

# Learner's Language and Educational Problems

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## Introduction

Today, in the field of English learning and teaching it is unlikely that we have a definite framework or a compass for the acquisition of English. It is rather that we have lots of teaching methods and teaching materials which we should study. That makes us feel uneasy in learning and teaching English. It is safe to say that we are in a state of chaos in terms of English learning and teaching as well as other foreign languages.

Everyone that has been studying and getting involved in English feels difficulties in mastering English and in communicating with other peoples including native speakers of English in real life, especially in the situation where we study English as a foreign language. When we are forced to communicate in English, we face some difficulties in recalling particular structures, forms or semantic concepts. When we encounter such a situation we sometimes say incorrect expressions which are unsuitable in the situation. Or we may simply avoid the frustration of the situation by not saying anything.

In the level of school, both teachers and learners have a problem of how to teach and study English. Most teachers still have a favorable bias for the translation method of teaching English, but at the same time they are seeking for or waiting for new methods or new techniques. In the case of students, they feel more or less frustrated studying English. They really want to study practical and useful English which can be used in everyday life. It is a general principle that one of the roles English plays is communication. A language behavior is that we try to get our messages across to each other through language. It is natural that we never deny language behavior involving linguistic, biological, and psychological factors.

Along with such social and educational background, we have experienced many changes concerning English teaching and learning. First of all, the focus of English education is away from "teaching" and toward "learning" for the last few decades. Learning how to learn English is more important than being taught something by a teacher. Secondly, according to the viewpoint of "learner-centered" principle, the learner is viewed as a "fully functional person", meaning a learner should be treated as a whole person. We should take into consideration their affective, cognitive, emotional, and social being. Much emphasis was placed on "learner-centered" teaching. This change is a natural result and yet an inevitable way toward a new era of English teaching and learning.

A learner's language which I will try to study in this paper is also a new perspective

in English learning and teaching. This research of an English learner is called by various terms by different researchers. The term "Interlanguage" has recently been established. What I try to study here is to know a clear overall picture of the term "Interlanguage", because in Japan we have not yet paid attention to the phenomenon of interlanguage (henceforth IL). The study of IL originates from Error Analysis. The study of IL, therefore, is strongly related to learning theory of error analysis. Originally, IL is a small field for studying error analysis. But recently IL has gained its own right for study. One of the reasons why the study of IL became popular is that this phenomenon gave researchers and teachers a new perspective into the process of how learners learn or acquire a foreign language.

In chapter I, I want to examine the background of IL, because this learning theory is influenced by other learning theories and linguistic theories. In chapter II, variables of IL are the subjects for study. As I described above, there are other terms similar to the IL phenomenon. The term interlanguage was originally invented by Selinker in terms of language learning. Nemzer called the similar phenomenon "approximative systems". An "idio-syncretic dialect" is named by Corder. I will try to find peculiar property of each learner's language. In chapter III, I want to examine the current theory of language acquisition and several strategies which have an influence upon the formation of IL systems. Chapter IV includes the pedagogical problems of IL systems and conclusions.

## Chapter I Historical Background of Interlanguage

A linguistic theory is deeply related to learning theory. A linguistic theory is a norm or sample for developing a learning theory. On the other hand, learning theory plays a role as feedback as to which peculiar linguistic theory is valid or not. Comparative analysis is totally based on behaviorist theory of psychology. Generative Transformational theory fundamentally gave access to the advent of research of the process of second foreign language learning. The study of analyzing the learner's language has contributed to the formation of learning theory of error analysis. The study of the learners' language and the process of how to learn or acquire a target language is a kind of by-product of error analysis, simultaneously, proceeding to take the same step with the study of error analysis. It is so recent that the study of the learner's language seems to turn aside from the direction of error study and have gained a civil right as an independent domain of research.

Generative Transformational theory which was invented by N. Chomsky in the late 60's had a really important influence upon theory formation of how human beings acquire a language. His theory began with a criticism of Skinner's behavioristic learning theory. B. F. Skinner's thought is embodied in his classic *Verbal Behavior* (1957). He looks at learning as a process of operant conditioning, meaning the effective language behavior is made by the production of correct responses to stimuli. If a particular response is reinforced, it then becomes habitual, or conditioned. A behaviorist, like structuralists, takes the focus on studying only performance—the outward manifestation of language, which is equivalent to Saussure's term "parole".

