

SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: 'ACQUISITION OF AUXILIARIES: DO-SUPPORT AND BE-INVERSION IN QUESTION FORMATION BY MARATHI SPEAKING CHILDREN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A L2'

DR. PRATIMA P. MALWADKAR

CHETANA COLLEGE,
MUMBAI, INDIA.

Abstract

It is necessary to determine how children learn a language before educationists take decisions on teaching methodology. With this in mind, the acquisition of a particular aspect of grammar was selected for study. A longitudinal study was planned in which the development of three learners was observed over a period of 27 months. The period of observation was divided into nine stages, with each stage consisting of three months. Both oral and written responses made by the students during these sessions were recorded and tabulated. The learners were studied at different stages in the development of their auxiliary system as seen in their production of interrogative construction. Development in the acquisition of the specific aspect of the auxiliary verb is studied at points where this development takes place. These points are different or similar for each learner and his/her development is broken into stages. The attempt was to discover whether all the three learners acquire these categories in the same order or in different orders. Also of interest is the length of time taken by them to acquire a particular category properly. This will help us to make generalizations about similarities/differences in the order of learning grammatical structures in second language acquisition. It is seen that the order of learning of auxiliaries for interrogatives is similar across the learners in this study. An order does emerge in this study and to a certain extent this ratifies the order given in the previous studies by Brown (L1 learning) and Dulay, Burt and Krashen (L2 learning). The common order of acquisition of the auxiliary verbs identified in the research will help to explain students' learning patterns, and the stages of rule formation. Teaching/learning programmes should be planned which give importance to learner patterns of development, and this study hopes to make a modest contribution in this direction.

Key words: L2 learning, L1 learning, Acquisition, Second Language, longitudinal study

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Introduction

Since the early 1970s, the distinction between teaching and learning has aroused much interest in language teaching circles. No doubt teaching is a rewarding and lively experience, but it remains incomplete without the learning process. To make the teaching/learning process a joy forever, it is necessary that the teacher's teaching scheme neatly matches the learner's way of learning.

Since Second language learning is a very complex phenomenon, understanding this complex process is essential for facilitating L2 learning. It is, therefore, essential for a language teacher to know about Second Language Acquisition research. The study of SLA, a relatively new field, focuses on the learner; learner language: Inter Language (Selinker, 1972); Idiosyncratic Dialect (Corder, 1971); Approximative System (Nemser, 1971); learning processes involved. This field raises the question:

How do people learn their L2?

Researchers have attempted to answer this question by adopting the following Approaches/Methods to SLA:

- Contrastive Analysis
- Error Analysis
- Performance Analysis (Acquisition Order and Developmental Studies)
- Discourse Analysis
- Form-Function Analysis
- Variability/Pragmatic Features

All these approaches help to study the intricacies of the learning process. A large number of studies of first and second language acquisition have been done since the 60s and 70s, particularly of a mother tongue and of a second language. Various aspects of the learning of linguistic features have been investigated with a view to understanding acquisition processes and in turn, to help take language pedagogy forward.

In order to get an idea of the order of acquisition or the developmental sequences, learners' interlanguages at different stages of development have to be observed. Order of acquisition studies focus on a range of target language features, and the order in which each is acquired in relation to others. Developmental sequence studies show the path the learner takes in getting to the final correct form of a specific feature, through intermediate or transitional forms, at various stages.

The present paper is an attempt to cut a path through the trees to explore the way in which the linguistic categories represented in the mind expand and develop. It is concerned with certain aspects of the syntactic behavior of three children studying in the 4th standard (at entry point) of an English-medium school considered representative, of schools in Mumbai. The nature of their exposure to English is similar as they go to English medium school but most of the time use Marathi at home and perhaps even in school with their friends.

This researcher has been interested in how children acquire a second language, the order in which auxiliaries (verbs in English) are learnt, and how an understanding of this learning process can contribute to language pedagogy and overcome problems of learning. With these in view the present study focuses on one aspect, namely, the development of the auxiliary (here only Do- Support and Be-Inversion) in Interrogative sentences. This longitudinal study specifically looks at Order of Acquisition of the auxiliary system in English by these children.

Literature survey:

Order for acquisition of the auxiliary system in Question-formation has been considerably treated in the L1 and L2 acquisition literature.

