THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LEARNING AND ACQUIRING

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Abstract. This paper explores the fundamental differences between first language (L1) acquisition and foreign language (FL) learning, focusing on how these two processes occur, their cognitive mechanisms, and the theories that explain them. The discussion highlights Noam Chomsky's concept of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) and Universal Grammar, which suggest that humans are biologically predisposed to acquire language naturally. It also contrasts this view with the behaviorist theory proposed by B. F. Skinner, which emphasizes reinforcement and imitation in language learning. The paper further examines Eric Lenneberg's Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) and its relevance through the case of Genie, a child deprived of linguistic input during early development. In addition, Stephen Krashen's Monitor Model and Natural Order Hypothesis are discussed to show how second or foreign language learning depends more on conscious effort and instruction compared to natural language acquisition. Social interaction theories by Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner are also included to demonstrate the importance of communication and cultural context in acquiring linguistic and pragmatic competence. Overall, this study concludes that first language acquisition is an innate and subconscious process tied to biological and social factors, while foreign language learning is a conscious, effort-based endeavor that depends on age, motivation, and exposure.

Keywords: Language Acquisition Device (LAD), first language acquisition, foreign language learning, Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH).

Have you every thought about the difference between first language learning (L1) and Foreign language learning (FL). Both actions are process of learning language, yet they are so different. For acquisition process it does not even take two years to be fluent, but when it comes to learning, people spend years to master it. The truth behind the difference between language acquisition and learning lies in Language acquisition device (LAD) . Acquisition happens when we were learning our first language and first second language (L1 and L2) but learning happens when we are learning foreign language (FL). Early childhood education often seems to have been effective when it comes to language learning, it is all because LAD the predisposed system or a device as Noam Chomsky stated in 1960s, device that helps to acquire language and notice language patterns of grammar. Before Chomsky proposed his theory there were another theory called "Behaviorism" which was proposed by Skinnier, it says that language learning is like a habit which supported by positive reinforcement.

There are more theories that was before Chomsky but right now let's talk about Language acquisition device. As Noam Chomsky defined "UG [universal grammar] may be regarded as a characterization of the genetically determined language faculty. One may think of this

faculty as a 'language acquisition device,' an innate component of the human mind that yields a particular language through interaction with present experience, a device that converts experience into a system of knowledge attained: knowledge of one or another language." He defined LAD as device that converts experience into a system of knowledge. When babies hear words, they start to imitate precisely they start to babble as if they are trying to say something. From that phase the language journey starts, in the end of the journey babies became fluent without even spending hours for grammar drills. It is all because they listen and the environment that they are in also helps, the behaviorist theory, positive reinforcement with the help of the all of this things babies start to notice the naturally the patterns of the language. We do not teach them what is noun, what is adjective and what is adverb. They just naturally notice everything the patterns the rules. Chomsky also referred to a predisposed universal grammar system that can play a big role in language acquisition. Now let's talk about the tragic phenomenon that is pretty famous among linguists "Genie's case". Abandoned girl in America helped to define if CPH as Lenneberg highlighted "Language acquisition is possible only within a limited period of time, after which the ability is lost or markedly diminished", was true or not. Until her 13th years she lived a life that was apart from communication, when doctors found her she was not even able to speak, Linguists studied the case they managed to teach some words to her yet she was not fully fluent. When neurologists scanned her brain, it was so small, as three year old kids. This case played a key role in studying how language acquired in early ages and define CPH. As we have defined the terms acquisition and learning they are referred as two different processes , one of them happens in L1 another in FL. But it does not mean adult learners cannot achieve native – like speaking as kids do. Chomsky highlighted "The ability to pick up the language do not disappear at puberty" which do really explains that adult learners can achieve native speaker's level as kids do but the process that they go through would be slightly different. When teaching English as a second language most people do believe that error correcting is essential, while Stephen Krashen highlighted in his book Principles and practices in Second language acquisition stated that error correcting has little or zero effect to acquisition. Parents only correct small percent of the child's language. In his book he also stated about the Natural Order Hypothesis which explains the natural sequence of morphemes – acquiring. As it is stated in NOH , "ing", Plural, COPULA "To be" acquired initially while the singular and third person "s" were on the last. Bound morphemes they are acquired the same in both learning and acquiring. Another difference acquisition and learning have is, acquisition is about using the language, learning equals to Monitor, the filter that our sentences go through before we speak. Most people assume monitor happens first but acquisition happens first and then monitor. Monitor users, as Krashen defined, divided into three groups: Monitor over – users, under – users and the last one optimal user. Monitor over – users tend to struggle to master fluency cause their brain is busy to correct their mistakes rather then expressing. When it comes to under users they make mistakes cause they do not use monitoring skills enough. And optimal users this is what a good language learner looks like, they use monitor when it is needed and can express their opinions without hesitation in a fluent way.