Generative linguists took a quite different stance against behaviorists' attitude of learning they have sought to discover the underlying motivation and deeper structure of human language, with the rationalistic approach. They contend that the child is born with an innate knowledge of or predisposition toward language, and that this innate property is universal in all human beings. They take the position that in terms of first language acquisition the child's language is a legitimate system in its own right (at any given point) and the child is constantly forming hypotheses on the basis of the input he is exposed to and then testing those hypotheses in his own speech. During the development of the child's language, those hypotheses get continually revised, reshaped, or sometimes abandoned. Certainly the field of language acquisition owes these insights in part to Chomsky's observations on language learning and his criticism of behaviorist theory in language learning (1959), as well as to Brown's important work on first language learning (1973)<sup>1)</sup>. Roger Brown wrote his classic *A First Language: The Early Stages*, which took some giant steps towards understanding the process of first language acquisition in terms of morpheme acquisition.

Thanks to the research of how the child acquires his first language proposed by N. Chomsky and his colleagues, many teachers get precious suggestions for teaching and studying the first language acquisition and for improving the understanding of the task of teaching language skills to native speakers in a language education. However, in the situation where we learn and study English as a second or foreign language, it is another matter. The process and mechanism of the child acquiring English as his native language are different from those of native speakers of Japanese learning English as a foreign language. We should take account of different situations, individual differences such as age, cognitive factors, intelligence, and knowledge of the world. The big problem is how the second or foreign language teachers interpret the hundreds of facets of first language research and theory and then apply them to and reflect them in the second language learning and teaching.

In Japan, most of English learners meet with the difficulties in pronouncing English language as native speakers. This is a field of physical or biological domain of language learning. Eric Lenneberg, in his book *The Biological Foundations of Language*, gave us important suggestions in terms of the function of brain. He claims that language learning or acquisition is related to the maturation of the brain. There is a critical period for language acquisition, which is supposed to be around puberty. It is because lateralization of the brain is completed around the same time from the neurological point of view. That is, language can be acquired easily before puberty, but after that, language is increasingly difficult to acquire. In the case of Japanese students, they begin studying English around or after puberty. It is one of the difficulties in mastering the authentic pronunciation. This lateralization hypothesis is also related to cognitive development of human beings. It is believed that human cognition develops rapidly throughout puberty. Adult language learners, however, possess superior cognitive capacity: they have a richer knowledge of language, and the world, and they can profit from certain grammatical explanations and deductive thinking. But we

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1) Chun, J. 1980. 'A Survey of Research in Second Language Acquisition'. in Croft, K. (Ed.). *Readings on English as Second Language*. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers. p. 182.

find it more difficult for them to learn language than for children. The child is good at meaningful learning but in the case of adults, they have a greater ability for rote learning.

We never ignore affective factors of language learners. They are especially sensitive to emotions. The teacher's attitude towards the English language or foreign culture in a sense influences students. Motivation is also a key to language learning. Most teachers have been struggling to positively motivate their students to learn English even in spite of a few hours of English class a week in a school.

English learning and teaching as a foreign language is a complex process involving biological, cognitive, affective problems as well as linguistic ones. In short, when we get involved in language teaching even outside or inside the classroom we have to consider every facet of individual learners. In such a sense, interlanguage is a favorable theme for improving the understanding of the process of language learning linguistically.

### **Comparative Analysis and Error Analysis**

Before dealing with the main theme of a learner's language, it might be proper that we take a glance at a different learning theory: comparative analysis hypothesis which is deeply rooted in behaviorism and structuralism. The focus of this comparative study between a learner's native language and his target one is that in the process of learning a foreign language the linguistic system of his mother tongue and culture is the principal barrier to acquire a foreign language. A scientific structural analysis of two linguistic systems in question will allow teachers and learners to predict the difficulties they will encounter and help understand the acquisition of the target language. It was commonly believed that learning a foreign language basically involved the overcoming of the differences between two linguistic systems—the native and target languages (NL and TL). Robert Rado contends in *Linguistics Across Cultures* that "in the comparison between native and foreign language lies the key to ease or difficulty in foreign language learning".<sup>2)</sup>

