DESCRIPTION:

The **<u>Position Statement</u>** was created for Dr. Richard Robison's course on Second Language Acquisition (TESL 505) in Spring I 2020. It demonstrates my understanding of the second language learning process, including the motivational factors, contextual variables, and applied teaching strategies that affect the learners' progress and language learning ability.

REFLECTION:

Analyzing the complex factors that contribute to a second language learner's progress, I am aware of the significant motivational and affective factors that influence a person's perception of themselves and how the impact of learning a second language can alter an adult's identity. In this learning journey understanding the differences between adult and children L2 learners, I recall doubting moments in my abilities. These moments are usually under duress that I question my motives for continuing. Being mindful that students will experience these emotions during their learning. I must be empathetic and create a Community of Practice (Lightbown & Spada, 2013) where my students embrace making mistakes as part of the learning process. I hope to impart with the student to learn to be kind to ourselves and forgive our own mistakes.

APPLICATION:

Creating a learning environment will allow my students to explore their L2 identities to enable them to process information closely aligned to their learning styles. I will utilize learning assessments such as questionnaires that will help me evaluate their learning styles, cognitive and affective factors, and learner's native language. Use authentic, challenging lessons to help promote learning through mistakes, continually learning, and encourage language production through various instructions and practices engaging for both the teacher and student. Conduct class discussions with students to identify effective ways to promote a safe environment that practices sensitivity to anxiety, language identity conflicts, and cultural differences and fosters intrinsic motivation to continue their L2 journey that maintains a high level of engagement with lesson plans.

Position Statement

TESL 505 Second Language Acquisition

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Introduction Statement

Second Language acquisition, when compared to a child acquiring their first language (L1), occurs within the learners' linguistic environment. The first language learner, their first exposure to language, is influenced by their caregivers and social contexts. These elements provide feedback loops, creating various kinds of scaffolding to assist the learner in the beginning to approximate meaning to words and later develop them from simple utterances to more complex ones. However, while the second language (L2) learning can occur at any level, for this discussion, it can only happen provided that the learning of the L2 takes place sometime later than the acquisition of the first language (L1).

The Second Language Acquisition Perspectives

Several theories have emerged as researchers, teachers, and theorists have attempted to understand and explain how humans learn a language. Most hypotheses presented on how the second language is learned stem from how the first language is acquired. Each theory is often exploring and responding to weaknesses in previous models and attempting to reveal different viewpoints.

First, when exploring the Behaviorist model, the critical aspect of the thesis language is learned through developing habit formations. Thus, suggesting a series of learned behaviors acquired L1 due to habits in response to stimuli. Then applied to L2 acquisition, the focused emphasis is L2 learners, through repetitive practices and memorization, form habits that will prevent errors.

The Universal Grammar views language and grammar as innate. Noam Chomsky states that humans are born with language with certain parts of grammar in the brain, and the type of language or culture that one is born into does not matter. In other words, humans are born with

the capacity for recognizing the foundational functions of grammar, syntax, and morphology.

The thought here is that a universal language allows language processing even when grammar rules and forms are unclear. Further validating the perspective of the innatist that it is the interaction with others that allows the second language learner to gain competency without exposure to explicit rules. Krashen clarifies how interaction with others allows for practice of the language acquired, and learning is a process when the language is learned. The key in Krashen's Monitor model is that humans do not learn a language but instead acquire a language similar to the first way humans developed their L1 language naturally. This suggests as long as comprehensible input is provided, acquiring continues just one step above the learner's current capacity.

The cognitive models of language acquisition focus on the learners' cognitive development and interaction with others. Also challenging the Behaviorist theory focused on how students behave as language learners and instead examines how information is processed. Learners process information with the ability to learn and pull from existing knowledge through experience and practice. This allows the accumulation of input to be used automatically as output – called upon at any particular moment. For the learner, this requires frequent exposure to the language and practice. For the L2 learner, exposure to vocabulary, word pairing, and practice become the role of the classroom with an emphasis on instruction.

Sociocultural theorists look at a combination of learning behaviors. The simplicity of this idea as learners talk and practice, they get better. This perspective explains that language learning is a social function that starts with an external social activity that becomes internalized. Also, the social interactionist theory explains a motivational component where there has to be a willingness to interact with other people. This means the learner must be engaged, encouraged to

be autonomous, and motivated to drive their learning behaviors. These viewpoints correspond with the Zone of Proximal Development, a metaphorical zone where the learner constructs knowledge with the support of an interlocutor. In other words, the more motivated the learner is to play a role in their success, the more willing the learner will be to participate in the learning,

The Nature of Second Language Proficiency and Communicative Competence

Traditionally, second language proficiency tends to define a learner's ability to master the language through rules, grammar, syntax, focusing on creating correct sentences in the language. But, knowing how those sentences translate in communication becomes the focus of communicative competence.

