

## THEORIES OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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### Abstract

This article explores the theories of second language acquisition through an in-depth analysis of two learner profiles and the instructional approaches applied to support their language development. Drawing on sociocultural theory, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, and contemporary perspectives on identity, motivation, and investment, the study examines how individual differences—including learning styles, linguistic backgrounds, personal identities, and socio-cultural contexts—shape learners' language acquisition processes. Two students, Abbos and Dilnoza, are described in detail to illustrate how factors such as motivation, bilingualism, exposure to English, family environment, and personal interests influence their progress. The article further discusses pragmatic and syntactic challenges faced by learners, instructional adaptations, and the role of CLIL, CLT, and behaviourist methods in supporting skill development. The author's teaching philosophy emphasizes student-centered learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, and the integration of technology, highlighting how theoretical principles guide classroom practice. Overall, the paper demonstrates how understanding learners' identities and motivations can enhance effective second language instruction.

**Keywords:** Second Language Acquisition; Learner Identity; Motivation and Investment; Sociocultural Theory; Input Hypothesis; CLIL; Communicative Language Teaching; Bilingualism; Pragmatics; Syntax; Teaching Philosophy.

### Introduction

#### Learner Profiles

Two of my students whom I am going to describe are studying in my intermediate and pre-intermediate level groups. **Abbos** is 20 years old Tajik male who follows Islam religion and who studies at Uzbek State University of Law. He speaks three languages: Russian, English and Tajik. As for his English language background,

he has learned grammatical rules and has built a vocabulary base which means his general English is good. Currently his level is intermediate. The purpose of studying in my course is getting above 7.0 band score in IELTS exam because he wants to apply to a foreign university. He is interested in reading English books and watching documentary films in English which influences his language acquisition in a great way. By doing so, he is enriching his vocabulary and improving his listening and reading skills. He is single and from a rich family and his parents are both educated and they always support them to study and gain knowledge in different fields. Thus they try to be aware of his progress and when there's a problem they are always there to support and help him. Moreover, he has an English speaking friend from England and they communicate with each other on the internet. This helps him to improve his speaking skills because they speak to each other on the phone or voice chat discussing different topics. His is an extroverted person and he always tries to be active during lessons taking part in discussions and class debates, also he seeks to help others who have problems with their studies. He is an auditory learner and he is very concentrated when I explain topics. Besides reading books, he is keen on sport and he attends gym on a daily basis. Sport helps him to be consistent in his studies as well. He is open to feedback and I try to give him an 'explicit feedback' by directly correcting him (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). He is open-minded and he accepts my feedback and never feels negative about it, this might be because his family who always listen to his ideas and thoughts and discuss his mistakes or problems avoiding any kind of conflict. He tries to be responsible and do all the tasks on time although sometimes he fails to do it because his university or work. He has high communicative competence: he never gives inappropriate questions in the classroom and knows how to communicate with people in an appropriate manner. He is bilingual and he can switch between Russian and English depending on the context and the people he is communicating with. He is also good at 'translanguaging' which is a term used by Cen Williams to name a pedagogical practice which switches the language mode in bilingual classrooms. It involves fluidly moving between languages to express ideas, emotions, and thoughts. This student may code-switch or mix elements of Russian and English in his speech, depending on the situation or the people he is speaking to.

Regarding **Dilnoza**, she is a 17 year old female student who is currently studying at lyceum. Her nationality is Uzbek who follows Islam religion and she speaks

