. For example, Flege and Fletcher (1992) found that among children who had been immersed in English since they were five to eight years old, Chinese L1 speakers had more perceivable non-native accents in L2 (English) than their Spanish L1 counterparts.

Unlike in L2 contexts, in FL contexts where learners usually have limited target language input, ‘the earlier, the better’ is not warranted. In fact, most existing studies have found no advantage for young starters in perceiving and producing FL sounds. In FL contexts, the amount and quality of instruction appear to be more influential over one’s phonology acquisition than the age of onset of FL instruction (Muñoz, 2014).

LEXICAL DEVELOPMENT

In L2-learning contexts, young L2 learners’ lexical processing (i.e., the process of recognizing, accessing, and producing words that are stored in one’s mental lexicon) improves gradually throughout their primary school years, consistent with the general development pattern observed among L1 monolingual children. However, it is often reported that lexical processing among child L2 learners is less efficient or slower, compared with their monolingual peers. Researchers have also found that L2 learners’ vocabulary size (both receptive and productive vocabulary) in both their L1 and L2 is smaller than the vocabulary size of their monolingual counterparts (Bialystok, 2009).

A caution is necessary, however, when we compare young L2 learners – namely, children with various degrees of bilingual/multilingual abilities – with monolingual children. Researchers such as Grosjean (2010) argue that bilingual children’s language knowledge and processing are *qualitatively* different from those of monolingual children. Under this view, it does not make sense to evaluate L2 learners’ linguistic abilities against monolingual

norms. In addition, we need to keep in mind that there are substantial individual differences in vocabulary development among young L2 learners, as well as among monolingual children learning their L1 (Murphy, 2014).

Among young L2 learners, older learners tend to acquire lexical knowledge faster than young learners, due to their greater cognitive maturity and richer experiences. From a multilingual developmental perspective, it is also important to note that children who have an opportunity to develop basic literacy skills in their L1 tend to keep developing their L1 vocabulary better than children who do not have a chance to develop basic literacy skills. Retrospective research often shows that children who immigrate to an L2 environment when they are around eight to ten years old, as well as L2-learning children who receive instruction in both their L1 and their L2, have a better chance of developing grade-equivalent (or higher) L2 vocabulary while retaining a high level of L1 vocabulary.

MORPHOSYNTAX DEVELOPMENT

Morphosyntax acquisition patterns of young L2 learners are often similar to those of monolingual L1-learning children. For instance, morphologies acquired late by L1-learning children also tend to be acquired late by young L2 learners, and common errors observed among young L2 learners have also been found among L1-learning children. However, young L2 learners also exhibit different patterns from L1 learners. For example, the overgeneralization of the copula (e.g., “I am play baseball”) and the omission of a subject (e.g., “play baseball”) are frequently observed among young L2 learners, irrespective of their L1 (Paradis, 2005). These phenomena may be largely attributable to children’s cognitive maturity rather than other factors, such as L1 influence. It is important to note, however, that most current research on this topic was conducted among children whose L1 and L2 are European languages; more research looking at different language combinations is necessary. Indeed, while earlier studies claimed that children’s L1 plays little role in their L2 morphosyntax acquisition (e.g., Dulay and Burt, 1974), more recent studies suggest that children’s L1 may play a larger role than we used to believe. Similarly, the extent to which young L2 learners’ morphosyntax acquisition is different from that of adult L2 learners remains unclear.

As with phonology development, there is no consensus on whether the age of initial exposure to L2 affects the ultimate attainment of morphosyntax; it remains unclear if there is a critical period in morphosyntax acquisition and, if so, when it is. However, when it comes to efficiency of acquisition, young L2 learners can pick up morphosyntax knowledge faster than L1-learning younger children, due to the older L2 learners’ greater degree of cognitive maturity. Similarly, research conducted in FL contexts has shown that later starters of FL learning develop morphosyntax more efficiently than earlier starters (e.g., García Mayo and García Lecumberri, 2003).

LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

For young minority-language-speaking children who receive education in their L2 context, acquiring sufficient literacy skills (see Chapter 26) in L2 is a pressing issue. Existing studies, primarily conducted in North America and the United Kingdom, repeatedly report that many young L2 learners lag behind in their reading comprehension and academic studies. Interestingly, however, as far as the research from North America is concerned, young L2 learners on average perform equally well with their monolingual L1-speaking peers in word-decoding skills. Such word-decoding skills, which include phonological awareness, lexical access, and working memory, have long been known as critical elements for successful reading comprehension. But young L2 learners tend to have a weaker

vocabulary, academic vocabulary in particular, which influences their reading comprehension. Oral language proficiency also seems to be associated with young L2 learners' reading comprehension, although the precise relationship remains unclear. Nonlinguistic factors, including socio-economic background, individual characteristics (e.g., motivation, personality, learning strategies, etc.), and type of instruction they receive, all contribute to young L2 learners' literacy development in complicated ways. For example, research has shown that teacher-centered instructional approaches tend to work better for quiet and analytical learners, while more activity-based instructional approaches appear to work better for active and outgoing children (Murphy, 2014).

