

## Acquisition of second languages: Spanish as a foreign language

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## Abstract

Applied linguistics relates closely to the real functioning of language. It seeks to solve specific problems, either in the field of linguistics or in areas where other disciplines such as psychology or sociology intervene. Another of its defining features is its interdisciplinary character, its field of action delimited by the zone of intersection of the various theoretical conceptions of human language and the approaches of other disciplines that are in some way involved in the treatment of questions related to language. Another characteristic is its dynamism since it not only has to select the linguistic features to be investigated, but also has to be defined according to those same features. Among the diversity of topics with which applied linguistics is associated, learning and teaching a second language is the most important. With this in mind, this article attempts to present, succinctly, the main theories on the acquisition of foreign languages and, more specifically, on the acquisition of Spanish, offering, in addition, an overview of the contributions offered by psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics.

**Keywords:** foreign language acquisition; Spanish for foreigners; psycholinguistics; sociolinguistics.

## 1. Introduction

When an individual learns a second language, they already have, in general, a series of resources and linguistic habits that are perfectly organized, so that learning is driven by the pressing need that comes from not having a specific and effective way of communicating.

Applied linguistics is defined by a perfect symbiosis of theoretical and practical aspects. This dual character becomes evident when addressing the issue of teaching/learning second languages. The different theoretical linguistic models have presented, each one from its own particular methodology, their approaches about how to tackle such a process. In recent years, the more prevalent hypothesis has been that the learning of a second language does not only imply the acquisition and mastery of a linguistic system, but also the need to know the multiple communicative factors that favour a successful linguistic exchange. From this point of view, the teaching of second languages must take into account both the cognitive dimension, focusing on the transmission of knowledge and the assimilation by the student of a linguistic competence, and the pragmatic dimension, which will attend to the acquisition and implementation of forms of communicative behaviour. The transmission of a second language must be done, therefore, taking into account the aspects that we have cited above and applying an appropriate methodology.

## 2. Theories of language acquisition

Diane Larsen-Freeman and Michael Long (1994: 207) speak of three kinds of theory of second language acquisition: nativist, environmentalist and interactionist.

### 2.1. Nativist theories

The acquisition of a second language (ASL) is explained in terms of “innate biological talent that allows learning” (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1994: 207), that is, based on the characteristics of the language itself and its systematic nature.

*Verbal Behavior* of Skinner and *Review of Verbal Behavior* by Chomsky, in 1959 opened the debate on the nature of ASL. Behaviorism explains the behaviors of an individual as response to the external stimuli that the individual perceives. From this premise, it is considered that speaking a language is the result of responding to a stimulus. That is, the individual perceives languages and imitates them. With more repetition comes more imitation and, as a consequence, greater learning. There are weaknesses with this theory, since in the mother tongue (MT) we observe that children make mistakes that are explained by the nature of the language and by cognitive structures.

Chomsky (1959) affirms that the human being is born with the innate ability to learn languages and considers that individuals have a language acquisition device (LAD) that is a kind of mental processor that allows external information to be received and related to a universal grammatical structure. This device enables the differentiation of speech from other sounds, organizing and structuring different linguistic categories for the proper use of the linguistic system, enabling accurate communication.

## 2.2. Environmentalist theories

This type of theory opens a new debate in relation to ASL. What is the priority in ASL, the sociocultural relations of the human being or the influence of internal cognition? Environmentalists argue that language is acquired from social relationships and the different types of communication that emerge from those relationships in such a way that innate abilities are no longer necessary.

Institutional education or experience itself support the acquisition of a language. Environmentalist theories posit that the acquisition of a language is the result of social relationships and the different types of communication that derive from them.

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1994: 233), distinguishes three types of models involved in ASL:

- a) Acculturation model. This model revolves around the gradual process through which the learner passes until they adapt to another culture. It is a direct and continuous contact but does not imply the abandonment of the patterns of the culture of origin. The greater acculturation, or assimilation of the other culture, the greater the acquisition of language. Santos Gargallo points out that:

The important thing is to know how things are done in each culture, only in this way can we be competent non-native speakers. For this, there are many factors that influence throughout the learning process, some of them are: the student's idea about the language they are learning, motivation, socioeconomic or cultural level, cultural traditions, tolerance and the vision of a shared future (1999: 30).

- b) Denativisation model. The assimilation of new cultural patterns will lead the learner to a process that will take them away from their native behavior and thinking. This process, in turn, will bring the individual closer to learning the L2.
- c) Accommodation model. The motivation of the learner will vary depending on whether it is integrative, instrumental or of survival. If the motivation of the individual is high, the degree of acquisition of L2 will be greater than if the individual were rooted in their community since, in this second case, they would present less motivation.

Kim Griffin (2005: 43) schematizes this idea in the following table.