Our linguistical competency tells us what sentences in a language are grammatically correct. Our communicative competency examines utterances in language, determining if they are communicatively appropriate. However, how best teachers define a complete success for second language proficiency remains unclear. Therefore, researchers put together five components to assist with a determining goal for whole language competence. It comprises language competence: grammatical competence, discourse competence, functional competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence as followed.

Grammatical competence produces grammatically and phonologically well-formed sentences with correct syntax and pronunciation. Discourse competence is expanding vocabulary, ideas, and knowledge in a coherent and cohesive order for use in more complex sentences, discussions, and debates. Functional competence is the ability to keep the communication flowing through a full range of language functions to accomplish the desired purpose effectively in various situations. Sociolinguistic competence is the capability to select the correct register and style of communication for the setting and audience. Finally, strategic

competence assesses the communication needed in the situation, plans effective communication, and then executes the plan. And has the full ability to repair communication if it begins to break down.

The Nature of the Second Language Acquisition

Many theories analyze the acquisition of L1 during a child's development to compare how L1 is learned to see if any applicability to adult L2 learning. When reviewing some of the analyses, several factors acquiring L1 are true for L2 second language. Still, there are notable differences, such as Cognitive development and learning, mediated by language and other social elements. Vygotsky's concept of regulation talks about how things are limited and controlled at some point – ideas, thoughts, language by others.

Presented are significant differences between child first language acquisition and adult second language acquisition.

The first difference is the neurological differences between young children and adults. An adult is anyone beyond the age of puberty. The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) stated that the critical period for language acquisition is possible after birth and before puberty. Adults trying to learn a language after puberty do not have the neural plasticity that children have. While this period is primarily debated, the most substantial empirical evidence for this period is the study of accents where most older learners will not reach a native-like level. However, native-like accents have been observed under certain conditions, suggesting that accents are affected by multiple factors, such as identity and motivation rather than the critical period biological constraints.

While discussing these same factors of the child's stage, language is typically modified input crucial to early acquisition and regulated by other people who influence the learner, i.e., Teachers, caregivers, and parents. Eventually, the learner will appropriate things by developing

an awareness of the grammatical structure of their first language, and it becomes theirs. However, before this happens, information is introduced as shared knowledge. What this means is that the learner is given a limited amount of information. It is scaffolding evolved with helping them whether the child is learning an L1 language, which is valid for the adult learning L2. The interlocutor assists the learner in problem-solving, and eventually, the learner appropriately associates the information to those things. The learner can subsequently do things independently—this concept is derived from the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) model.

Again, when examining the difference in cognitive development between adults and children, adults cannot replicate the early stages of a child's cognitive development. In contrast, the child develops both their language and cognitive ability at the same time. Thus language development has to be performed at the explicit level of learning for the adult L2 learner. Children are unique to implicitly learning a language while being exposed to it in their environment. In comparison, even after an adult spends considerable time in a different culture and language, absorption does not occur without some intervention of explicit learning. The adult learner must actively engage in their learning process through metalinguistic awareness. Adults can explicitly learn grammar rules and apply those rules through cognitive awareness.

More decisive differences between L1 and L2 acquisition, such as the affective differences, further clarify between adults and children. Notably, the L1 in early childhood is likely acquired in informal, unstructured environments. Young children are cognitively and emotionally naive, and their egos are at the same stage of their language development. Children are less hindered with the perception of themselves learning, unlike adults individuals' mental and emotional restraints. In many aspects of the language learning environment for adults, it requires a more formally structured accommodation for older individuals' mental and emotional

development. It allows them a safe environment to expand their identities when learning a new language, <mark>which can cause stress, anxiety, and intimidation which all inhibit learning in an adult brain.</mark> Also, L2 learners may primarily lack exposure to the target language that young children had to their first. <mark>Young children are likely immersed within the social context within which they will become participants. Second language learners may be in an environment where the target language is unavailable for close encounters and interactions</mark>, and the classroom may provide the only structured learning environment for a community of classmates.

One other significant factor in second language learning is contextual differences. <mark>A child has considerable time in its L1 while the brain develops</mark>, absorbing and processing information before the expected output. An adult L2 learner is often expected to produce language immediately, whether informal or formal. <mark>An adult L2 learner usually spends less time in the L2</mark>, especially if the language is being learned in a foreign language with little exposure and interaction with the target language. As a result, <mark>a child has less expectation producing utterances and word pairing when learning L1. In contrast, higher expectations of adult L2 learners to communicate at a higher level,</mark> skipping those utterances and basic steps of a child's L1.