two languages: Uzbek and English. Her level is pre-intermediate and she has a good language background: has a fundamental knowledge of English grammar and sufficient vocabulary, but still has difficulty in complex grammar structures. She is from middle class family and his father is educated person who works as a teacher while her mother is a housewife. She is taking my course because she wants to study at Language University and she needs an IELTS certificate for being accepted. She is an introverted girl and quite often she is silent during lessons. Even if she knows the answer, she chooses to stay silent to my general questions addressed to the whole class. This is because she is quite reserved and afraid of making mistakes. She has a little immersion to the language and except for my classes, she rarely does self-study. For this reason she struggles in speaking and writing as for these productive skills more practice should be done. She is a visual learner, and she learns more effectively when visual aids are provided and when she makes notes of the lessons. She has an extrinsic motivation to learn an English language as she wants to get into university only. As for her interest she is quite interested in K-pop and watching Korean movies. Her favourite music band is BTS and she likes to talk about them whenever she is asked about favorite singers or hobbies. She is pretty kind girl but is not open to any kind of feedback; this is why I try to give implicit feedback by not telling openly that she is doing a mistake. She does her best to do her assignments on time. She is very punctual: she is never late for classes and this is because her parents are a little strict and demand her to study hard and do everything on time. She knows only one foreign language, does not exhibit bilingualism. She can speak only English. While she does not have the advantage of bilingualism, she still possesses the valuable skill of being able to communicate in a foreign language. She also uses translanguaging at times, she incorporates elements of her native language into foreign language communication, especially when she faces with challenges or gaps in her language proficiency.

## **Identity**

### **Student A**

Abbos is a 20-year-old law student who is diligent and ambitious. He knows foundational aspects of law and very interested in this sphere. His parents are strong legal professionals and this has influenced his decision to pursue law. His identity is strongly linked with his family and he has a sense of responsibility to

maintain the values that were instilled in him from young age. Also, Abbos is passionate about English because he wants to learn more about law with the help of this international language. He is an active participant during the lessons and very good at debating and forcing his ideas which is one feature of lawyers. According to Norton and Toohey (2021), learners often draw on their social and cultural identities as they engage with a new language. For Abbos the English language serves not only as a tool for legal studies but also as a gateway to understanding and participating in the broader legal discourses. His identity is closely tied to his desire to become a successful lawyer in an international context. This is why he tries to learn English for his career prospects. As an intermediate-level English learner, Abbos knows essential legal terminology and concepts, but he is eager to enhance his communication skills to excel in law and improve his knowledge in this sphere in a foreign country. Because of his interest in law and politics, he tries to dress formally and imitate some politicians. When presenting the topics or discussing, he speaks clearly and in a formal way.

## **Student B**

Dilnoza is a 17-year-old student at lyceum. She is a dedicated student pursuing her academic dreams in a foreign language. She embraces her identity as a girl who wants to pursue a higher education. Her cultural background influences her language learning because according to Uzbek culture, there are still some areas that girls shouldn't study, but deal with household chores. Because of this, her relatives and some members of family happen to encourage her not to pay so much attention to her studies. They usually have celebrations and she sometimes skips lessons due to this. But she is a diligent student and allocates time to study English as well as her lyceum subjects. Despite facing challenges she values consistency and believes that she can achieve success with regular practice. For this, she does her best to do her assignments on time and learn the topics attentively and thoroughly. "As learners move fluidly across boundaries and oscillate between online and offline spaces, they enter these spaces equipped with their own material resources, linguistic skills, and social networks." (Darvin & Norton, 2017). Dilnoza also gets her inspiration from K-Pop and she tries to watch them in English as she doesn't know any Korean and tries to imitate the Korean culture and create aesthetics of K-pop in her clothing style, way of talking and communicating with others.

## **Student A**

### **Motivation:**

**Academic pursuits.** This learner is highly motivated to study abroad because he knows the value of global perspective in law and politics. To get more knowledge about these fields in international institutions, he is studying English because knowledge of this language can open the doors of success in studying abroad. By this he can have an opportunity to expose himself to different legal systems and politics. Dornyei (1998) discusses integrative motivation, which is fueled by the desire to integrate oneself into the culture and society associated with the language being learned. Abbos has integrative motivation as he aims to study abroad, immerse himself in a different legal system, and understand international law or politics.

**Career goals.** Furthermore, he believes that knowing English is a key asset for his future career. Being able to communicate in the language of the country he wants to study in can open up opportunities for internships, networking, and a deeper understanding of law.