However, CA has come under a good deal of criticism. We may consider several points of the major criticism. CA hypothesis claims that the principal area of difficulties which a learner will encounter while learning TL is the result of a first language interference on the language he is studying. According to the findings of second language learning research, however, the notion of interference turned out not necessarily to be the main cause of errors. Many of the difficulties predicted by CA do not show up in the actual learners' speech. On the contrary, many errors made by learners are traceable to the linguistic system he is learning. Second, CA doesn't tell teachers much about how a learner will go about the learning task. Third, we can find the same errors made by learners who have different language backgrounds, namely errors are virtually independent from their mother tongue. Last, in the teaching level, the task of writing any contrastive analysis of two languages is an enormous one, and at the same time, is a waste of time. In the case of teachers, they do not have enough systematic knowledge of the students' mother tongue, even if they have a

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2) Dulay, H. C. and Burt, M. K., 1980. 'You Can't Learn Without Goofing. An Analysis of Children's Second Language Errors'. in Richards, J. C. (Ed.): *Error Analysis*. London: Longman. p. 97.

speaking ability as native speakers. However, no one has rejected CA hypothesis entirely. Because this hypothesis gives insight to the formation of error analysis (EA). The "predictability" hypothesis of CA in fact brings to light areas of difficulties not even noticed by EA. As a matter of fact, CA may be most predictive at the level of phonology, but least predictive at the syntactic level.

Now we are in the proper position for the explanation of EA and the role of errors. Many researchers have come to have some doubt of CA in terms of the process of second language acquisition and have begun to turn to EA as an alternative form of analyzing a language learner's speech. EA is not restricted to errors caused by interlingual transfer from the habit of the first language to target language. The object of EA is fundamentally to examine and categorize systematic errors in a language learner's performance and to compare them with the target language. It is significant that EA gave a new dimension for investigating how learners made erroneous utterances psycholinguistically. One of the goals of EA is telling us something about the psycholinguistic process of language learning.

Next, we have to consider the significance of EA under two heads: the new attitude towards errors and language learners. CA claims that errors are absolutely overcome and eradicated. Errors in language learner's speech are not a significant object of research in respect to language learning. According to S. P. Corder, learner's errors are "an inevitable and indeed necessary part of the learning process".<sup>3)</sup> They are essentially indicative to the system of the language that learners are studying at a given particular stage in the learning career. More concretely, from the perspective of teachers they are indicative to how far the learner has progressed toward the target language and consequently, what aspect of that language he should study from there. What they can tell us next is that they can provide valuable evidence of the language learning process and of learning strategies or procedures the learner is employing to discover complex rules of the target language.

The making of errors is a kind of necessary strategy the learner uses in testing his hypothesis about the nature of the target language. That is, second language learning as well as first language acquisition by the child is viewed as a process of creative construction. This viewpoint owes much to the finding in the first language acquisition. We can perceive many ill-formed, ungrammatical forms in the child's speech which are thought to be errors by the standards of an adult's grammar. No one views those deviant forms as those to be eradicated. For example, every child, who has a normal ability of language function, utters such erroneous forms as 'goed' or 'comed' at a particular stage of development. This is called overgeneralization which is thought as the single most important strategy in language learning. The child unconsciously overapplies a rule such as 'English past=ed'. We can hear those utterances at approximately the same stage of language development. The child tries to keep hypothesizing and testing about language he hears around him, rather than imitating an adult's language. The making of an error is evidence of hypothesis formation and testing in the child acquiring his mother tongue as well as in second language learners.

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3) *Op. cit.*, Corder, S. P. 'Idiosyncratic Dialects and Error Analysis', p. 170.

We have come to consider an error as undesirable but an essential part of language learning. That is, what EA has brought to us is the change of attitude towards an error.