External Affective Variables, Motivation, and Effect of Context

Affective Variables

<mark>Some prominent individual factors affecting second language acquisition include cognitive or learning style and anxiety or stress response</mark>. <mark>Together, these factors impact many individual variables attributed to the degree of success in learning a second language</mark>.

Learning style refers to the way a learner prefers to take in and process new information.

It is the way the learner's cognitive processing intersects with their personality. Thus, for example, it may conclude the preferences of learning activities, e.g., inductive vs. deductive. The circumstances learners find to be stress-inducing, and their stress response will impact a host of affective factors that can hinder or aid their language learning. For example, it will reshape a person's self-esteem and be at the core of self-confidence, or the lack thereof. In addition, it will influence the learner's willingness to communicate, interact, and take risks. Finally, it can even be a factor in a learner's ability to deal with uncertainty.

Each learner is a diverse infusion of cognitive abilities and affective states. Neither stands alone, and both are dependent on the neurobiological processes occurring within the physical brain. For example, a strong correlation is demonstrated between left- or right-brain dominance constructs and field independence or field sensitivity.

In the developing brain, lateralized functions are to either the right or the left hemisphere. While the problem-solving capacities of both halves of the brain are essential, many learners may tend to demonstrate a preference for the processing capabilities of one half or the other, hence the identification as being left-brain dominant or right-brain dominant. The characteristics of right- or left-brain dominance bear a striking correlation to the cognitive styles of field independence and field sensitivity – the ability to differentiate a particular item from amongst a collection of items, or the ability to see the whole without being distracted the various parts. Again, while an individual may prefer a particular perspective, both are necessary for problem-solving. The different styles reflect different aptitudes: field independence for analysis and attention detail and field sensitivity for empathy and socially related interactions.

Motivation

A composition of variables and individual factors rooted in cognitive and affective elements explains learners' motivation and other affective differences relevant to fulfilling social needs for belonging and community. Whether the motivation to learn comes from outside sources (extrinsic) or internal sources (intrinsic), the learner's motivation will impact acquisition and retention. For example, adult learners' feelings about themselves as learners have a marked influence on motivation and quality of thinking. For instance, positive emotion such as curiosity generally enhances motivation and facilitate learning and performance. However, other emotions rooted in anxieties and worried about competence to learn a new language can lead to losing motivation. In addition, a cascade of affective differences within learners can disrupt motivation. Such as, anxiety, cultural differences, stress, and time are all factors that most adults encounter while learning a second language, and each factor can either promote or destroy motivation.

Contexts of language learning

While motivation is a critical factor in a learner's second language learning process, context can weigh heavily on a student's progress and outcome. There are five dimensions of context: institutional, political, linguistic, social, and cultural.

Institutional context refers to the framework in which language learning is performed. Schools, universities, religious organizations, clubs, social groups, and government bodies all form institutional contexts that can influence or force language learning. Of course, each institution will also have its own policies and procedures for teaching language. This institutional context may determine whether the approach to language instruction is teacher-oriented or student-oriented. The institutional context shapes the second language learning it is learned in. The political context is related to what nation or political entity is determining language learning. For example, the language might be an official language of the nation or required for graduation

from school. In addition, the political context often determines the official language of a nation and determines the language of power in a community by defining what language business and political transactions are conducted in. International relations between nations can also affect language learning. For example, trade relations between nations can encourage second language acquisition as the two nations negotiate business using a common language. The linguistic context refers to the dialects and varieties exposed to L2 learners. Linguistic context also involves the amount of time the learner is spending using the second language. For example, suppose the learner is only using the language in a foreign language classroom. In that case, their limited time will inhibit their learning more than those living in a country that speaks the target language.

Social context can play a significant factor in SLA. The attitudes of their social group shape learners. If the learner's social group does not accept the second language, the learner will not be as successful as a learner their family and peers well support in their SLA. Cultural Content –impact second language acquisition is that of culture. It forms how we run our institutions, promotes political views. It is shared in our language and social interactions. Generally, our cultural identity authenticates how we perceive ourselves and our position within our communities. It defines our norms for discourse, behavior, and how ideas are imagined, all reflected in the language. Learning a new language with new perspectives and norms challenges and alters all of these, resulting in a new language identity.

The Process of SLA

How an adult learner learns an L2 continues to be explored, researched, producing theories, hypotheses to assist teachers in the classroom in analyzing L2 learner errors through contrasting and predicting L2 learners difficulties. The contrastive analysis hypothesis looked at early

detections of a language learner's L1 on their production of the language that the learner is targeting. Because the effect can negatively impact in any aspect of language – grammar, vocabulary, accent, or spelling, teachers should provide instructions focused on modifying behaviors and habits used in learner L1, and replacing them with new ones for L2 learning. When the influence of the native language differs from the use of the target language, then it is considered a negative transfer or "interference." In contrast, when the influence of the L1 leads to immediate acquisition of the target language because of its similarities. Then it is considered a positive transfer or "facilitation". This analysis provided some predictions of errors in L2 learners. However, its close alignment with the Behaviorist perspective suggests second language acquisition is more habit-forming and not a process and L2 learners' learned bad habits can be modified with new ones through explicit instruction.