**Interest in international law and politics.** As he wants to pursue education abroad, he needs to improve his English language skills. His utmost desire to become international lawyer drives him to learn the language more effectively. Moreover, Abbos is aware that many international organizations, such as the United Nations and various NGOs, conduct their work in English. By being proficient in the language, he will have the opportunity to participate in international conferences, workshops, and seminars, where he can network with like-minded people, exchange ideas, and contribute to the global discourse on politics and law.

Overall, my student's motivation to learn English in the context of politics and law is driven by their desire to excel in his chosen field, stay informed about global developments, effectively communicate his ideas, and actively participate in the international community of political and legal professionals. He recognizes that English proficiency is an essential tool that will open doors to a world of opportunities and enable him to make a meaningful contribution to his field of interest.

## **Investment:**

**Time and energy.** He is likely deeply invested in the language learning process. According to Darvin and Norton (2021), learners who are motivated by integrative goals tend to invest more effort into language learning, as they accept it as a means to achieve their desired social or professional goals. Due to the motivation of academic prospects, Abbos invests time and energy in language learning. He tried to practice his English more often: besides classes he exposes himself into the language by reading books, listening podcasts and watching videos related with his field. He spends 6-7 hours a day besides my classes. He attends some touristic attractions to speak with native speakers to improve his speaking skills and gain confidence; openly communicates in English with other students at language center and sometimes at nights organizes Zoom sessions with group mates to discuss topics and practices speaking. Also, he teaches what he has learnt to his group mates who missed classes and by this strengthen his knowledge even more.

**Reading articles and books related with his studies.** Being a law student, he reads legal materials, case studies and political texts in English to improve both his language skills and understand legal and political topics. Also, after reading them he makes notes and retells the main concepts he got from those materials which improves his productive skills as well.

**Language course.** Abbos wants to learn English in a structured way because he wants to take an IELTS exam which is necessary for his studies in a foreign country. For this reason he is attending my courses in order to get help with IELTS structure and deal with his language gaps.

Abbos invests in his identity by actively seeking out opportunities to learn more about topics of law. He attends political rallies or debates, reads books or articles on the subject, and engages in discussions with others who share his interests. He also considers seeking out internships or volunteer opportunities in related fields.

## **Student B**

### **Motivation**

**Education and future plans.** Her decision to learn English is driven by the practical goal of entering the university. For university admission, she either

should have English proficiency to take a test or she have to get a language certificate to get a maximum score from English. Thus, she knows the importance of learning English for her future academic achievements.

**Cultural and personal interest.** The motivation for Dilnoza is also rooted in her interest in K-pop. Her interest in English is tied to a desire to understand lyrics, learn more about the culture and possibly connect with her favourite K-pop idols. She listens to her favourite bands' songs with English subtitles and watches their interviews in English which improves her comprehension in listening and reading to some extent. Furthermore, my student wants to explore opportunities beyond the local fandom. She is aware that many K-pop groups and actors have gained popularity and recognition on the international stage, and being proficient in English will open doors to potential interactions and engagements with her favorite idols and actors. This includes attending concerts and fan meetings, participating in fan events, and even potentially pursuing career opportunities in the entertainment industry.

Overall, my student's motivation to learn English in the context of K-pop and Korean doramas is driven by their desire to fully immerse herself in the fandom, connect with fans worldwide, and explore opportunities for deeper engagement with her favorite artists and shows. She understands that English proficiency will not only enhance her enjoyment of K-pop and Korean doramas but also provide her with a pathway to connect with a global community of fans.

## **Investment**

**Social Media Consumption.** Because of her interest in K-pop, she invests time watching subtitled content, listening to songs and reading articles or interviews related to her favorite K-pop groups. This serves as an engaging way to learn the language while staying connected to her interests.

**Language Apps.** Darvin and Norton's (2021) work emphasizes the role of language in shaping one's identity and connection to a global community. Engaging with K-pop, often produced in English, can contribute to her sense of belonging to a broader cultural and linguistic community. She uses language learning apps, online resources, and language exchange platforms to practice English in a more informal and interactive way. She has a Telegram group of K-

pop fans and she discusses and shares her interest with them and stays tuned with latest news in K-pop world which are released in English. Also, she uses an app where she writes her feelings and opinions about her favourite idols in English.

