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COGNITIVE FOUNDATIONS OF THE LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROCESS

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Abstract: The study of language acquisition has increasingly shifted towards cognitive perspectives, emphasizing the role of mental processes in developing linguistic competence. Cognitive foundations of language learning involve mechanisms such as perception, memory, attention, and problem-solving, which interact to support learners in mastering phonological, lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic aspects of language. This approach highlights how learners actively construct knowledge rather than simply imitating or repeating linguistic input. Cognitive theories also stress the importance of prior experience, conceptual development, and metacognitive awareness in the language acquisition process. By integrating insights from psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, and educational psychology, the cognitive perspective provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how language is internalized and applied in communication. This study contributes to ongoing discussions by outlining the theoretical and practical significance of cognitive principles in second language acquisition and by offering implications for language teaching methodology.

Keywords: Language acquisition; cognition; memory; attention; psycholinguistics; metacognitive awareness; cognitive approach; second language learning.

INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition is one of the most complex and multidimensional processes in human development, drawing the attention of scholars across disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, neuroscience, and education. Traditional theories of language learning often focused on behaviorist explanations, which viewed language as a set of habits formed through imitation and reinforcement. However, in the last few decades, there has been a paradigm shift towards cognitive perspectives that regard language acquisition as an active, knowledge-constructing process deeply rooted in human cognition. This transition has allowed researchers to explore not only the structural features of language but also the mental operations that enable individuals to process, store, and apply linguistic knowledge. From a cognitive standpoint, language acquisition is understood as a dynamic interaction between innate mental capacities and external linguistic input. Processes such as perception, categorization, working memory, and attention are seen as fundamental in shaping how learners internalize linguistic patterns. Moreover, the cognitive approach emphasizes the role of prior knowledge, problem-solving strategies, and metacognitive regulation in language development, suggesting that learners are not passive recipients of information but active participants in constructing their linguistic competence.

Recent advances in psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics have further strengthened this perspective by demonstrating how brain mechanisms, memory systems, and conceptual frameworks interact during language learning. These findings have significant implications for second language acquisition, where learners must rely on both their cognitive resources and instructional environments to develop communicative competence. In this context, the study of cognitive foundations provides not only

theoretical insights but also practical applications for language pedagogy, curriculum design, and assessment methods. Therefore, the investigation of the cognitive bases of language acquisition remains essential for understanding how individuals acquire, process, and use language in diverse social and educational contexts. This introduction sets the stage for an in-depth analysis of cognitive mechanisms and their implications for language learning, highlighting the relevance of cognitive theories for contemporary research and practice.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of the cognitive foundations of language acquisition demonstrates that language learning is not merely a mechanical process of memorizing words or imitating patterns, but rather a sophisticated interaction of mental functions that shape linguistic competence. Perception, attention, memory, and problem-solving skills work together to allow learners to process and internalize complex linguistic input. This highlights the active role of the learner as a constructor of knowledge, whose prior experiences and conceptual frameworks guide the acquisition process. By integrating findings from psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, and educational psychology, it becomes clear that cognitive approaches provide a more holistic understanding of how language is acquired and applied. Such perspectives offer valuable implications for language pedagogy, particularly in second language learning, where the effective use of cognitive strategies and metacognitive awareness can significantly enhance outcomes. Teachers and curriculum designers can benefit from these insights by developing methods that foster attention, memory retention, and learner autonomy, thereby aligning instructional practices with the natural cognitive processes of learners.

Furthermore, the cognitive perspective bridges theoretical and practical dimensions of language acquisition. It not only deepens scientific knowledge of how humans process and use language but also informs classroom practices that can make language learning more efficient and meaningful. Recognizing the importance of individual differences, learning strategies, and cognitive engagement helps to create a learner-centered environment that supports long-term linguistic development. In conclusion, the study of cognitive foundations reaffirms that language acquisition is a multifaceted process shaped by the mind's capacity to perceive, store, and manipulate information. Future research should continue to explore how cognitive mechanisms interact with social and cultural factors, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive framework of language learning. Such an integrated approach will ensure that cognitive theories remain central to both academic inquiry and practical applications in language education.

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