When considering these findings, it is important to remember that many studies measure children's reading comprehension using standardized tests, while usually setting monolingual L1 children's performance as the norm, and what counts as literacy skills is usually defined narrowly. Studies also tend to pay almost exclusive attention to learners' L2 literacy skills, and ignore their literacy in L1 or any other language(s) that they may know. Increasingly, scholars are questioning such narrow, monolingual-based conceptualizations of literacy, and are advocating instead for multimodal and multilingual approaches to literacy (e.g., the translanguaging approach advocated by García and Wei, 2014).

LEARNING STYLES AND STRATEGIES

It is often assumed that children learn L2 more implicitly (i.e., learning through an unconscious and unintended process), whereas adults tend to learn L2 more explicitly (i.e., learning through a conscious and intended process) (e.g., DeKeyser, 2003; Ellis, 2005). However, empirical studies on implicit and explicit learning among young L2 learners are so scarce that it is unclear to what extent such assumptions are based on evidence. Lichtman (2013) suggested that our perceptual bias toward implicit L2 learning for children and explicit L2 learning for adults might, at least in part, be due to the fact that children tend to receive implicit instruction while adults tend to receive explicit instruction. Research conducted in FL learning contexts reports that older children (upper grade primary school students) appear to benefit from receiving both explicit and implicit instruction. When it comes to academic language, however it is defined, it needs to be explicitly instructed.

Young L2 learners may exhibit age-specific language learning strategies, such as incorporating body movements to interact with word meanings, and repeating and playing around with sounds. They appear to use some of these strategies (e.g., repeating sounds) unconsciously. As children become more cognitively mature and gain more experiences, they start incorporating many of the same language-learning strategies that are observed among adult L2 learners. The use of L1 as a strategy (e.g., memorizing L2 spelling using L1 phonetic knowledge) has also been observed (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2009).

It is also important to point out that many children today grow up immersed in technology. Prensky (2001: 52) argued that cognitive styles of children who are used to technology are different from previous generations in a number of ways, in that:

- they can process information much faster than the conventional speed;
- they are good at parallel processing rather than linear processing;
- they access information randomly as opposed to in a step-by-step fashion;
- they rely on graphics first rather than texts;
- they are accustomed to being connected with others as opposed to being unconnected;
- they prefer active learning to passive learning;

- they see *play as work* as opposed to *play vs. work*;
- they make constant decisions between payoff and patience;
- fantasy, rather than reality, pervades their lives;
- they view technology as their friend, not their enemy.

Although we still need more empirical evidence to affirm Prensky's observations, it is important for educators to pay close attention to children's learning characteristics when designing material and instruction for them.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

In the following sections, I translate the preceding research findings into a few practical suggestions for teaching and assessing young L2 learners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR L2 TEACHING

USE MEANING-FOCUSED, HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO L2 LEARNING, SUCH AS TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

Children have a strong drive both to make meaning while interacting with other people and to acquire new knowledge and skills playfully (Bland, 2015). Task-based language teaching (TBLT) can be used as an effective pedagogical approach, particularly if the learning goal is mainly to acquire age-appropriate communicative competence in L2. In TBLT, real-life communicative tasks are employed as instructional materials or syllabus designs, while primarily focusing on meaning rather than linguistic accuracy. Thus, it is particularly suitable for young learners.

When designing or choosing tasks for young learners, it is important to carefully consider young learners' unique characteristics, such as their cognitive maturity and experiences, as well as their language proficiency. Children's affective elements, such as their motivation, must be considered as well. And given children's affinity for stories and fantasies, narrative and fantasy features can be incorporated into task designs in order to motivate and engage children. Educators can control cognitive demands for completing tasks in a number of ways. For example, *tell a story based on pictures*, a common task introduced to young L2 learners, can be made less cognitively demanding by using fewer pictures, providing the pictures in sequential order, using a simpler plot line, and offering sufficient planning time prior to the task. Cognitive demands can also be reduced by providing children with scaffolding, such as incorporating whole-class brainstorming of major plot lines and ideas, or allowing children to work together in groups or pairs (Pinter, 2015).