**Language course for exam preparation.** Knowing the importance of English for her entrance exams, she is attending my course in order to improve her language skills and get a language certificate required for university applications. Dilnoza invests in her identity by immersing herself in the culture and community surrounding this genre of music. She attends concerts, follow K-pop news and trends on social media, and participate in online forums or fan clubs. She also studies Korean language and culture.

### **Instructional Considerations**

**Classroom.** These learners study in a group that consists of 20 students. The level of learners in the class are almost the same but their strengths and weaknesses differ: most of them have difficulties in speaking and writing, but there are some that struggle dealing with tasks that require good receptive skills. The common weakness of the students is General English which often poses some problems in certain tasks.

### **Methods and Approaches**

The approach I chose to use is behaviorist approach because during classes we should repeat the learned topics and I chose to reward students and by this motivate them to study more. Furthermore, we can do a lot of practice which is one main feature of this approach.

As my learners are motivated to learn the language based on their interest I would apply CLIL and CLT methods in my classroom. This is mainly because with the help of CLIL (Content and Language Based Learning) I can teach them topics integrating content that they are interested in. for instance I would give them reading tasks that cover topics of law or K-pop and within those topics I can explain grammar topics or teach vocabulary. The process will be more engaging for them. Techniques involve reading subject-specific texts, listening to subject-based audio or audio-visual resources, discussions, and subject-related tasks. Also, I would integrate CLT method because they also need to develop communicative competence as it is needed for their further study and IELTS

exam. Savignon (1991) emphasizes the importance of communication in language learning and suggests that learners should be engaged in meaningful, real-life communication activities. This is a reason why I prefer to use CLT method as it encourages contextualized learning which means we choose the context and develop language skills. Techniques such as board games, role-plays, discussion and debates can be applied.

To address the language learning needs of Abbos, who is a visual learner and wants to improve his spoken fluency, I would use visual aids, such as charts, graphics, and videos, to help improve comprehension. Additionally, I would incorporate activities that encourage speaking and interaction, such as role plays, group discussions, and pair work that can support his goal to improve spoken fluency.

For Dilnoza, who is an auditory learner and aims to enhance her writing skills and grammar, I would use audio materials, podcasts, and language labs to improve listening and pronunciation. Writing-focused activities like compositions, essays, and feedback sessions would help her develop her written communication skills.

## **Aspects of the language**

### **Syntax:**

Learning syntax could be a little difficult for Abbos because even if he has a fundamental knowledge of English, he has some language gaps. Moreover, because his first language is Uzbek, sometimes he finds it difficult to learn some structures that don't suit this language. But, whenever he learns similar structures, he can acquire them without difficulty. His knowledge of Russian also helps him to learn the grammar more efficiently than those who don't. For Student B, for instance, knows only Uzbek and for her it is more difficult to learn some structures than Student A. Besides that their language background also influences it: student A has a fundamental base from English grammar despite some gaps while student B faces difficulties because she jumped from level to level even though she hadn't acquired the course completely.

As a language instructor I would identify their gaps in grammar and try to work on them. Also, I would try to teach those topics with the help of technology and the internet as both of them find grammar sometimes too boring. Besides that I would let them know that their learning process is under control. Unless they are

controlled, they feel irresponsible towards their study, that's why I would check their homework and ensure that they understand the topics.

Teaching syntax to the learners of this age (17-20 years old) can be quite beneficial as they have good memory and have an ability to use technological devices to work on their weaknesses. Also, as they are adaptable in learning styles, it can pose not so big problems for me to adapt teaching grammar to them. Also, they already have established communication habits and patterns that are difficult to change, making it challenging to break old habits and adopt new strategies.

