

Dvora Dubiner, Research Review – Second Language Acquisition

Abstract

This survey examines central issues in the field of second language acquisition, and exemplifies their applicability in a variety of contexts. Naturally, there are numerous examples from the field of teaching English as a second language in North America and in different places in the world. In most cases, we can extrapolate from the published research in the field of English as a second language and apply this acquired knowledge towards a deeper understanding of the research on the teaching and learning of Arabic as an additional language in Israel. In addition, we will refer to research on the teaching and learning of additional languages other than English and Arabic. In these cases, the language learning settings are similar to the Israeli context, in which Jewish students study Arabic as an additional language.

Generally speaking, there is a consensus in language acquisition research, where exposure is regarded as one essential component in a first, second, or additional language acquisition process. Additional elements, which under appropriate circumstances play a central role in the process, include interaction and output.

In this survey, different constituents of the language acquisition process are discussed: vocabulary, attitudes, motivation, culture, the role of the teacher, and the learning experience. In addition, we present a variety of approaches and processes germane to the language learning process in a school setting, when a limited number of weekly classroom teaching hours are available. These approaches can be placed along a continuum, according to the focus on form or focus on content. We provide details on the main approaches to second language acquisition. These range from traditional approaches, which stress the structure of the language, to communicative ones, in which conveying and understanding messages are emphasized as paramount in the language acquisition process.

In the present survey, we explore both the theoretical and the practical aspects of process involved in successful additional (second, third) language acquisition in various places in the world. Different concepts, pertinent to the understanding of these processes, are discussed. These include metalinguistic awareness (which refers to the learner's cognitive development when he is confronted with two additional languages simultaneously), and multicompetence (the distinct abilities of the multilingual speaker, which are described as dynamic and flexible, according to different settings). Additionally, in an effort to shed light on the processes of learning Arabic as a second language in Israel, we survey successful programs of foreign language learning in schools around the world. These programs take place in settings similar

to the Israeli scene, where Arabic is studied simultaneously with English as a foreign language.

In this survey, we acknowledge several special considerations relevant to teaching a diglossic language, as is the case of Arabic. As a consequence, we examine the registers and local dialects learned in programs around the world, in different settings, such as universities, schools, and online courses. In the framework of the studies in these places, the question of the number of contact hours necessary in order successfully master a second language is tackled. At the time of this writing, no reference to the number of contact hours necessary to the achievement of different levels of proficiency in Arabic as a second language was found in the professional literature. Therefore, the reader is presented with existing data for other languages, studied in a variety of programs worldwide. Research is inconclusive in this field; however, the picture that emerges is one that points to the greater importance of quality of teaching over the number of teaching hours provided to the student.