Research Paper

The Linguistic Basis of Second Language Learning

Jayaprakash Paramaguru[1], Dusmanta Kumar Pattanaik[2]*

(1Associate Professor, Department of Humanities, Veer Surendra Sai University of Technology, Burla)
(2* Assistant Professor of English, NIIS, Bhubaneswar)

Abstract
The second Language learners who are usually either bilingual or multilingual while starting to learn the second language are already pre-occupied with the linguistic codes and functionalities of their mother tongue. So, at times it becomes a challenge for them to process the linguistic codes of their second language. This work focuses on the key issues revolving around the second language learning theories and the factors affecting the second language learning. The linguistic basis of second language learning has been discussed from a theoretical perspective in the context of several research undertaken in this field. The concepts of bilingualism and multilingualism has been discussed at length as most of the Indian learners learn the second language, English in a multilingual situation. Even the Odia learners of English learn the second language in a multi lingual platform. The paper attempts to make a prudent understanding of the eco system of second language learning and its key linguistic indicators.
Key words: Second language learners; bilingual; multilingual; linguistic codes; language, communication; competence; discourse.

The second language learners are often either bilinguals or multi-linguals. So, they do not start with a tabula rasa. When they start learning the new language, they already have in their command the linguistic repertoire of their mother tongue (L1). Then how does they process the new language into their mind and whether the existing features of the L1 interfere with the learning of L2 are unresolved questions troubling the linguists, who have made numerous conjectures about the SLL and SLA and their relationship with the L1 acquisition. This chapter intends to examine some important theories related to the linguistic basis of SLL and the linguistic factors affecting SLL.

Bilingualism, as the word suggests means the knowledge of two languages which can be used for both comprehension and expression. Multilingualism similarly, means the knowledge of more than two language and the ability to use all languages to certain extent.

Linguists have differentiated between individual bilingualism and societal bilingualism by observing linguistic groups and different specific communities. Individual bilingualism is distinguished from social bilingualism as explained in the following quotation from Hamers and Blanc:

"Individual bilingualism refers to the psychological state of an individual who has access to more than one linguistic code as a means of communication but social bilingualism refers to the state of linguistic community in which two languages are in contact with the result that two codes can be used in the same interaction and that a number of individuals are bilingual." (Hamers and Blanc,1986;6)

Bilingualism is the condition in which two living languages exist side by side in a country, each spoken by one national group, each representing a fairly large proportion of the people. (AUCAMP, 1926 cited in Bactens Beardsmore 1982;2). Based on the relative ability to use the four communication skills of language (LSRW), bilingual individuals are classified.

Bilingualism can also be perceived according to competence in L2 and the age of acquisition of L2. According to competence level a person may be,

- Monolingual
- Balanced bilingual
- Dominant bilingual
- Semi lingual

Similarly, a bilingual individual can acquire bilingualism in the childhood, adolescence or adulthood, hence can be termed childhood bilingual, adolescent bilingual or adult bilingual.

Language competence, simply saying refers to the "knowing of a language". From the linguistic point of view "knowing a language" refers to the knowledge of words of a language, knowing sentence construction,

pronunciation of words and how to use language appropriately in different situations. From the functional point of view language competence means the ability to use a language to communicate effectively, by understanding, speaking, reading and writing it. Hence taking into consideration these two components, language competence has been described as a combination of both linguistic competence and communicative competence.

Modern language competence theories are greatly influenced by Dell Hymes who coined the term "Communicative Competence" (CC) in 1972. Since then, various attempts have been made by linguists like Hatch (1978), Littlewood (1981), Canale (1983), Savigon (1983), Brown (1987), Nunan (1987), Richards (1992), Ellis (1994), Dornyei and thurell (1994), Bhatia (1998) to analyze the concept of communicative competence and identify the components of communicative competence. The various components of language competence are presented in the diagram below:

A domain can be described as a sphere of human activity which represents a particular setting involving different role relationships. Therefore, language use and language style vary according to the following factors:

- Setting: the place of communication; home, workplace, seminar, marriage ceremony etc.
- Roles: the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the receiver; the senior, junior, husband, boss, friend, children, etc.
- Topic: the meaning itself; day to day experiences, religion, literature or gossip, etc.

The language domain where the L1 is used may differ from the domains where L2 is used. The nine domains of L1 use are, family, playground, school, religion, literature, media, army, courts, administration. In each domain, various kinds of pressures, economic, administrative, cultural, political, social, etc. influence the speakers to use one language in preference to others.