The process by which people naturally and subconsciously learn to comprehend and speak in their native tongue is known as first language acquisition. It typically starts at birth and lasts through early childhood without any official instruction. All typically developing youngsters, irrespective of their upbringing, culture, or IQ, successfully pick up the language used in their surroundings. An infant's brain starts to process and internalise the noises, voices, and speech patterns they are exposed to from the moment of birth. They eventually learn to recognise word borders, identify phonemes—the smallest units of sound—and progressively develop meaning as a result of this experience. Linguist Noam Chomsky claims that children are born with the ability to learn language through an inbuilt system he named the Language

Acquisition Device (LAD). Even though they are never formally taught, children can recognise grammatical structures and language rules thanks to this innate system. For instance, without actively studying grammar rules, a toddler can readily learn how to produce past tense verbs or plural nouns just by being exposed to language. The previous behaviourist approach, which maintained that language acquisition occurs solely through imitation and reinforcement, was refuted by Chomsky's theory. Rather, he highlighted how children have an internal grammar system and are imaginative language users who create new sentences they have never heard before. There are various steps involved in learning a first language. Babbling, cooing, and various cries are all produced by infants during the pre-linguistic stage and are crucial for the development of the speech muscles. Children start saying their first identifiable words at the age of one, which are frequently nouns that refer to well-known individuals or things. The one-word and two-word phases come next, during which time phrases like "mama" and "want milk" start to appear. The telegraphic stage, which occurs as vocabulary develops, is when kids begin to create brief but meaningful phrases like "I go to the park" or "Daddy works." By the time they are five or six years old, they have mastered intricate grammatical patterns and are completely fluent. In relation to L1 acquisition, Eric Lenneberg's Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) is another crucial idea. According to this theory, the human brain is particularly suited to spontaneously pick up language during a biologically defined window of time, generally from birth to adolescence. It becomes much more difficult to become fluent in any language at this point. Studies of isolated children, like the well-known example of Genie, who was denied language exposure until adolescence and so never fully developed grammatical competence, provide evidence in favour of this theory. Additionally, social engagement is essential to learning a first language. Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner's theories emphasise the significance of social environment and communication. Children acquire pragmatic skills—the ability to use language effectively in a variety of contexts—as well as vocabulary and grammar through interactions with peers, parents, and other carers. Motherese, also known as child-directed speech, is a simplified and exaggerated speech pattern used by adults that makes it easier for kids to understand structure and meaning. In conclusion, the ability to communicate successfully through language is the ultimate aim of both first language (L1) acquisition and foreign language (FL) learning. However, the process, context, timing, and level of proficiency attained vary greatly. Early childhood is a natural time for the unconscious, physiologically driven process of first language acquisition. It makes use of natural processes in the human brain, such Chomsky's postulated Language Acquisition Device (LAD), which allows kids to easily take in language and internalise grammar principles without the need for formal instruction. Social engagement and a relevant cultural setting facilitate the process, which enables kids to form emotional and cognitive bonds with their language in addition to verbal proficiency. On the other hand, learning a foreign language usually starts after the critical time, when the brain's plasticity has diminished. As a result, it requires motivation, disciplined learning, and intentional effort. In contrast to first language acquisition, it necessitates that learners translate from their original tongue and use metalinguistic awareness to comprehend intricate rules. It frequently entails explicit instruction, repetition, and memorisation of vocabulary and grammar. Furthermore, there are significant differences in the emotional engagement and exposure in the two procedures. A child learning their first language is surrounded by native speakers all the time, is exposed to communication from birth, and develops an emotional bond with the people and society that speak that language. Fluency and pronunciation can be slowed down in foreign language learners due to inadequate exposure, artificial learning environments, and a lack of emotional attachment to the language. The degree of proficiency also varies; whereas speakers in the first language attain near-perfect fluency, it is uncommon for a learner to reach native-like accuracy in a foreign language unless they begin early or

undergo complete immersion. In terms of psychology, L1 influences a person's identity, worldview, and thought processes, but FL learning frequently increases cognitive adaptability and intercultural comprehension. As a result, the distinction between learning a first language and learning a foreign language involves not just how we learn but also when and why we acquire it. One is an intentional intellectual endeavour that requires exposure, drive, and effort, while the other is a natural byproduct of human evolution with roots in biological and social necessity. Together, they highlight the limitations imposed by age, experience, and environment while simultaneously demonstrating the remarkable plasticity of the human mind—its capacity to take in, comprehend, and recreate complex linguistic systems. Knowing these distinctions enables linguists, teachers, and students to recognise the special processes that mould our linguistic capacities and demonstrates why, despite its difficulties, learning a foreign language is still one of the most effective means of fostering interpersonal relationships and cross-cultural understanding.

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