A new view of language learners is another major fruitful outcome EA has effected. Before the advent of EA, second language learners were merely looked on as producers of malformed, deviant language in terms of the norm of the target language. From the perspective of non-native language learners like Japanese there is something like “language gap” or “language distance” in mind while studying a foreign language. More concretely, most of us as non-native speakers of English still are more or less prejudiced against English, although we are studying it in a formal situation. One of the goals of language learning in a school is the acquisition of English language as close as possible to the way native speakers of English speak. It is in fact an enormous task to master authentic pronunciation concerning speech production. This will develop into an unfavorable bias against English at the conscious or unconscious level. This is an important phenomenon in language education we cannot ignore so easily, simply because something like a “language distance” is one of the causes which disturb language learning and inhibit a learner’s motivation to learn.

Today, researchers of second language acquisition believe that the second language learner is not merely a passive participant in the language learning process, totally dependent upon the teacher for drill and reinforcement to learn, but an active participant who is directly interacting with the target language and persistently trying to hypothesize and test the nature of it through logical, systematic stages of learning and to continue to establish closer and closer approximations of the system used by native speakers. In short, second language learners are intelligent and creative beings, creatively acting on their own linguistic environment. This is a similar phenomenon to the child playing an active and creative role in the creation of his own language system.

## Chapter II The Concept of Interlanguage

Let’s turn to the subject of “Interlanguage” (IL). This concept is originally constructed by Larry Selinker in the field of language learning. IL in general refers to a second foreign language learner’s language system, or his own unique linguistic system, independent from his native language and the language system he is at present learning. IL is “a legitimate system of language in its own right.”<sup>4)</sup> The approach of IL is to analyze learner’s interlanguage systems. It is obvious that the study of IL is closely related to the errors of learners. IL as well as EA focuses on only ‘incorrect’ forms in a language.

On the contrary, “correct” forms or grammatical utterances in learners’ speech is more than the object of IL. IL reflects the transitional stage of the learner’s development at a given stage. It is not the linguist’s but the applied linguist’s task to describe and characterize the language of individuals from the data of their utterances and discover what the process of the second language learning is and what the natural sequence of development is.

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4) Brown, H. D., 1980. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Englewood Cliffs : Prentice-Hall, Inc. p. 162.

At this point, we may pause to consider the difference between two other approaches to a learner's performance. Generally speaking, the different point is ascribed to the norm of investigation : what language of the language learner among his NL, TL, and IL is qualified to become the norm. CA is exclusively concerned with comparative study between his NL and TL, while EA concentrates on his performance and TL. These approaches analyze the learner's speech in the light of TL. But IL is a little bit different. Perhaps this is the most important difference. That is, on the assumption that IL is a legitimate linguistic system, totally independent of TL and NL, IL is one of independent language systems like natural languages. This hypothesis means that ILs may be shared within some homogeneous community and thought of as means of communication in a meaningful context. There is no basic language to be a norm other than IL itself. In other words, IL has gained a public right. But IL fundamentally takes these two systems into account as a technique for a much better understanding of the learner's language system. For example, a comparative study is still an important means for understanding the meaning of IL produced by a second language learner. According to S. P. Corder, a means of interpretation and intuition by native speakers is also inevitable to the understanding of IL. The difference is that CA is an initial filtering device in IL.

### Selinker's Interlanguage

The term interlanguage has gained the widest currency among applied linguists in recent years. This term was originally coined by L. Selinker, dating back to his paper of the same title. Almost at the same time, other names for learner's linguistic systems were proposed. W. Nemzer named them "approximative systems", while S. P. Corder invented the term "idiosyncratic dialects", and C. James called them "interlingua".

There are, of course, peculiar characteristics under these terms, but, they may signify a similar concept. There are some reasons why Selinker's term interlanguage became popular : (1) This implies a neutral attitude as to direction, while the others take a TL-based perspective. (2) This refers to a structurally intermediate stage of the learner's system between his native and target languages. (3) In relation to (2), it suggests its instability—the learner's system is generally variable whatever it may progress or backslide. (4) Focusing on the term "language" of interlanguage, it signifies a self-contained, systematic and rule-governed approach and plays a role as the function of a communicative system. S. P. Corder, however, points out the inappropriateness of the name interlanguage, namely that "it does not show in all cases obvious interlingual features"<sup>5)</sup>. That is, the learner's performance is not always ascribed to "transfer" from his native language. The term interlanguage fails to characterize this phenomenon. It is in fact that a comparative study, as I said above, is an initial filtering device for testing hypotheses about interlanguage systems, but not all of the research of IL systems.