AVOID 'ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL' APPROACHES TO L2 INSTRUCTION

If the learning goal is mainly to acquire academic language, young L2 learners need to receive explicit instruction in vocabulary, syntax, and discourse associated with academic learning. A number of instructional strategies have been suggested in order to assist learners in comprehending content subjects (e.g., mathematics and science) through their L2. Learners' L1 can be used effectively as well. Multilingual- and multimodal-based literacy exercises may need to be promoted, depending on the children's background and purpose of the study. For example, educators can encourage children to construct texts involving multiple languages or incorporate various audio and visual materials into their learning. Importantly, there are substantial individual differences among children, both in their L1 and L2 development and in their needs. To meet such diversity, teachers must be flexible in their approach to L2 instruction. After all, there is no 'one size fits all' teaching method or strategy for young L2 learners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT

ADOPT AN ASSESSMENT APPROACH THAT SUPPORTS ONGOING LEARNING

In assessing young learners, measuring their abilities makes sense only if the results directly assist their learning. In other words, learning should be the core purpose of the assessment. Therefore, assessment for learning, a concept that has received substantial attention in recent assessment research, is particularly relevant to young learners. In assessment for learning, as opposed to assessment of learning, the primary goal of assessment is not to measure learners' learning outcomes accurately and consistently, but to obtain information about the process of learning in order to inform and assist their ongoing learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Thus, some researchers (e.g., Davison and Leung, 2009) argue that traditional psychometric notions of validity and reliability may need to be reconceptualized in assessment for learning.

In the assessment for learning paradigm, critical concerns include how best to provide the learners with diagnostic information and how best to assist them to be in charge of their own learning. Grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, dynamic assessment, as a diagnostic assessment, for example, aims to identify learners' potential for development through mediated teaching such as modeling during the process of completing tasks (Poehner and Infante, 2016). Self-assessment can be used effectively with young learners to assist them in reflecting on their progress and setting learning goals – as long as they are given sufficient guidance (Butler, 2016).

In order to make the assessment informative and diagnostic, the teachers' role is critical. Edelenbos and Kubanek-German (2004) have argued that teachers need to develop sufficient diagnostic competence, which is composed of a series of abilities and actions for capturing and interpreting students' learning growth, handling assessment material and procedures, and providing students with assistance that corresponds to diagnostic information provided by the assessment.

CHOOSE AN ASSESSMENT FORMAT THAT SUITS YOUR STUDENTS' LEARNING STYLES AND YOUR PEDAGOGICAL GOALS

Just as instructional tasks and strategies should be age-appropriate for learners, assessment tasks and formats also should align with learners' cognitive maturity and experiences. Individual students' characteristics and needs should be thoroughly considered when designing assessments. For example, in formative assessment, an individual-based assessment format (teacher–child dyad format) may be advantageous for young learners, in that it allows teachers to tailor the assessment content and scaffolding to children's individual proficiency levels, personalities, and learning styles; in other words, the format enables teachers to stretch children's abilities. But at the same time, the individual format tends to elicit limited types of interactive responses from children, and the elicited language often looks like an initiation–response–evaluation (IRE) response, which is a typical classroom interaction pattern between teachers and students. On the other hand, pair- or group-assessment formats, in which children work on assessment tasks in pairs or groups, has the potential to elicit wider ranges of interactional responses from children. However, teachers' careful oversight is necessary to ensure that children collaborate well (Butler and Zeng, 2011).

LINK L2 PROFICIENCY TO ACADEMIC CONTENT LEARNING

In L2 learning contexts where children learn subject-matter content in their L2, teachers are increasingly held accountable for assessing learners' language proficiency as it is embedded in their content knowledge. Language proficiency and content knowledge have traditionally been considered separate constructs; content knowledge is considered a construct-irrelevant variance in language proficiency assessments, and vice versa.

However, linking language proficiency and content learning is inevitable in L2 contexts; this may require redefining the construct of language ability in specific academic contexts (Llosa, 2011). In standard-based educational systems, sufficient guidance is necessary for teachers in order for them to be fully familiar with standards (both L2 standards and subject-matter content standards).

To assess young learners' L2 abilities while engaging in academic content learning, assessment tasks should be designed to elicit particular language functions that are associated with critical cognitive and metacognitive skills for completing the given academic task. Sufficient consideration needs to be paid to learners' affective factors, such as their interest in, and anxiety about, the assessment task.

CONCLUSION

While research on child L2 acquisition is still relatively limited, we do know that L2 learning by young learners differs in important ways from children's L1 acquisition and adult L2 acquisition. This chapter described the heterogeneity of child L2 learners and outlined major issues in child L2 acquisition, offering a number of implications for teaching and assessing young learners. Due to the variabilities of learning goals and contexts, educators need to take flexible and localized approaches to teaching and assessment that meet learners' needs.

Discussion Questions

1. Think about a couple of tasks that you often use in your L2 instruction. What are some ways you can increase or reduce the cognitive demands for these tasks?
2. Edelenbos and Kubanek-German (2004) made a list of teachers' diagnostic competencies, based on their observations of teachers' assessment practices. Based on your own experience, what skills and actions do teachers need for capturing their students' learning processes and outcomes in order to provide them with useful diagnostic assistance?

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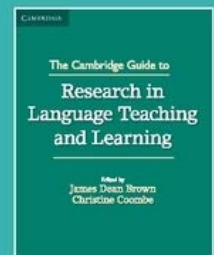
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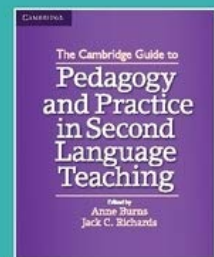
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