

The Role of Universal Grammar and Age in Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract

The term of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is refers to the acquisition of second language in any stage of age, can be children or adults. In learning Second Language Acquisition, people can learn it because they have Universal Grammar (UG). UG is an “innate” for everyone.

Keyword : Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Universal Grammar (UG)

Introduction

Universal Grammar and age give influence in Second Language Acquisition. This paper deals with second language acquisition and the role of Universal Grammar and age in the course of the on-going acquisition process. Actually, there are many factors that influence SLA, such as aptitude, attitude, motivation, intelligence, etc. But in this paper describe about UG and age in SLA process. UG is an issue which is often discussed not only in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), but also in First Language Acquisition the Universal Grammar approach is often seen as not verified, or on the other hand, it is viewed as the only solution to the mysterious question of language acquisition. This term paper defines about universal grammar (UG), age, and the role of universal grammar and age in Second Language Acquisition.

In SLA, age give contribution on it, it is influences SLA. According to Ellis (1985:264), “age influences the affective state of the learner, after puberty the Affective Filter is likely to increase in strength.” Age also influences input of people. From input that people have, age also influences learning. Adults or older

learners are better in learning language form than children or younger learners because adults have critical thinking and children have no critical thinking. Children also use generalization in learning, for example, in saying plural noun, because influenced by book → books, so children say mouse by saying mice, not mice.

There are some substantive findings about age and SLA (Edmondson, 1999: 122), they are:

- Adult and teenagers learn more quickly than the kids, specifically in morpho-syntax and in vocabulary acquisition.
- Given similar condition, however, the kids will soon overtake both groups in terms of ultimate attainment.
- Some studies support the notion of a “critical age” for morpho-syntactic learning.
- Kids and teenagers seem to be better able to imitate than adults.
- Person who contact L2 as kids or teenagers are more likely to develop good pronunciation and suprasegmental skills.
- Moreover, in terms of ultimate achievement: the earlier you start, the better.
- This has led to the “Critical age” hypothesis (maybe age 6) for oral production.
- However, other studies suggest that adults certainly can achieve near native oral skills.
- The evidence therefore suggests a sensitive, rather than a critical age for production skills.
- Communicative fluency tends to co-vary with length of contact, but accuracy doesn't.

Universal Grammar (UG)

Universal Grammar is not a grammar in the usual sense, it's not a set of rules, it's more a set of principles (Edmondson, 1999: 25). This is because UG is the innate capacity that every person can have it, not like about mastering the grammar. Every person in all over the world has UG. People can learn every language if they want, there's nothing impossible about learning a language because based on UG. According to Crain & Martin (1999:54), the basic idea of UG can be drawn as:

Input (PLD) → Language Acquisition Device (LAD) → Final State

Input that also called the Primary Linguistic Data is anything that learners get. It can be the information, explanation, picture, etc. Then knowledge that learners bring in language acquisition is called Language Acquisition Device LAD. The role of this is to analyze the linguistic input. Then, after analyze it learners give output from the input data that people get before, that is the linguistic competence that people show. In particular, it will be presupposed that the linguistic competence of native speakers of a language can be accounted for in terms of an abstract and unconscious linguistic system, in other words, a grammar, which underlines use of language, including comprehension and production. Native-speaker grammars are constrained by built-in universal linguistic principles, known as Universal Grammar (UG) (White, 2003: 1). So, UG is the set of principle that work in all human language.

Universal Grammar provides a system of constraints limited range of possible grammars to be considered. UG provides principles which consists of principle itself, parameter, and projection. Archibald (2000:102) says, “in a theory of Universal Grammar (UG) based on fixed general principles and language-specific setting of parameters, functional categories and features have been identified as a locus of variation among grammars.” Principle means in everything has name. Parameter means everything has name but in different language the name will be different. Principle and parameter almost the same but parameter is more specific than principle. For example, every country and every language has its own name in saying some expressions. In English, people say “I love you”, but Indonesian say “Aku sayang kamu”, and Korean say “Saranghae”. All of them are different name. The last, projection means knowing the rule and applying it. For example, when learners have already know to make simple sentence by the rule S + V + O, so when they have to make sentence they can make it because they

already know the rule then apply it. Learners can make sentences project to many things.

Competence and Performance also fundamental while looking at the role of UG in SLA. Universal Grammar deals in both, L1 and L2 achievement, with the grammar of a language, belonging rather to competence than to performance. Competence is defined as the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language, while performance is the actual use of language in concrete situations. Competence cannot be measured while performance can be measured. For example, the competence is knowing there are many tenses like simple present, simple past, etc. The performance is when make sentence of simple present tense, "you go to school" or "she goes to school."

Discussion

SLA is the process of acquiring language after learning mother tongue (L1). SLA is used in order to socialized in the community. In second language learning, language plays an institutional and social role in the community. It functions as a recognized means of communication among members who speak some other language as their native tongue.

Learners acquire second language by making use of existing knowledge of the native language, general learning strategies, or universal properties of language to internalize knowledge of second language. In the process of acquiring second language, learners have the stage named "interlanguage." It is language learner language. Some of the utterances produces by learners are not well performed according to the rules of adult grammar. This is not first language and also not as second language, so between them. In learning second language, age and UG have their role.

By looking the term age, in learning second language, children are better in learning aspect like pronunciation, while adults better in learning language

form. This is because adults have critical thinking then use problem solving while children don't have it. Children use more generalization in learning while adults aware between the similarity and difference of language. About the input, children have limited input so they can only communicate if there are some people around them, while adults have more input so they can think about many things. Adults may have easier time learning second language because of knowledge of a first language. However, often their second language is learned in a classroom setting and interference is greater than in a natural setting which is how children usually learn. Acquisition of second language in children is similar to the processes used in the acquisition of first language.

In addition, Universal Grammar (UG) has role in acquiring second language. UG is commonly used by adults in SLA. Adults have different ways in accessing UG based on the similarities between L1 and L2. Universal grammar is an "innate" for everyone. Universal grammar is the grammar which characterizes the innate predisposition to learn language. UG is a set of rules that all human possess by virtue of having certain common genetic features which distinguish them from other species.

There are some ways that adult make use and access of UG in SLA. They are full access, partly, possible access but blocked and no access. L2 learners has full access to UG principles, if L2 parameter setting = L1 setting, then learning is eased: if not adults proceed as with L1. In partly access, the UG parameter and principles found in L1 can be used in L2, but to reset parameters, general learning strategies will be used. Access is possible, but it is blocked, in this case, adults often use problem solving strategies for learning, instead of UG, the two systems compete. It is possible that there is no access to UG in the condition that after L1 acquisition, UG has served its purpose. Adult will use other, more general learning strategies.

There are some ways for learners in acquiring L2. Learners acquire a second language by making use of existing knowledge of the native language,

general learning strategies, or universal properties of language to internalize knowledge of the second language. Those processes serve as a means by which the learner constructs an interlanguage (a transitional system reflecting the learner's current L₂ knowledge). Communication strategies are employed by the learner to make use of existing knowledge to cope with communication difficulties.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the term Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers to the acquisition of second language in any stage of age, can be children or adults. In learning Second Language Acquisition, people can learn it because they have Universal Grammar (UG). UG is an "innate" for everyone. In this case, Adults has different way in accessing UG based on the similarities between L1 and L2.

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