Selinker has proposed a theoretical framework to account for the phenomenon in second

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5) Corder, S. P. 1981. *Error Analysis and Interlanguage*. Oxford : Oxford University Press. p. 84.

language learning. His paper is exclusively concerned with psycholinguistic structures and processes when the language learner attempts to express meanings in a language he is learning. He posits the existence of a psychological structure which is latent in the brain, activated when a language learner attempts to learn a second language: latent psychological structure. This structure is supposed to be genetically determined. He proposed five psycholinguistic processes: language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication, and overgeneralization of TL linguistic material, which are supposed to exist in the latent psychological structure, and which are central to second language learning. These five processes are thought of as psychological learning strategies which the learner brings to the language learning task. One or more of them are associated with the shape of IL performances.

Selinker introduced another important phenomenon of "fossilization," a mechanism which is also assumed to exist in the latent psychological structure.<sup>6)</sup> This phenomenon means that a learner's IL systems cease to develop or internalize incorrect forms and rules of the TL however long he remains exposed to the data of TL. He claims that errors are a typical manifestation of fossilizable structures, which tend to remain as "potential performance" in the brain and unexpectedly reemerge in an IL performance, especially when learners are in an extreme emotional state such as hypertension or anxiety. By this fossilization mechanism, linguistic structures in an IL productive performance, which are originally thought to be eradicated but regularly reappear will be accounted for. On the contrary, such linguistic performances produced by the second language learner will be able to explain the reality of fossilization and IL system.

The formation of the phenomenon of fossilization can be considered from the perspectives of individual learners and culture. That is, we can find IL performances which are peculiar to an individual learner and to the whole group of a particular society. For example, at the level of an individual fossilization mechanism will account for psycholinguistic process of idiolect or register in IL productive performances. It is simply because second language learners try to keep in their favorable IL expressions which are supposed to be useful in communicative needs. At the level of culture, NL might have an important impact upon the formation of an IL competence. Just as the Japanese language is a social dialect which is affected by our thought structure, so IL performances, whatever they may or not be institutionalized, may be influenced by our peculiar thought structure and our linguistic situation. This will be one of the causes of what we call Japanese dialect of English or Japlish which sounds ironical. Five central processes which are assumed to be associated with the formation of fossilization can be classified by two different levels as I described above. Language transfer and transfer of training are to some extent culture-bound. If any fossilizable IL utterances come out of NL of a second language learner, they are the result of language transfer. When we can find fossilizable IL performances which may occur in the course of methodological strategies of instruction, we have to deal with the problem of

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6) *Op. cit.*, Selinker, L. "Interlanguage". p. 36.



transfer of training. Strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication and overgeneralization of TL linguistic materials are ascribable to an individual language learner. Selinker stresses the importance of learning strategies of a language learner. "It cannot be doubted that various internal strategies on the part of the second language learner affect to a large extent the surface structure of sentences underlying IL utterances."<sup>7)</sup> Internal strategies are equivalent to Corder's concept of a "built-in syllabus" which refers to the natural sequence of creating the grammar of a language. This concept is a cognitive process learners have for the learning of any particular second language. Anyway, it should be noted that fossilizable structures are the result not only of one of five processes but of the combinations of these processes.

The final goal of a second language learner is, in short, the acquisition of a native speaker's competence. One of the most important things in Selinker's paper is a theoretical suggestion that is meaningful to good language learners. Those will achieve a native speaker's competence in the TL are a mere 5% of the whole of second language learners. But a latent psychological structure which is the key concept of his theory is genetically determined but is available to every learner, whether he is old or young. There is no genetic time-table unlike a Lenneberg's theory, meaning there is no critical period of language acquisition. A second language learner should make the best use of "interlingual identifications", which refers to what unites the three linguistic systems (NL, TL, and IL) psychologically. According to Selinker, the second language learner should have "switched his psychic set or state from the native speaker domain to the new domain of interlingual identifications".<sup>8)</sup> He should have TL-conscious strategies or a TL norm from IL and NL. More concretely, he should attempt to produce in and perceive the TL as much as possible. That is, he should totally immerse himself in the TL.