In a bilingual or multilingual context like India, different language domains demand different language use. While L1 is the choice language for family, friends, playground, L2 is the choice language for education and employment. English language is the language of choice for the educated, elitist, urban section of the society only at their work place or formal environment because here the choice of English is an act of preference and prestige.

In India, English is not exactly the dominant course of discourse for any speaker in the domain of intra-national communication. Its use is generally restricted to the very few urban elite's code-mixing of English in their discourse. But Indian learners learn English as the L2, because it is the most preferred language in the domain of higher education and administration. Learning English and acquiring both BICS and CALP is a necessity for Indi youth aspiring for a decent job or for upliftment of his social status. Therefore, the two important domains; education and administration yet, being governed by English language speakers, give the impetus to Indian learners to command English as their L2.

Contrastive analysis by structural linguists suggested the notion that each language has specific features quite contrasted to other languages and emphasized the proximity and distance of languages with regard to their phonology and syntax. Researchers like Sridhar (1976), Fisiak (1983), Lehtonen and Sajavaara (1983 applied contrastive analysis theory to substantiate the distance and closeness between languages by comparing the rules and items f grammar, but failed to establish how the difference/distance between languages hamper language learning.

Spolsky in his conditions for Second Language Learning discussed the results of important studies and investigations on this aspect of language and postulated two conditions about SLL:

- Language Distance Condition; which states the closer two languages are to each other genetically and typologically, the quicker the speaker of one will learn the other.
- Shared Feature Condition; according to which when two languages share a feature, learning is facilitated.

Considering the factors given by Spolsky about language distance and comparing English with the vernacular languages of India, it can be clearly evidenced that the Indian languages, which originated from the Indo-Aryan language group are phonologically and structurally not similar to English language which has originated from Indo-European language.

Chomsky introduced the theory of Universal Grammar, which states that the human species possesses a Language Acquisition Device (LAD) in the brain and inherits the universal grammar of all languages. This explains the L1learning/acquisition by children and their error-free use of the L1. Ellis in his book Understanding Second Language Learning has suggested that L1 and L2 learners produce very similar kinds of utterances in the early stages, bur L2 learners learn unmarked or less marked properties of a language before marked properties of the target language.

Spolsky hypothesizes in his condition 38 that when both native and target languages have the same setting for some parameter of universal grammar, minimal experience will be needed to trigger the correct form of grammar. Hence the learner's previous knowledge of his L1 is a factor of potential importance in second language learning.

Exposure to the new language is of utmost significance in SLL. Though some linguists like Carrol measure exposure only in terms of time; others like Schumann, Lamendella and Gardner believe the amount of exposure, as well as the quality of the exposure are more relevant to successful second language learning. Klein

(1986) proposed a relationship between linguistic input received from exposure and the learner's interest to utilize the exposure, which can be considered as an opportunity. According to Klein:

The second language learner has four essential tasks to perform: firstly, he or she must successfully analyze the speech input he or she hears into appropriate units. Secondly, he or she must learn how to synthesize these minimal units to larger units. Then, he or she must learn how utterances are embedded in context. Finally, he or she must learn to match his or her own present command of a language with the target aimed at. (Cited in Spolsky; 1989: 167).

Exposure to the second language; i.e., English for Indian learners is available in restricted forms. Besides the formal learning situation i.e., the school or college, where the teacher is the only real fluent speaker of the language, the learners have little access to the real target language used by native speakers in natural real-life contexts. Besides the English movies and serials, to which the Indian learners may have access, but do not have the habit of viewing, exposure to standard English, as spoken by the Englishmen, is almost a dream. Their maximum exposure to English is in the classroom, through the teacher and the text books. Besides this, the type of English they are exposed to is a regionalized variety of English; not even the standard Indian English, that is used in the TV news broadcast. The regional varieties are loaded with impurities derived from the phonology, syntax, sound and intonation pattern of their own mother tongue.

Spolsky clubs the exposure condition with the time condition and states that, "The more tome learning any aspect of a second language, the more will be learned." So, exposure to L2 need not be considered only in terms of quantity of time devoted to expose oneself to the L2, but the quality of L2 gas to be considered while analyzing exposure as a condition for the achievement in second language learning.

An individual most closely identifies with his mother tongue because the language reflects norms, values and culture of a particular social group. One can also pass on his culture and tradition to the next generation through the mother tongue, which is the L1. Therefore, L1 is considered as a powerful agent of group identity. Group identity reflects a shared set of practices, beliefs, value system, etc. It also psychologically unites and binds the speakers of the particular language group. Pattanayak (1992) has rightly stated:

Places are not geographical concepts; they exist in people's consciousness. So does the concept "mother tongue". It is not a language in the general sense of the word, nor is it a dialect. It is an identity signifier, waiting to be explained.