### **Pragmatics:**

Teaching pragmatics to Student A could be difficult to some extent. Because of his age he might not always understand all the features as he is more focused on immediate goals and may not see the immediate relevance of pragmatics to his life, which could affect his motivation to learn and practice these skills. However, he could have fewer difficulties in learning pragmatics because he is the person who reads a lot and watches ted-talks and this skill can help him to learn it. For Student B, it might be challenging as she is still developing her critical thinking which are important for understanding and applying pragmatic principles.

As an instructor, I would use multimedia resources such as videos, podcasts, and interactive online platforms to engage them in learning about pragmatics. This can make the learning process more engaging. Also, incorporating real-life examples can be beneficial in teaching as they can understand practical application of pragmatics in their daily life. Moreover, I would encourage role-play activities in the classroom and apply pragmatic rules in different social situations.

### **Teaching philosophy**

I consider myself as a dedicated teacher and I value language learning and teaching. As a teacher, I believe in creating a safe and supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas. I encourage critical thinking and creativity, and I strive to make my lessons engaging and interactive. My identity as a teacher is one of compassion and empathy, as I understand that every student has their own unique challenges and strengths. I am dedicated to helping my students reach their full potential, both

academically and personally, and I am always willing to support them in their learning journey.

Teaching philosophy can be defined differently by different teachers. For me, teaching philosophy should be firstly focused on student-centered learning. Before the lessons used to be lecture-based where the teacher was dominant while students had nothing to do but listen to their mentor. This method no longer can be effective in our modern world. Teachers should know diverse learning styles, interests and needs and according to this they should organize lessons where students actively participate in their learning process. As Beamont (2010) suggested this can be done by organizing 'higher order thinking activities such as collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving experiences. By doing so, students can apply the knowledge they have gained into practice and strengthen it. Other than that, a teacher should create an inclusive and welcoming environment where students can feel respected and valued. For this, teachers should pay attention to various perspective, cultures and backgrounds provided in their course materials so that students can have equal access to education. According to Bloome (2012), if teachers are trained to be aware of their students' identity, those teachers can be more effective in the classroom. Being aware about students' identity is definitely an advantage for teachers as they can consider what is right to teach or what way or method is appropriate to teach certain types of students. Besides that, I believe that teachers should be ready for lifelong learning when they choose this profession. They should be aware that learning is not limited to the classroom. Teaching is always searching for opportunities to expand knowledge, enhance teaching skills and stay updated with the latest educational trends. Furthermore, I reckon teachers' assessment should be authentic. To be more precise, assessment shouldn't be like before relying solely on traditional exams or quizzes. Teachers should implement project-based assessments, portfolios or presentations where students are encouraged to investigate and use their research skills. Teachers should give constructive feedback during assignment. The feedback given by teacher in turn shouldn't harm students' feelings or demotivate them from studying. A teacher should know the identity of a student and according to this, he/she can provide explicit or implicit feedback. To my mind, a teacher should be a friend to his/her students and be ready to discuss their ideas and feelings. Most students are afraid of asking questions and by this learn something simply because they can't talk with their teachers openly.

Restricting students everything, not letting them be open to express their ideas can deprive them learning the language effectively. Last, but not least, teachers should be able to incorporate technology to their classroom as nowadays most young people are engaged in social media and they can find the lessons interesting in which modern technology is used. All in all, I believe that my role in teaching is to motivate students to learn more and ensure that they learn something with pleasure, not with force.

For my teaching I try to apply sociocultural theory originally conceived by Vygotsky (1978) which emphasizes the role of culture and social context in language learning. As a teacher, I incorporate cultural elements into my lessons and encourage students to explore the target culture through authentic materials and experiences.

Furthermore, I try to follow Input Hypothesis suggested by Stephen Krashen. This theory suggests that language acquisition occurs when learners receive input that is slightly above their current level of comprehension (Krashen, 1985). Therefore, as a teacher, I strive to provide students with comprehensible input that is challenging yet not too difficult. These theories inform my teaching philosophy because they provide a framework for understanding how language acquisition occurs and how I can best support my students' learning. By incorporating these theories into my teaching practices, I can create a more effective and engaging learning environment for my students.

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