

Interlanguage Theory

Interlanguage Theory

Two Modals of Foreign Language teaching:

- Foreign language learning is seen as a process of imitation and reinforcement; learners attempt to copy what they hear, and by regular practice they establish a set of acceptable habits in the new language. (Behaviorists' view)
- Learners use their cognitive abilities in a creative way to work out hypotheses about the structure of the foreign language. They construct rules, try them out, and modify them if they prove to be not enough. In this sense, language learning proceeds in a series of transitional stages, while learners acquire more knowledge of L2. At each stage, they are in control of a language that is equivalent to neither L1 nor L2. (Cognitivists' view)
- Interlanguage is the type of language produced by second language learners who are in the process of learning language. It refers to a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native language and the target language.

Interlanguage Sources

The interlanguage system is based on a learner's hypothesis about the target language made from a number of possible sources of knowledge:

- Limited knowledge of the target language
- Knowledge about the native language
- Knowledge about the communicative function of the language
- Knowledge about the language in general
- Knowledge about life, human beings, and cultures

The Main Premises of Interlanguage Theory

- 1- The learner constructs a system of abstract linguistic rules which underlies comprehension and production. The system of rules is referred to as ' interlanguage'. The learner draws on these rules in much the same way as the native speaker draws on linguistic competence. The rules enable the learner to produce novel sentences. They are also responsible for the systematicity evident in L2 learner language. An interlanguage is ' a linguistic system.....in its own right'. As such it is a natural language and is entirely functional.
- 2- The learner's grammar is permeable. The grammar that the learner builds is incomplete and unstable. It is amenable to penetration by new linguistic forms and rules, which may be derived internally(i.e. by means of transfer from L1 or overgeneralization of an interlanguage rule) or externally (i.e. through exposure to target language input).

- 3- The learner's competence is transitional. As a result of the permeability of an interlanguage system learners rapidly revise it. They pass through a number of stages in the process of acquiring the target language. Each stage constitutes 'an interlanguage – transitional competence'. These stages are not discrete but overlap because every part of an interlanguage is subject to a constant revision.
- 4- The learner's competence is variable. At any one stage of development the language produced will display systematic variability. This variability reflects the particular form—function correlation which comprise the rules of the learner's grammar at that stage of development.
- 5- Interlanguage development reflects the operation of cognitive learning strategies. The process by which interlanguages are constructed has been explained in various ways. One type of explanation identifies a number of cognitive learning processes such as L1 transfer, overgeneralization and simplification.
- 6- Interlanguage use can also reflect the operation of communication strategies. When learners are faced with having to communicate messages for which the necessary linguistic resources are not available, they resort to a variety of communication strategies. These enable them to compensate for their lack of knowledge. Typical communication strategies are paraphrase, code-switching and appeals- for – assistance.
- 7- Interlanguage systems may fossilize. Fossilization refer to the tendency of many learners to stop developing their interlanguage grammar in the direction of the target language. Instead they reach a plateau beyond which they do not progress. This may be because there is no communicative need for further development. Alternatively, it may be because full competence in a L2 is neurolinguistically impossible for most learners. Fossilization is a unique feature of interlanguage systems.

Example

Learner: I go to Disney World.

Native speaker: You're going to Disney World?

Learner: What (doesn't understand what the native speaker asks about.)

Native speaker: You will go to Disney World?

Learner: Yes. (notice they key word ' go ' but doesn't notice the verb tense.)

Native speaker: When?

Learner: 1996.

Native speaker: Oh, you went to Disney World in 1996.

Learner: Yes, I go Disney World in 1996.

The development of Interlanguage

- 1- Language transfer: Interfering; interlingual transfer from L1; borrowing patterns from the native language. Such as using 'the book of John' instead of John's book.
- 2- Transfer of training: Some elements of the interlanguage may result from specific features of the learning. For example, students make some errors because of a misleading explanation from the teacher..... incorrect presentation of a structure.
- 3- Strategies of second language learning: These strategies are part of the context of learning; resulting from a specific approach to the material to be learned.
- 4- Communication strategies: expressing meanings using the words and grammar which are already known by a learner with limited knowledge of the target language. Such as using 'That's my building. I live there' instead of 'That's the building where I live'.
- 5- Overgeneralization: The extension of using grammatical rules beyond its expected uses (e.g. mans instead men)

Final Thought

The interlanguage theory has been fluid, constantly changing, and incorporating new ideas. It played a crucial role in the transformation of thinking, prediction and understanding the process of second language learning.

Notes: