

Navigating Second Language Acquisition: Insights From Learner Profiles and Effective Teaching Strategies

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Abstract: This article delves into the complexity of second language acquisition (SLA) through the learning trajectories of two teenage students, Anna and Bella, who achieved comparable proficiency levels despite their disparate linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Anna's controlled learning in Uzbek and Tajik contrasts with Bella's multilingual upbringing in Russian and Tajik, demonstrating how native language, age, and context affect SLA.

The analysis investigates grammar, syntax, and pronunciation issues, combining SLA theories like as Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis with practical teaching insights. It underlines the need of individualized, student-centered solutions for meeting various learner needs and makes actionable recommendations for educators in multilingual settings.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Multilingual Education, Language Learning Strategies, Learner Profiles, Grammar and Syntax in SLA, Pronunciation Challenges, Differentiated Instruction, Student-Centered Pedagogy, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, Multicultural Learning Environments.

Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) is a complex process influenced by a variety of factors such as age, cultural background, and learning environment. In an increasingly globalized world, recognizing these elements is critical for building effective language learning pedagogies. This essay delves into the dynamics of SLA through a careful investigation of two learners, Anna and Bella, who, despite achieving similar proficiency levels, took different learning trajectories determined by their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Anna, a philology student with Uzbek and Tajik roots, and Bella, a dentistry student who is bilingual in Russian and Tajik, are two very different examples of SLA. Anna's journey stresses formal learning contexts, whereas Bella's reflects a multilingual background with a focus on natural learning. These profiles highlight the various problems and techniques that learners use, ranging from overcoming pronunciation influences in their first language (L1) to learning grammar and syntax.

Student 1- Anna. Anna is 19 years old and she is a university student, she is a freshman in the faculty of Philology, she is doing her bachelor's in English philology and has the biggest desire to become a guide, she doesn't want to teach because as she said she doesn't consider herself a teacher, but I think she has the ability to do it. Anna was born in a small village not far from the Gijduvan district but in her childhood, her parents decided to sell their family house and move to the district to give their children a better education. Her native language is Uzbek because her family members speak only Uzbek at home, she comes from a pure Uzbek family with no mixed blood. Also, she speaks Tajik because of her environment in childhood, she went to a kindergarten where 70% of the children and her educator were Tajik-speaking. At first, it did not affect her Tajik language acquisition as educators spoke in Uzbek during small classes and Anna did not speak with other children much because she was a shy and introverted child. However, time passed and at the age of 4 she obtained 2 friends July and Hanna, who were from Tajik-speaking families, and they taught her Tajik while playing together, it was her first Second Language Acquisition. As she says "It was funny and interesting", the girls

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played a teacher-student game, where July and Hanna were teachers and Anna was their student. They taught her language by translating words into Uzbek and pointing out some environmental things and telling her their denominations. For example, they pointed at the house and said “xona”, pointed at the bottled water and said “ob” and so on. She repeated after them and they corrected her pronunciation. It helped her to start speaking Tajik and even if her family does not speak this language and some of the members do not understand, Anna can freely communicate without any accent. She does not speak Russian at all, but she understands it, even interested in Russian media, but cannot communicate because of a mental block, called “Affective Filter” (Krashen, 1985), she is shy because of her accent and never uses Russian even if understands it well, so English is her third language. At the age of 7, Anna went to school, at this age, she spoke only Uzbek and Tajik. In primary school, she was a very hardworking and obedient student, teachers loved her for her temper and her desire to study. However, she had some problems with her peers as she still was shy and silent, she did not come together with her classmates and liked to sit alone and draw rather than play with them. She could draw for hours; this was her passion and hobby. Even now she is a good artist and still, I can see her with a pencil and A4 paper drawing something. In secondary school, her temper did not change and her mother decided to take advice from the school psychologist who advised her to enroll Anna in courses, where she could communicate with her peers on one unifying topic. Anna wanted to go to drawing courses, but her mom decided to enroll her in English courses, where teenagers communicate more with each other. So, that was the beginning of her English learning when at the age of 14, her parents brought her to English courses not far from their house. It was the first step in English learning. And how she says, that is how her “love story” with the English language began. Her English was at 0 levels, as she had never been interested in it before. She started learning English from ABC and learned the whole Grammar for 1,5 years, however via Grammar courses she could not start communicating freely in English, even if she was good in grammar and her grammar test scores were 85-90%, she had good understanding while reading and listening but her output (speaking and writing) was poor because knowing a language rule does not mean one will be able to use it in a communicative interaction (Lightbown, 2000). So, she started working on her speaking and writing skills by attending IELTS courses, she attended IELTS courses in 2 or 3 different language centers in Gijduvan and then in Bukhara, after two years of studying she passed CEFR with the B2 level (www.cambridgeenglish.org) and IELTS in August 2022 with 6.0 score (www.ielts.org). Her case in English learning is similar to Laura’s (Ioup et al, 1994), she obtained her ability to speak English via learning. She is continuing to learn the English language at the university and also still attending English courses.

Student 2 – Bella. Bella is 19 years old and she is a university student as well as Anna. She is a hardworking and active student as well, so here are their similarities with Anna’s end. She is a second-year student in the medical faculty, and she is doing her bachelor’s in Dentistry. She wants to be a dentist in the future also she wants to teach Dentistry disciplines in English-speaking universities, which is why she is interested in ESP (English for Specific Purposes). In comparison to Anna, Bella was born in the city center, never moved, and lives in the same house with her family members. Her native languages are Russian and Tajik because her family speaks Russian and Tajik at home equally, she is a metis (Has mixed blood), her mother is half Azerbaijanian and half Turkish and her dad is half Uzbek and half Arabian. She does not remember which language she acquired first as she was bilingual from her early childhood. She speaks Russian with her mom and uses Tajik in communication with her father and father’s side relatives. So, she speaks these two languages equally, without any accent, totally understands them and freely moves from one language to another. Bella is a very outgoing person, she is an extravert in comparison to Anna, and from her childhood, she was interested in languages. She travels a lot. Her 2 aunts are married to Azerbaijanians and live in Baku, her uncle studied in Turkey and stayed there to work at the University in Istanbul, and one more uncle moved to Georgia with his family. So, she spends her summer holidays in these countries from the age of 8. To feel free to talk with Turkish and Azerbaijanian citizens Bella started learning these languages with her mother. Her mother speaks Azerbaijanian and Turkish freely, so she helped her daughter with the acquisition. She used stickers to write the names of house items on them and hung them all around the house so little Bella could learn the items’ denominations, also she spoke with her while walking



from school or going to the market only Azerbaijani. As Bella said the most useful when learning Turkish were Turkish movies as they speak with emotions, she used to copy their dialogues with her mother and trained in the pronunciation. Moreover, living for 2-3 months in Azerbaijan one year, and in Turkey the next year, and communicating with native speakers helped her in acquiring Azerbaijani and Turkish languages. Bella says that both of these languages have plenty of similarities because they come from one language family. As she studied in a Russian school and had a Russian-speaking and Tajik-speaking environment, she understood but did not speak Uzbek. After graduating from school, she could not enter medical college and enrolled in law college. There were not any Russian groups so she had to study in an Uzbek group, where no one spoke Russian, and all classes were in Uzbek, she said that it was really hard but the environment was very supportive and helped her acquire the Uzbek language, teachers and students supported Bella in her acquisition process, gave her guidelines, she had no problems with sentence structures construction, but she wrote verbs as she says or hears in Bukharian dialect. For example, instead of writing “Boryapman”, “qilyapman”, she used dialectical versions of them “boropman”, “qilopman”, which are not correct spellings. So, her coursemates and teachers used to correct her, and after 2 years in the Uzbek-speaking group, she acquired Uzbek and speaks now as a native-like speaker and writes without spelling mistakes. Her case is similar to Julie’s (Ioup et al, 1994) because like her Bella got into an Uzbek-speaking environment. Her English acquisition started at the age of 16, after graduating college, she could not enter a medical university in Georgia because her English was poor. She found language courses in Bukhara and started attending them, there was total discipline, and one lesson lasted for 5-6 hours. She started from the beginner level and after half a year her English level was pre- intermediate, also she made an environment for herself because she already knew 5 languages, and she understood how to learn a language effectively via movies, songs, and English YouTube podcasts, also she obtained a friend online to train her writing and speaking skills. After one year of intensive learning, she passed her IELTS in Georgia and her score was 5.5 (www.ielts.org), as she says she was really nervous because it was her first attempt, then after a few months she passed it again in Uzbekistan and her second score was 6.0 (www.ielts.org). In 2021 she entered University and now doing her bachelor’s in Dentistry. She is still learning English, now she pays more attention to ESP because she needs it in the medical sphere.