### Nemzer's Approximative Systems

W. Nemzer referred to the same concept as Selinker's "interlanguage" and named the learner's language an "approximative system". This term stresses "the goal-directed development of the learner's language towards the target language system".<sup>9)</sup> He contends that an approximative system is "the *deviant* linguistic system actually employed by the learner attempting to utilize the target language" (my italics).

He implies that the final goal of an approximative system is of course to achieve a native-like competence in TL for the second language learner, and that at the same time it is impossible to do so. This system is also supposed to be a transient and variable system which constantly develops as learning proceeds according to the definition of that term. Moreover, this system varies in proportion to individual differences like the learner's learning experience, proficiency level, learning strategies and so on. As a matter of fact, this system tends to form "permanent intermediate systems and subsystems" which are deviant from

7) *Ibid.*, p. 39.

8) *Ibid.*, p. 47.

9) *Op. cit.*, Corder, S. P. p. 67.

the standard of TL. That is, the language learner reaches “a plateau” in his learning. This is similar to Selinker’s concept of fossilization. Approximative systems come in several varieties.

One of stable varieties of approximative systems is immigrant speech which is peculiar to members of the same immigrant group who have no problem in communicating in the language of a country they immigrated to. This phenomenon is supposed to be an interference from their mother tongue. Utility systems are another kind of approximative systems, which have limited semantic function, limited grammars and lexicons. Professional linguistic systems which are the result of frequent interaction with foreigners are included in this utility system. This is also the result of a particular discourse in a limited social context. Generally we can infer this kind of approximative system is simpler or reduced registers of a particular TL. This utility system refers to the system actually employed by teachers, mothers, taxi-drivers, hotel-reservation clerks, and so on. They are native speakers of TL and are forced to change their own language for people who have different background languages to understand. This point of view is different from an immigrant speech, which gradually is modified by different members of a language community group.

Learner pidgin is another different variety of an approximative system. This is generally applied to an IL system the second language students often use. A pidgin is a mixed language usually arising out of two languages coming into contact for commercial or social purposes. A pidgin is also a simplified form of language in terms of grammar and vocabularies and is spoken in a limited social context. Simplification and social context of language are common to the other systems described above, but this variety seems complicated. Learner pidgin of course represents evidence of the reality and autonomy of IL and is also a model signifying developing stages of second language acquisition. This kind of IL is ascribed to not only NL and TL but also intralingual interference, which Nemzer calls “internal interference”. IL systems directly attributable to NL and TL are called “external interference”. The term internal interference represents learning strategies such as overgeneralization and pattern confusion. As other interference phenomena resulting in the formation of IL systems Nemzer refers to “syncretism”, “reinterpretation”, and “hypercorrection”.

The basic ground of his IL systems is to seek the more powerful theoretical validity of another learning theory—CA and its application to the second language pedagogy. He contends that the object of his purpose may be carried out by the direct and systematic examination of a learner system as well as TL and NL. Approximative systems are in this sense useful to understand the speech behavior of language learners. That is, Nemzer talks about the learner’s systems within the general framework of CA. Also we have to pay attention to the definition of the term “approximative”. To what extent is this learner’s system approximative to TL? According to him, those available with three systems are restricted to native speakers or the second language learners who have attained considerable fluency in TL. That is, in the case of the second language learners, they have a linguistic ability for use of TL like native speakers. Approximative systems of language learners are literally IL systems considerably close to TL systems. If this idea is right, his IL systems become the least powerful

to examine a learner's linguistic behavior. It is simply because the subjects to be examined are limited, especially in the linguistic circumstance where TL is regarded as a foreign language.

### **Corder's Idiosyncratic Dialect**

Corder used the term "idiosyncratic dialect", namely implying that the learner's language is peculiar to a particular individual, and that the rules of his IL systems are also peculiar to the language of that speaker alone. An "idiosyncratic" dialect is a special kind of dialect. According to S. P. Corder, dialects are assumed to be languages which share some rules of grammar. Therefore an idiosyncratic dialect is based on the assumption that it is made up with shared rules of TL and NL, whatever Corder may pay less attention to NL. However, he claims that an idiosyncratic dialect is also an autonomous system as Selinker and Nemzer do, and that it is systematic and in principle describable, i. e. it has a grammar. However it is a peculiar personal code of the learner. We have some doubts that it is possible to communicate with other learners via an idiosyncratic dialect. Moreover, Corder emphasizes that it is a code which is not necessarily the code of any social group. On the contrary, idiolects are one kind of social dialect. People who speak idiolects have the linguistic and cultural conventions common to them. So, idiolects do not present any problems for communication. That is, an idiosyncratic dialect has communicative function. It is assumed that Corder's definition of the learner's language is a little bit simple, namely that any spontaneous speech by the second language learner is meaningful, which means it makes communication possible.