In understanding the importance of detecting learners' errors, error analysis is a valuable tool used with SLA. Through contrastive analysis, it was the dominant approach to conceptualize learner errors. However, students made errors outside these predictions. The goal of error analysis is intended to provide the teacher insight. Find ways to define the type of error the learner is making and provide the Teacher with information about how the learner is learning to develop the best teaching strategy to fix the learner errors. Teachers distinguish errors and mistakes differently. A mistake is a chance of inaccuracy related to performance. An error is a consistent inaccuracy related to competency.

The approach most studied to understanding second language learning is Interlanguage analysis. Interlanguage is a dynamic system of language that develops as the learner acquires the second language. A much broader look into second language acquisition contains two types of analysis. First, interlanguage analysis suggests that second language learning is complex,

dynamic and can result in the fossilization of learning. Second, fossilization occurs when the learning process halts. Why does the learning process halt? Here the attention turns to discussing some of the Interlanguage dynamics. The student is not a child acquiring two languages simultaneously but has reached puberty and is educated in their L1 when learning L2. In this stage, it is fair to say L2 learners are in a state of limbo. Primarily, L2 learners learning another language while continuing the intelligible conversation in their native language, their L1 influences their brain processing and practice of L2. Over time, the learner's understandable language is in flux. It is not like their L1, nor does it mirror the L2. The interlanguage at this state is considered unique, almost a third language. The students' language is challenged to operate under a new internal set of dynamic rules that are neither fully L2 nor L1, impacted with affective factors and variable input influenced by (teachers, culture, parents, other native speakers, body language, cultural interaction).

Moreover, in this case, to answer the question posed. The learner may or may not continue to be provided or respond to comprehensible language input that allows acquiring language. The L2 learner may not have an interlocutor to help the learner problem-solve and correct grammar errors. Other factors depend on the type of input and in the context that the student receives as language. From a different perspective, interlanguage is a continuum; the student never entirely speaks the L2. Sometimes you hear words misused, and sometimes the learner uses made-up words because there is no equivalent for the L1 to translate a phrase into L2 or vice verse. These made-up words created out of necessity become part of the native language lexicon to bridge complete terms that are not part of the L1 or L2. In continuing this analysis, the student is speaking broken language parts of the L2, and over time, a neutral language level occurs unconsciously with progression. However, the advancement of language to

a neutral level raises the discussion of *fossilization*, where the students increase knowledge plateaus. Suggesting when the L2 learner has ceased acquiring the L2 before reaching target norms, fossilization is occurring because the L2 comprehensive meaning for the student is halted. During this period, the Teacher has to recognize this occurrence in the student and look for ways to stop it. Some become satisfied with their level, are not motivated to progress, and have no interest in changing accents. For others, it could be the age of the learner, social identity, and communicative need

Teacher responsibility and role –

In the classroom, the Teacher's and learners' success is dependent on building a rapport during language learning is critical stimulating self-confidence or lowering the affective filter in an environment, encouraging learners to experiment to discover the target language. Teachers are also a diverse group. They have their cognitive styles, affective factors and operate under a set of personal beliefs. Teachers can offer students an understanding of the types of anxiety and stress; the learner is facing. It may be communicative apprehension, the inability to express their ideas, or fear of social evaluation because learners feel this constant pressure to make a positive impression. The goal is to find the right mix of practices. Teachers need to develop teaching tools that engage different cognitive learning styles when creating a task. The task should causes the learner a little apprehension, just enough tension that generates a positive feeling when the task is completed. The practice should consistently remain engaging for the Teacher to maintain that high enthusiasm for the lesson. Teachers who have taken the journey of learning a second language are in a uniques position to empathize with the students' fears and anxieties about learning a L2 because they can reflect on that journey and their own learning experiences and emotions. This is not to say a Teacher who has not taken this journey is less

empathic. Still, <mark>extra care and attention are required of the Teacher to be conscious and astute, making the classroom a safe environment and continue finding ways to develop themselves how to teach language to the L2 learners effectively.</mark> Teachers should be willing to risk designing lessons, search for new methods and strategies of practice to deploy with L2 learners that are not so prescriptive. <mark>SLA constant changes in students' requirements should prompt Teachers to look for ways to be effective teachers through engagement in personal research and class observations to explore more effective teaching tools available to them to use with teaching students to remain relevant with information for teaching instructions in the classroom.</mark>

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