First Language Acquisition studies focused on the general pattern of children's language development. The early studies First Language Acquisition in the 1960s and 70s included: Case studies of individual learners' speech (e.g. McNeill, 1970; Brown, 1973); Cross-sectional studies of larger numbers of learners (e.g. de Villiers and de Villiers, 1973); Experimental Studies which focused on production and comprehension of specific linguistic features by children (Berko, 1958; C. Chomsky, 1969).

Berko's (1958) study of the order of development of inflectional morphemes marked the onset of the modern era of child language studies. Klima and Bellugi (1966) studied the development of the Interrogative (L1 acquisition). They studied whether the acquisitional sequences reflected the rules in a transformational analysis of adult English grammar.

Brown (1968) studied the development of the Interrogative (L1 acquisition). His study of acquisition of English grammatical morphemes (1973) shows that the first

language learners learn these morphemes in the same order which is explained in terms of the syntactic, semantic and phonological complexity of the individual morphemes. He identifies the different stages of acquisition for these learners. De Villiers and de Villiers (1973) cross-sectional study supports the results of Brown's longitudinal study.

The evidence from the cross-sectional and longitudinal studies in the 70s and 80s supports the belief that there is an order/developmental sequence in the acquisition of specific linguistic features, phonology, semantics, morphemes and syntactic structures, such as auxiliaries, negatives and interrogatives.

L1 morpheme acquisition studies have inspired similar work in the context of L2. The Second language research tried to study the development of the second language in learners from different first language backgrounds; investigate a common sequence of development; find out whether the order found in L2 learners of English was similar to L1 learners of English.

Child second language was investigated by Dulay and Burt, 1972-74; Hatch, 1972; Hakuta, 1974). Morpheme counts establishing a similar order for adults, have also been reported (Bailey, Madden and Krashen, 1974); Larsen-Freeman, 1975). Krashen (1977) proposed a 'natural order' of morpheme acquisition existed for certain morphemes in English L2.

The finding that children acquire certain grammatical morphemes in a predictable order (e.g. Dulay and Burt, 1975) has been confirmed by most of the other studies using child second language learners.

Most of the morpheme studies of first and second languages show that there is a similarity in the order of morpheme acquisition across different learners.

It can be said that there is sufficient evidence to support a predictable, natural order of English morphemes. There is a rough Order of Acquisition of language structures which is unaffected. The order exists whether as L1 or L2; with or without instruction; regardless of age groups (child, adult, adolescents); despite varied mother tongues; despite varied contexts. The Order is similar across learners.

These regularities found in the developing speech of children enable psycholinguistics to support Chomsky's thesis that the human mind has an innate linguistic structure, which guides the way young children internalize the language they hear around them.

The Present Study

It seemed that among the studies that had already done, there was no specific consideration of the learner who operated in a mixed L1-L2 situation, such as frequently

exists in India. Basically it is an L2 situation, with the learner using his mother tongue for most purposes, but a strong L1 element is introduced by providing instruction in English. It was felt that it would be useful to consider the acquisition of any one feature of particular syntax in this kind of mixed situation, as this might shed additional light on the learning process. The feature chosen here was that of the auxiliary in interrogative (here do-Support and Be Inversion) constructions to determine whether the acquisitional process varies.

The attempt was to investigate, over a period of time, whether a common order of acquisition of auxiliaries exists. For this purpose, a longitudinal study was conducted on three students in order to study the manner in which their auxiliary system developed in the production of Interrogative sentences. The pattern of the development of the auxiliary verbs in each of these students individually and the overall pattern of the development in all the three students was taken into consideration. Patterns in the development of these auxiliaries were observed in order to determine whether all students followed a similar order.

Hypotheses

- Each of the learners will make marked progress on each category of the auxiliary verbs in interrogative sentences from entry level to exit level.
- There would be broad patterns of similarity in the acquisition of the selected categories in the three students, though there might be differences in the order in which certain categories were learnt, in spite of their being exposed to the same or similar input.

Methodology

An extra English subject class was conducted for the students thrice a week. Each session was of two and a half hours over 27 months. This period was divided into 9 stages, with each stage consisting of 3 months.