We have to take into consideration the problem of interpretation, which is a criterion of judging IL systems. This interpretation hypothesis is the characteristics of Corder's idea of IL. The distinction between a social dialect and an idiosyncratic one depends upon interpretation, too. For example, idiolects do not pose the problem of interpretation. It is partly because a speaker who has an idiolect shares conventions with other speakers of the same NL in a language community. However, some of the sentences of an idiosyncratic dialect are not *readily interpretable* (my italics). This also depends upon the matter of conventions underlying the productive performance, Corder contends. It appears that what Corder implies about conventions includes linguistic and cultural elements. Interpretation of some sentences produced by the second language learner is rather complicated in some cases, therefore it is forced to be involved in both NL and TL which are social languages. Moreover, the difficulty of interpreting the sentences of idiosyncratic dialects naturally results in problems of analysis and description, partly because they are fundamentally unstable.

Corder shows the example of idiosyncratic dialects which are classified into four types : (1) the language of poems, (2) the speech of an aphasic, (3) child language, and (4) the language of the learners of a second language. Of course, he is exclusively concerned with (4).

He introduces the model technique for identification Of idiosyncrasy. It is fundamentally what he calls "bilingual comparison", which to some degree depends upon both the mother

tongue of the learner learning the foreign language and the rules of TL. First of all, he classifies idiosyncratic sentences into two kinds : covert and overt. A superficially well-formed sentence is called covertly idiosyncratic and a superficially ill-formed one overtly idiosyncratic. They will be recognizable in terms of the rules of TL. In the case of overtly idiosyncratic sentences, we can try to make a plausible interpretation and then a reconstructed sentence. Simultaneously, it is of importance that these sentences are acceptable in the light of context. Otherwise we have to have resort to NL of the learner and literally translate the sentences into NL. So we may get translation equivalents. I am sure that this technique is one of the good teaching strategies even in classroom activity. This is more convenient for learners in the early stages. It is simply because this bilingual comparison technique tells us what the student knows about TL at the moment in his career and moreover the psychological process of how he learns the TL.

### Chapter III

#### How to Organize a Learner's Language

This recent wave of research in second language acquisition owes much to the findings of generative linguists and cognitive psychologists. Foreign language researchers and teachers have been struggling to establish more appropriate learning theories and certain teaching methods on the basis of first language learning principles. It is generally believed that hypothesis formation is a key concept of child language learning concerning the first language acquisition. That is, the child is constantly forming hypotheses on the basis of the input he receives in the linguistic environment. This concept is also applied to the process of how second and foreign language learners acquire the language that they are learning. Corder says that the learner is creating for himself an account of the structural properties of the target language, about its grammar, on the basis of his interaction with the data he is exposed to.<sup>10)</sup> In short, the learner is meant to be acquiring the rules of the target language. Besides, his learning behavior is rule-governed and systematic in the same way as that of native speakers of a particular language. His language is changing all the time and his rules of hypotheses are constantly undergoing revision as long as he continues to learn.

However, interlanguage is recognized as a kind of independent system like a natural language : the autonomy of IL. It is because IL systems have a structurally intermediate status more than TL and NL. What we are driving at, therefore, is that the language learner who is studying a foreign language has his own personal grammar. He has a limited set of rules for generating sentences on the basis of IL systems. In this case the speech produced by the learner is not always grammatical but may be acceptable in the linguistic context. He is always trying to elaborate and reconstruct his IL grammar, which is a "transitional competence" in Corder's original term, in order to accommodate a new knowledge.

There is another important concept which is called the "heuristic" hypothesis. This is a kind of cognitive strategy which is available to help recognize the structural properties of

10) *Ibid.*, p. 73.

the target language data and development of transitional competence. This term was first introduced by N. Chomsky.

