**Lesson 07: Language Acquisition**

**Definition of Language Acquisition :**

Language acquisition has been described as the process by which humans acquire the capacity to perceive, produce and use words for the purposes of understand and communication It has to do with the picking up of linguistic afordances in the areas of grammar/syntax, phonetics and vocabulary.

Language acquisition is considered a normal process in development. However, children acquire language in stages, while there are variations in the time different children reach various stages. Interestingly, children acquiring/learning the same

language will orient to a pattern which almost shares same features in stage sequence to be undergone. When any of the stage is delayed or never started in children, it is usually seen as a source of concern by the adult and this is a concern for the field known as developmental psycholinguistics in which the phenomenon is appropriately studied.[[1]](#footnote-2)

**The acquisition of language** has undergone extensive revision and expansion since the early days of psycholinguistics. A child’s development progresses from an initial state sensitive to universal properties of languages to a state consisting of fully formed representations of the native language. This development takes place in a remarkably brief period of time: by the time a child begins school (typically around 5 or 6 years old), a marvelously sophisticated mental system is in place. That trajectory is informed and constrained by basic principles of linguistic organization, as well as by the child’s developing perceptual system, lexical store, and additional cognitive abilities. Powerful internal capacities of pattern recognition, statistical monitoring, and memory contribute to the acquisition of a child’s native language. An explosion of research on the acquisition of two or more languages and also of signed languages has enriched what we know about language development. We have always known that a child must be exposed to a language to acquire it, but recent advances in contemporary research have augmented how we understand and describe the characteristics of linguistic input, the feedback available to the child, and the quality of interactions with the child’s linguistic environment.[[2]](#footnote-3)

**Language Learning and Language Acquisition :**

Field (2004) states that the term is used for infants acquiring their native language (first language acquisition) and for those learning a second or foreign language (second language acquisition). The use of the terms is still unproblematic. Some experts use the term ‘language learning’ and some use the term ‘language acquisition’. Chaer (2015) explains that term ‘language learning’ is used because some experts believe that second language can be master by learning the language intentionally and consciously. This is different from the first language and mother tongue which is acquired naturally and unconsciously without a formal setting. The term of language acquisition is used because it is believed that second language or third language is acquired either formally or informally

There are two types of language learning; naturalistic language learning and formal language learning. Naturalistic language learning is learning a language naturally, consciously, and unintentionally.

This usually occurs in bilingual or multilingual society. Otherwise, formal language learning takes place in the classroom with teachers, materials and learning aids.

**Factors Affecting Language Learning:**

Some students learn a new language more quickly and easily than others. This fact related to the crucial factors influencing success that are largely beyond the control of the learner. According to Lightbown and Spada (2006:58-74) mention some factors affecting language learning.

1. **a. Intelligence**

The term 'intelligence' has traditionally been used to refer to performance on certain kinds of tests. These tests are often associated with success in school, and a link between intelligence and second language learning has sometimes been reported.

1. **b. Aptitude**

Specific abilities thought to predict success in language learning have been studied under the title of language learning 'aptitude'. Research has characterized aptitude in terms of the ability to learn quickly. Thus, we may hypothesize that a learner with high aptitude may learn with greater ease and speed but those other learners may also be successful if they persevere.

1. **c. Learning Style**

The term 'learning style' has been used to describe an individual’s natural, habitual, and preferred way of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills. Some people say that they cannot learn something until they have seen it. Such learners would fall into the group called 'visual' learners. Other people, who may be called 'aural' learners, seem to learn best 'by ear'. For others, referred to as 'kinesthetic' learners, a physical action such as miming or role-play seems to help the learning process. These are referred to as perceptually-based learning styles.

1. **d. Personality**

A number of personality characteristics have been proposed as likely to affect second language learning. It is often argued that an extroverted person is well suited to language learning. Another aspect of personality that has been studied is inhibition. It has been suggested that inhibition discourages risk-taking, which is necessary for progress in language learning. Furthermore, learner anxiety-feelings of worry, nervousness, and stress that many students experience when learning a second language- has been extensively investigated. Recent research investigating learner anxiety in second language classrooms acknowledges that anxiety is more likely to be dynamic and dependent on particular situations and circumstances. Several other personality characteristics such as self-esteem, empathy, dominance, talkativeness, and responsiveness have also been studied. However, it has been not easy to empirically demonstrate the effect of personality in language learning.

1. **e. Motivation (Intrinsic)**

Motivation has been defined in terms of two factors: learners' communicative needs and their attitudes towards the second language. If learners need to speak the second language in a wide range of social situations or to fulfil professional ambitions, they will perceive the communicative value of the second language and will therefore be motivated to acquire proficiency in it. Likewise, if learners have good attitudes towards the speakers of the language, they will desire more to learn it.

1. **f. Motivation (Extrinsic)**

Teachers also influence on students’ behavior and motivation in language learning. Teacher is one of students' reasons for studying the second language or having good attitudes

toward the language learning. Teachers can give a positive contribution to students' motivation to learn if classrooms are places that students enjoy coming to because the content is interesting and relevant to their age and level of ability, the learning goals are challenging yet manageable and clear, and the atmosphere is supportive.

1. **g. Culture and Status**

There is some evidence that students in situations where their own culture has a lower status than that of the culture in which they are learning the language make slower progress. Social factors at a more general level can affect motivation, attitudes, and language learning success. One such factor is the social dynamic or power relationship between the languages.

1. **h. Age**

Second language learning is influenced by the age of the learner. Children, who already have solid literacy skills in their own language, seem to be in the best position to acquire a new language efficiently. Motivated, older learners can be very successful too, but usually struggle to achieve native-speaker-equivalent pronunciation and intonation. Research found that age distinguishes children and adults in learning second language in certain aspects such as phonology, morphology, and syntax. [[3]](#footnote-4)

“Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill.”

“Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target lan­guage – natural communication - in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding.”

“The best methods are therefore those that supply ‘comprehen­sible input’ in low anxiety situations, containing messages that stu­dents really want to hear. These methods do not force early produc­tion in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are ‘ready’, recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production.”

“In the real world, conversations with sympathetic native spea­kers who are willing to help the acquirer understand are very help­ful”.[[4]](#footnote-5)

1. Iyabode O. Nwabueze et all : **COURSE TITLE: PSYCHOLINGUITICS**, National Open University of Nigeria, FACULTY OF ARTS , 2020,P23 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. **Field, J . (2004). Psycholinguistics : The Key Concepts. London: Routledge.**

   [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Norita Purba : **THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLINGUISTICS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING**, Tell Journal, Volume 6, Number 1, April 2018 , p49 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. El Ouchdi Ilhem Zoubida : **Courses in Psycholinguistics for Master one students in language sciences**, Abou Bekr Belkaid University- Tlemcen-, Faculty of Faculty of Letters and Languages, Department of English, 2022., p80 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)