The data were collected in the following ways: the Researcher took tuitions and the students were exposed to three types of settings: Context Greater (spontaneous discussions, interactions like parties, markets situations, picnic etc.), Limited Context (elicitations in which the subjects were asked to imitate or frame questions for a given answer/sentence) No Context (grammatical exercises). Thus sometimes students were put into an 'acquisition' type situation and sometimes into a 'learning' situation. In the acquisition, the grammatical monitor is not activated (it is a monitor-free situation), in the learning type of situation, the grammatical monitor is activated. The responses of the students were noted down by the researcher for the most part, and were sometimes collected in the form of tape-recordings.

Data Analysis

The data collected for observation were studied descriptively. The data were analysed in terms of the percentage of correct sentences (spoken/written) in the three contextual conditions (CG, CL, CN) for each category. In the present study, the categorization of learning was based on the percentage of correct and incorrect sentences produced. These percentages are used to measure the order of acquisition. The criterion level for learning was fixed at 70%, it was considered as a temporary fluctuation, not implying that the category could no longer be considered as learnt.

Findings

The Interrogative sentences formulated by the students during the course of study, fall into nine categories. Since in this paper the focus is on two categories: Do Support and Be Inversion, only these two categories will be considered here.

1. Be Inversion

Examples from student's responses for this category:

- i. Are you reading a book?
- ii. Is this completed?

This category requires the inversion rule. From the grammatical point of view, it is comparatively less complex due to the limited number of auxiliaries and hence is less difficult for students to imbibe.

2. Do-Support

Examples (from the student's responses),

- i. Do you want more?
- ii. What did Aditi collect for Kartik?

In questions, where tense exists only inside the inverted auxiliary, the insertion of the verb form *do* is required to carry tense, e.g. John likes it. Does John like it? This rule is called Do-Support or do-periphrasis (Christophersen & Sandved, 1969) or do -insertion (tense carrier). Do is an empty category semantically, and when coupled with WH movement, becomes difficult.

Individual student's performance for these categories is as follows:

Smita's (Subject no 1) performance in Category 4, in the first three stages was poor. However, a marked development could be seen from Stage IV onwards. This Category can be said to have been learnt in Stage IV, as here she has reached the criterion level of achievement. From Stage IV to Stage VIII, there was a steady development (she scored above 85%) though in Stage IX percentage came down to 75.

Her performance at entry point was 33% but she showed a considerable improvement over the period of study, for her exit point performance in this category was good. Her performance was found to be consistently good, but it slightly declined in the last stage.

The following are the Illustrations of student's responses:

- i. Is he going tomorrow? (LC)
- ii. You are sleeping now. (GC)

Sagar (Subject no. 2) seemed to have learnt Category 4 in Stage IV. His performance seemed to be good and the percentage of correct sentences was 80 and above. At entry point there was no instance of correct production. However at exit point, there was a noticeable increase in correct usage (70% and above).

The following are the Illustrations of student's responses: Examples,

- i. Are you coming? (GC)
- ii. Vaibhav is sleeping. (GC)

Vaibhav's (Subject no. 3) performance seemed to be poor in Category 4 up to Stage VI. But in the later stages there was a sudden rise in percentage figures, and the category was said to be learnt in Stage VII. His performance at entry point was zero. However, at exit level, he showed a remarkable increase in correct usage.

The following are the illustrations of student's responses:

- i. Are you exchanging pens? (GC)
- ii. Was I bother about it? (GC)

Smita can not be said to have learnt Category 5 at all, as the incidence of correct responses remained below 70% in almost all the Stages.

The following are the illustrations of student's responses:

- i. What did shoemaker and his wife do for the elves and why? (LC)
- ii. How does the grasshopper makes their noise? (GC)

Sagar could be said to have learnt this category in Stage VIII. There is the gradual increase in the occurrence of correct responses over the whole period, indicating steady development.

The following are the illustrations of student's responses:

- i. Why did people keep cricket (creature) in cage. (GC)
- ii. How the boys play cricket? (GC)

In this category, Vaibhav showed no noticeable change up to Stage IV. But after that in Stage V, a sudden positive change in the level of performance was observed, which was maintained at over 70% proficiency.