Are language formation hypotheses or heuristic hypotheses available in the foreign language situation in Japan? These hypotheses are a medium for acquiring the underlying knowledge of the foreign language, especially the English language as an example. Most English learners begin with rather complicated school grammar which is everything of English learning. They are in principle forced to master the whole school grammar system, otherwise they have to abandon their English study. However language is a mean of communicating our ideas or feelings. Therefore we don't need to study totally difficult school grammar or vocabularies which even native speakers of English are not supposed to come across once a year. Their inability to process the English data is attributable to school grammar in part and besides their limited exposure to an "English bath" in part. But for the advanced learners or professional English learners it might be possible to acquire a good knowledge of the English language like native speakers.

### Strategy and IL

In language learning we can distinguish two basic categories of strategies: learning strategy and communication strategy. These key notions are defined by Corder. He defines a learning strategy as "the mental processes whereby a learner creates for himself or discovers a language system underlying the data he is exposed to".<sup>11)</sup> A communication strategy, which is called "production strategy" as an alternative, is defined as "the devices whereby he exploits whatever linguistic knowledge he possesses to achieve his communicative ends".<sup>12)</sup> These strategies play very important roles for influencing and characterizing the learner's interlanguage system. Learning strategies generally discussed in the literature on language learning strategies include the following: language transfer, overgeneralization, simplification, and so on as a linguistic domain; and as a perceptual domain, memorization, perceptual saliency, and attention to word order. Communication strategies refer to avoidance, extension, appeal to authority, paraphrase, and language switch. Language transfer and simplification are included in each strategy. Each strategy is generally subject to socio-cultural setting on language learning, which is second/foreign language situations, and individual differences as motivation, attitude, age and so on. In particular, language transfer and rule learning such as overgeneralization and incomplete application of rules are major sources for formation of IL systems. For example, one third of IL systems produced by second language learners could be attributed to language transfer.

## Chapter IV

### Educational Implications and Conclusions

To know the theoretical background of IL systems such as nature and principles is one thing and to apply these systems to pedagogical and practical use is quite another

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11) *Ibid.*, p. 89.

12) *Ibid.*, p. 89.

As a matter of fact, we have a lot of problems left concerning data collection and its procedures. It might be a tough task because learners' language systems themselves are developmental and transient by nature and besides we can't make longitudinal studies of language learners due to the restricted time and data.

It might be rather difficult especially in the foreign language situation for us to gather enough data on which to base descriptions and to make systematic approaches in order to get a better access to establishment of the rule of IL systems and the grammar of the second language learners. However, despite many tasks to be overcome we have to make a closer observation of how and at what situation IL speech takes place and attend to the learner's psychological processes of the second language learning. The teacher's wider knowledge and a deeper comprehension of the learners' IL systems will yield insight into the language learning process which has direct relevance to the improvement of language teaching materials and methods and eventually lead to the feedback to the validity of theoretical hypotheses concerning IL systems.

The past decade has seen an increasing interest in the study of the learners' language systems from different perspectives. Originally the study of IL systems is the by-product of error analysis. A professional periodical entitled *Interlanguage Studies Bulletin* was published in 1976. It is especially no exaggeration to say that S. P. Corder's dedication to the study of IL systems is significant in terms of terminologies and further study of theoretical construction. On the contrary, the study of interlanguage of Japanese learners of English is still at an early stage. We have enough room left for the research of IL systems of Japanese learners.

It is apparent that this approach will help establish the developmental sequences of IL systems particular to Japanese learners. The approach from the socio-cultural or sociolinguistic perspective may be especially fruitful.

In conclusion, we just try to create conditions in which our students are willing to speak one another free from hesitation or inhibition in the classroom activity for communicative needs or purposes. We should place more emphasis on language use or the study of messages than language usage or codes of the language and attend to the roles of developing communicative competence of the learner rather than their linguistic competence. It is simply because language learning is an active and creative process. We should not mind if they make performance errors while speaking spontaneously but global ones which might break down communication. Each language learner has a "transitional competence" or his own personal grammar at a particular moment. Therefore it is of importance for us to have him improve his IL systems toward mastery of native-like competence.

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