**TABLE 1**

Ethnic identification and motivation in relation to ASL

	HIGH MOTIVATION	LOW MOTIVATION
Identification with the group itself	Little	A lot
Inter-ethnic comparison	Favorable	Unfavorable
Perception of ethnolinguistic vitality	Little	A lot
Perception of own group limits	Soft / open	Hard / closed
Identification with other categories	A lot	Little

### 2.3. Interactionist theories

Interactionist theories rely on innate factors as well as external factors to explain language learning. They are the result of the sum of nativist and environmentalist theories.

Interactionist theories in ASL differ markedly from each other since some are based on diachronic language changes, others arise from work done in experimental psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology, such as, for example, Pienemann (1983) McLaughlin (1968) and McLaughlin (1987), Others find their foundation in speech linguistics and discourse analysis, such as Hatch (1978), finally, on studies of functionalist orientation, which influenced research on second language acquisition, such as the functional-typological theory of Givon (1981).

Givon's theory was intended to be a theory that addresses any type of linguistic change, including acquisition. From this objective, it develops a "typological functional syntactic analysis". It is "functional" because one of its basic ideas is that the syntax emanates from the properties of human discourse and is "typological" because it takes into account a set of languages (Givon, 1981). Givon believes that both speakers and linguistic systems move from a more pragmatic way of communication to a more syntactic way. This process directed towards syntax acts on a series of contrastive features through the pragmatic and syntactic modes of communication.

Klein (1986) proposes a synthesis of the main investigations and orders them under four aspects: **the identity hypothesis, the monitoring theory, the contrastive analysis model** and **the error analysis model**.

**TABLE 2**

Contrastive features, pragmatic and syntactic modes of communication

FEATURES OF THE PRAGMATIC MODE	FEATURES OF THE SYNTACTIC MODE
Theme-comment expressions	Subject-predicate expressions
Propositional relations by simple juxtaposition or by conjunctions	Propositional relationships through grammatical mechanisms (use of adverbials or relative pronouns)
Slow speech	Fast speech
Simple intonation contours in short expressions	Simple intonation contours in long expressions
Higher ratio of verbs than nouns, greater use of simple verb forms	Lower ratio of verbs than nouns, greater use of compound verb forms
Absence of grammatical morphology	Presence of grammatical morphology

**Source:** Givon (1985).

## 2.4. Identity hypothesis

The identity hypothesis, also known as the universalist construction hypothesis, or as L1 = L2, is based on mentalist theories. This hypothesis argues that those who learn an L2 actively organize what they hear and make generalizations about its structure in the same way as children who learn L1, so that the course of the process is determined by the structural properties of the L2 and the system of learning. So, the strategies used by the learner are similar to those used by the child in learning the L1. The L2 student would have a specific type of mental organization that would lead them to use only a limited class of strategies to produce utterances in a given foreign language. The syntactic development of the structures of the target language is gradual, first the basic structures and then those subject to transformation. Language learning comes from the student's experience of those processes in the form of syntactic rules that they gradually organize and add as they hear the new language.

According to this perspective, the mistakes of L2 learners are practically identical to those made by children who learn that same language as a first language. This hypothesis does not take into account contextual and procedural differences that characterize L2 but states that L1 and L2 correspond to a single process governed by the same laws.

Klein (1986) highlights five restrictions to this hypothesis:

- The L2 is processed when the L1 is already more or less consummated, while L1 is formed at the moment when the child's social and cognitive development is achieved.

- In the L1, the pronunciation of speakers depends on the segmental and prosodic regularities of the linguistic group to which they belong, while in the L2 the accent can be influenced by the L1, which can generate a different variant from both the person who teaches the language and a native speaker of that language.
- There is a correlation between L1 and L2 if we pay attention to the order of acquisition of interrogative and negative structures and the acquisition of some morphemes.
- The acquisition of L1 and the learning of L2 have variations in their internal structures in terms of how learning develops.
- There are similarities and differences between L1 and L2, however, it is possible to develop a uniform theory for both processes.

## 2.5. Monitoring theory

Krashen (1982, 1985) explains this theory based on five hypotheses.

### a) Hypothesis on the difference between acquisition and learning

Krashen (1982, 1985) states that mastery of a foreign language implies two alternatives that themselves establish a dichotomy: acquisition and learning. Acquisition refers to the way in which linguistic skills are spontaneously internalized, that is, in order for the acquisition process to begin, a particular instruction is not required but, rather, a long exposure to usage in the various situations in which it occurs in real life and the need for communication is what promotes the process.

Acquisition results from exposure to an oral interaction that inserts the speaker in the world in an informal way that develops the so-called acquired competence, while learning begins with knowledge of the rules and is the result of the process of capturing the elements of a language in a conscious way that develops grammatical competence. Krashen (1982, 1985) attaches greater importance to the acquisition process, and relegates the learning process to the basic role on which the monitor works. The two processes can be simultaneous but acquisition does not depend on learning.