The mother tongue, therefore, plays a decisive role in an individual's identification with a society and group. Though often the L1 may not remain the most dominant language in one's life and other languages, may play more significant role due to changed circumstances.

An individual born and brought up in Odisha may lose his identity as an Odia if he settles down in Delhi, using Hindi for all purposes of communication or in UK, using English in all spheres at all times. He may come to consider himself a part of the Hindi or English-speaking community. Individuals identify with a particular language gives him greater motivation and impetus to learn the language, which may be his L2, L3, or L4.

Language loyalty is characterized by a resistance to change from one language to another. An individual's emotional involvement with the language of childhood serves as his group identity and integrity with the region and culture.

A language, like nationality, inspires strong feelings. Often an individual forced or even motivated to learn a L2 or L3 for instrumental reasons maintains his loyalty for his L1 and uses it whenever an opportunity crops in even in foreign (L1/L2) settings. This is called language loyalty, which inspires a desire for language maintenance. The factors which influence language loyalty and language maintenance are, the status and role of the language and the functions the language plays in important domains. When the status of L2 is greater than the L1 the individuals may prefer a language shift.

In Odisha, which is the microcosm of India; the macrocosm, English language learners, maintain language loyalty inside their state but practice language shift when they are settled elsewhere. But they also intend to add to their linguistic repertoire the English language, because of its higher status and significant role in the present socio-economic scenario of our country.

Language policies are directly influenced by the status and role of a language in the society. As languages are always in a state of flux, the speakers of various languages. In bilingual or multilingual societies like India, people have the right to choose a language for use in different domains. Keeping this factor in view, language policies and language planning are done by the governments to cater to the needs of various sections of society. Fishman defined language planning as, "the organized pursuit of solutions to language problems, typically at the national level" (1974;79). Cooper, who had a keener insight into the motive of language planning by the administrators pointed that "*Language planning is a deliberate effort to influence the behavior of others with respect to acquisition, structure or functional allocations of their language codes.*" (1989;183)

Like any planning activity language planning also involves four steps:

- Fact finding
- Planning

- Implementation, and
- Feedback

Different factors affect language planning of any country. Some of the important factors are:

i. Socio-demographic factors: which deals with the number of languages spoken and the number of people speaking the particular language.

ii. Linguistic factors: which consider the linguistic features of languages and its role in the society.

iii. Socio-psychological factors: which are based on the attitude of the people towards the language, and the status of the language in the society.

iv. Politico-economic factors: which decide the amount of money to be spent on teaching the language.

Language planning leads to the choice of languages to be used in the various domains and to establish a policy to be followed for the chosen language. Language policy refers to the decisions made by the government on the roles and functions of particular languages.

Language planning in India in the Post Independent era veered towards a negative campaigning against the English language in an attempt to uplift the popular language Hindi. By downgrading English from the official language status to the associate official language status and by making teaching of English optional in schools, the Indian government tried to free the nation from the shackles of the English language. But with changing realities in the socio-politico-economic scenario, English language has come to play a decisive role in the progress of the country. It is being used by the people in power; the scientists, the politicians, the administrators, the lawyers, etc. It has also attained a very high status in Indian society, as the lingua franca- the language of the higher education, the language of media, the language needed for employment, the language offering greater advantage in all walks of life, the language of prestige and privilege. The psychological attitude of the Indians towards English language is very positive because of its status and role.

The motivation to learn the language is very strong, though instrumental. The political will is no more against the English language owing to the globalization of Indian economy, which has invited the foreign traders and companies into our country. The central government and the state governments are gradually realizing the utility and necessity of English language learning and throwing in more money into the education pool. As the learners educated in private English medium schools are dominating the job sectors, especially the high paying ones, the politicians and educationists are forced to change their language policy and give greater importance to English language teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools. So, it can be deducted that the language policies are now favorable towards English language teaching and learning at all levels.

To sum up, in this chapter the linguistic basis of second language learning has been analyzed from a theoretical point of view with reference to various research undertaken in this field. The concepts of bilingualism, multilingualism has been discussed because most of the Indian learners learn English in a multilingual situation. The Odia learners of English even from the remotest areas, face a multilingual situation, because besides their mother tongue Odia, they are daily exposed to Hindi through the TV, and to English in their schools. Hence, most of them, even at the primary school level are multi-linguals to some extent.

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