Age plays a significant role in L2 acquisition. In recent decades, the interest in age increased and a lot of linguists examined the effect of age on second language acquisition (Munoz, 2019). Of course, it is better to learn the English language from childhood because, according to Penfield & Roberts as cited in Singleton, (2018), at the end of childhood brain starts losing its plasticity and brain became less adept at language learning (Singleton, 2018). Nowadays people try to start the SLA as early as they can, because of the globalization more and more professions and institutions require a high level of English, which is why parents believe that as early as their kids start learning a second language that would be better for them and they will benefit from this knowledge in future. Parents give their children preschool language courses because they expect that children will learn the language very fast and easily like a “sponge”. (Munoz, 2019). Both of my students did not learn the English language in childhood both of them are teenage learners. They did not face any problems with learning vocabulary because they have a good memory and immediately receive the input, however, their pronunciation is their weak point, as both of them have different accents affected by their L1, if they started learning English earlier their pronunciation would be more native-like, as it was given in the study that student who started their language courses in their childhood in comparison to teenagers and young adults have more native-like accent, however, teenagers and young adults perform better in grammar tasks and vocabulary (Singleton, 2018). So, here I would like to compare my two teenage learners (Anna and Bella) to children whom I taught one year ago. Both of them were 7 years old, a boy and a girl, and both of them were 1st-grade students. Ariella attended a Russian school, Tom went to an Uzbek school, and also their language backgrounds differ. Ariella is from a Russian-speaking family, she is a Mitis, her mom is Tatar and her dad is Russian, so she grows up in a Russian-speaking environment and English was a second language for her. Tom is from an Uzbek family, and his first language is Uzbek, also he speaks Tajik because most people in Bukhara speak Tajik, so he acquired this language



in his early childhood, he uses Tajik most while talking to his friends. So, English was the first language that the boy started learning. Their parents brought them to my courses at the same time, they started learning English at the same level, however during the learning process I felt the effect of family background and their first language. So, here are two aspects of language that I choose for my teenage learners and primary education learners. The first is syntax and the second is pronunciation.