The examples of students' responses:

- i. Why did widow take her son far away from the house? (GC)
- ii. What did Jaminida's father-in-law do? (GC)

The performance of these learners was compared in terms of steadiness of progress/fluctuations in progress; the types of categories learnt and the order of difficulty in learning of categories

All the three learners produced questions marked only by rising intonation only in the condition of Greater Context, indicating that when the Grammatical Monitor was not activated and they were communicating spontaneously, rising intonation was found to be sufficient. The reduction in the number of these questions over the entire period indicated that they no longer relied on rising intonation, and had learnt the inversion rule.

Such rising intonation questions have been observed in the developmental studies done in both first and second language studies. Example, the studies by Klima (1966), Bellugi (1971), Ravem (1968, 1974).

All the learners showed marked progress from entry point to exit point in these categories of auxiliaries in interrogative sentences from entry level to exit level of the learning, even if they differed in their performance at entry level.

It appeared that learning in a small class helped both the good and average learners to improve their performance. This was because providing more explanation, individual attention, with more opportunities for communication, and situations conducive to learning were possible within a small group.

Category 4 shows steady progress for all learners. There is no easy explanation for this steadiness.

Category 5 is grammatically complex. Complex category showed more fluctuations in performance.

All the learners showed learning from Stage IV onwards. Broad similarity was found in stages of learning of the categories for all the learners. Learning might partially be due to in-built agenda which guides the order of learning, thus supporting Chomsky's concept of Language Acquisition Device. Following Chomsky's work, Krashen and Terrell (1988) postulate an underlying subconscious process of learning in naturalistic circumstances, or learning that is considered to be L1- type learning.

All these learners successfully learnt the auxiliary system in Do Support and Be Inversion questions.

The Order of Difficulty of Categories of the Auxiliary in Interrogative Sentences for all Students taken as whole:

ORDER of DIFFICULTY	CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTION
EASY	4	Be Inversion
AVERAGE DIFFICULTY		
DIFFICULT	5	Do
VERY DIFFICULT		

Category 4 is assumed to be easier (as it is acquired early) than Category 5 because it is learnt later. Early acquisition of Category 4 can be justified as it involves a limited number of auxiliaries and only one verb. So category 4 is relatively simple and semantically less redundant.

Category 5 is difficult because of *do* insertion. The occasional use of the infinitive with *do* increases its grammatical complexity. The late learning of this category can also be explained in the light of other L1 and L2 studies (Isman, 1973), Ravem, 1968).

Conclusion

It was concluded that both types of learning contexts could profitably be used to stimulate language learning for second language learners, and it was not necessary to only use an L1 type acquisition set-up. Focus on grammar and the teaching mode also seemed to help in promoting learning. It can be said that the items which are grammatically complex may not be difficult from the point of view of learning. Order of difficulty may depend on grammatical complexity and semantic redundancy.

Thus in the main, the order of difficulty of learning of auxiliaries is similar for all learners in this study. Some individual variation, however, does exist. Thus the results of this study supports the findings of other studies, that there is some evidence for a rough

kind of common order of acquisition and some similarities in the learning of auxiliaries. It appears that variability is more the exception than the rule in the L1/L2/L1-L2 learning process.

It can be concluded that learning takes place, given appropriate exposure to language, in terms of both of spontaneous, non-formal use, as well as through some attention to grammatical form, over a period of time. This is seen through progress in the learning of the grammatical categories under consideration. With the learners in this study, learning could be said to have taken place only after Stage III, i.e. it took about six months for the effect of the teaching/ learning to show. Thus the results of this study are, at least to some extent consistent with previous research in L1 and L 2.

The common order of acquisition will help to explain students' learning patterns, and the stages of rule formation. Accordingly teaching programmes should be planned. This order of difficulty of auxiliaries will provide insights for more effective sequencing of grammatical features in text books to teach auxiliary verbs, and also more far-reaching consequences for sequencing of grammatical items in general.

A combination of spontaneous, subconscious mechanisms and conscious efforts seem to lead to effective L2 acquisition. This should be considered in syllabus framing. Encouraging active participation of learners and providing a learner oriented classroom are essential. Small-group teaching facilitates a naturalistic learning process.

The study provides insights into the learning process and suggests implications for teaching. Even a slight addition to our knowledge about second language learning can be used to improve language pedagogy, which in turn, will facilitate learning. The results need to be confirmed with larger groups of learners of different age groups and mother tongues, in different contexts and with different amounts of instruction.

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