Grammar (syntax). Grammar is a huge part of language learning, most teachers start teaching English from grammar, comparing L2 grammar to L1, without knowing our native language's grammar we cannot learn a second language's grammar, as we learn by comparing one to another (Ioup et al, 1994). When it comes to syntax, primary school students struggle with a lack of understanding, as we know the elements of grammar are abstract concepts, and primary school students cannot comprehend them well even in their L1, however after understanding their own language's grammar, L2 grammar structures become even harder for primary education learners because they make the same systematic errors as in the first language, as well as others that appear to be based on the learner's own native language (Lightbown, 2000). I have seen it in my lesson with Tom, whose native language is Uzbek, and Uzbek sentence structure differs from English or Russian, and often he tried to use the same structure (Uzbek sentence structure) in his English sentences. For example, "I to school went", "I English learn" and so on. In comparison, Ariella (A Russian-speaking student) did not make this kind of mistake as Russian and English sentence structures are almost the same, so she did not have such problems as Tom, but she struggled with "to be" and "present simple", she mixed them in sentences. For example, "I am play the piano", "He is speak English", and also both of them struggled with tasks. I used gap-filling tasks with visuals and rules inside of them, however even with some understanding, mostly they could not fill the gaps or made plenty of mistakes. So, teaching primary school students second language grammar in the traditional way through rules and sentence structures will not give any results. It is better to use other activities, such as games, visuals, songs, and cartoons. In comparison, teenage students are good with sentence structures, they completely understand sentence formation, tenses, and so on and they are already familiar with their native language's grammar and can differentiate them. For Example, Anna whose native language is Uzbek can comprehend that Uzbek and English sentence structures are not the same, and as she mentions, "We should start Uzbek-English sentence translation from the end of the sentence or put the verb as a last part of the sentence." For example, "I go to school", and "Men maktabga boryapman" and she is right, this is her self-made rule that she created through comprehension. So, grammar will be easy to understand for teenage learners and a hard theme for primary education. Language teachers should understand that grammar in a theoretical way will not be comprehensible for kids, so it is better to teach them sentence formations in the form of games, as we cannot give them the formula or sentence structure, as they are not yet familiar with their native language grammar, however even so, English teacher should give the foundation for the further language learning. So, I would recommend the didactical games for their teachers. In comparison, teenagers and young adult learners do not need games or such kinds of activities as they can easily comprehend sentence formation via grammar rules, formulas, and examples.

Phonetics (Pronunciation). The second language aspect is pronunciation. My teenage learners started learning English at the age of 14 and 16, and they have an accent, even if not strong but visible (Munoz, 2019), For example, Anna, whose native language is Uzbek always puts stress on the last syllable, as in the Uzbek language we always put the stress on the last syllable, so she says: he workgd (not w3rkt but workyd), words (somehow she allocates the 'z' sound like 'iz' and it sounds like 'w3rdiz, not w3rdz). Bella also struggles with the Russian accent, she pronouns 'th' like 'zh', switches "w" with "v", "I" sound with "ee", and so on. For example, "wave" sounds like "vave", and "wish list" is pronounced "veesh leest" and so on. In comparison, my primary school learners did not have an accent, I think it is because they do not shy to copy other people's speeches and pronunciation. At first, I tried to correct my teenage students, but then I stopped because isolated explicit error correction is usually ineffective in changing language behavior (Lightbown, 2000). This kind of correction does not give the results as even if the teacher corrects the student's mistakes he or she will continue making the same mistakes until understands the rule, the reason why we say like this, not like that, it requires time



and the base with audio materials that show the right pronunciation. Because sometimes students know the rules of a language but they do not hear their mistakes. In my case, students do not hear their mispronunciation, but English teachers and English-speaking students can immediately recognize the speaker's first language according to their mispronunciation. If my students will not work on their pronunciation now, it will become stable, and it will be near impossible to get rid of the strong accent. I was thinking about why my teenage learners face problems with pronunciation while my primary school students' pronunciation is native-like (Singleton, 2018), I came to the statement that children are not afraid to copy the accent, they feel free to repeat after speakers or sing songs while teenage students struggle with the mental blocks that appeared affected by their age. They become shy in comparison to children and do not want to look funny while copying the accents of native speakers. Here I would recommend doing more listening: listen to native speakers' speeches, songs, and podcasts, try to copy their dialogues do not be shy, and train their pronunciation more.

Conclusion

Second language acquisition is a complex, unique process influenced by a variety of factors, including age, cultural background, and learning environment. The comparative analysis of Anna and Bella demonstrates how these variables interact to form the learning experiences of people with different linguistic and personal backgrounds. Anna's structured route through formal teaching and Bella's multilingual exposure in multiple settings demonstrate the various paths to language proficiency.

Effective language instruction necessitates a comprehensive strategy that combines academic insights with practical applications. Educators may create an inclusive and supportive atmosphere that promotes active learning and personal growth by adapting instruction to learners' specific needs and skills.

Finally, second language acquisition is more than just a linguistic process; it is also a transforming journey that allows people to interact across cultures and widen their perspectives. Educators may help shape a multilingual, interconnected world by fine-tuning instructional practices and embracing learner variety.

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