### b) Natural order hypothesis

In relation to the acquisition processes for the achievement of the desired competence in the target language, Krashen (1982, 1985) observed that there was a natural order in the appearance of certain formal features in linguistic production that did not correspond to the order established in academic programs or in the mother tongue of the students. Thus, it is established that some grammatical forms of L2 are acquired first, while others are acquired some time later. This hypothesis also seems to indicate a universal phenomenon and provides a correlation between the order of acquisition of the rules of the language and the degree of correction in its use. If the natural order hypothesis is admitted, it must also

be taken into account that, in order for the learning of an L2 to take place, the grammatical structures that would be taught in the sequence in which they are acquired in L1 would have to be ordered. This would require, however, that this natural order had been scientifically proven in all languages.

However, although there is research on the problem, these include a few structures in only some of the most studied languages, so this information is not sufficient to serve as a basis for the development of L2 teaching materials.

### **c) Input hypothesis**

This hypothesis is based mainly on the observation of the acquisition process and not on the learning process. It responds to the formula  $i + l$ , which assumes that the student has acquired a certain level of competence that allows them to understand a certain level of input, but if at this stage they receive an input whose complexity exceeds the current capacity for understanding, then acquisition will occur, that is,  $i + l$ . The model proposes that it is the understanding of the messages transmitted through new linguistic forms (oral and written) that allows linguistic development. It also foresees that fluency in speech cannot be taught and that the individual only speaks when they feel ready to do so, which implies the existence of individual variables. With respect to typical errors of linguistic production in the first stages, it is acknowledged that they will be corrected over time by means of greater exposure to the language, which will also depend on the quantity and quality of the input provided to the learner. For the input to be optimal, it must be understandable, interesting and relevant and be offered in sufficient quantity or quantity and not be grammatically sequenced.

### **d) Monitor hypothesis**

This hypothesis is based on learning and holds that the conscious knowledge of grammar rules acts as a control mechanism that manages language performance and leads the speaker to self-correct if necessary. 'Monitor' refers to an internal mechanism in the student's mind that could be equated with a linguistic awareness. This mechanism is concerned with linguistic correction and is activated when a deviation from the norm occurs. However, the monitor only acts if these three conditions exist:

- a) sufficient time is available
- b) more attention is given to the form than to the content being transmitted
- c) the grammar rules are known.

These three conditions are necessary, but not sufficient for the monitor to activate. Its function is limited because, according to Krashen's theory (1982, 1985), learning does not produce acquisition. The hypothesis predicts that the degree of conscious use of the mon-



itor by the speaker will be variable, and depending on the intensity with which it is used, the learning process of L2 can be accelerated or delayed.

### **e) Affective filter hypothesis**

This hypothesis attributes an important role in the acquisition process to factors external to the process itself, such as intrinsic motivation to learn the language or the degree of anxiety and self-confidence, for example, of the learner. It contemplates the fact that the understandable *input* is necessary for the acquisition of the L2, but not sufficient, once the receiver is open to the input. The affective filter is a mental barrier that can prevent or encourage the acquisition of the received message. When the affective filter is closed, the receiver can understand what they read or hear but that does not result in acquisition of structures, and can even lead to fossilization<sup>1</sup>.

On the other hand, when the affective filter is open, the receiver is inserted in the message so that they temporarily forget that they are listening to or reading another language and this facilitates the acquisition of the structures. It can be said, then, that the environment in which learning takes place must be motivating, stimulating and devoid of anxiety.

## **2.6. Contrastive analysis model (CA)**

The proposal of contrastive analysis is based, on one hand, on the psychological perspective related to its conception of language acquisition in behaviourism, and, on the other, in structuralism, using it as a model of linguistic description (see Lado, 1957).

For behaviorists, language learning is based on the acquisition of behavioural habits, a capacity for linguistic response in the face of linguistic or non-linguistic stimuli in context. Lado, pioneer of CA, extends to the learning of second languages the principle that any learning process tends to reuse previously acquired knowledge and skills, so that previous knowledge will be transferred over the new ones.

Structural linguistics provides CA with a model of language description that aims to be coherent, comprehensive and universal. Lado (1957) employs the contributions of Fries (1945), because this model allows for homogeneous descriptions of different languages and, in turn, linguistic productions in any language can be compared with scientific rigor.

The learning of an L2 will be conceived as a specific and differentiated process from learning the mother tongue because it will contribute to learning different linguistic behaviours

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1 Fossilization is a phenomenon that does not appear in L1, but is common in L2. The causes of fossilization can range from the affinity established between the learner's mother tongue and the target language, to the type of teaching carried out.

that will be added to those that have been acquired in the mother tongue and that will be maintained as separate. Learning will be seen as a contradictory process in which the learner will tend to transfer, in a new and different system from the one they already know, linguistic habits only valid for their mother tongue.

Contrastive analysis proposes comparison of the mother tongue with the second language. When the structures of the two languages do not coincide, it can be foreseen that the student will tend to transfer to the L2 the linguistic habits learned in their mother tongue. In the spaces where there is coincidence, the transfer will favor the learning of the second language.

Knowledge of the two languages will allow us to see what are the conflicting points in learning and to anticipate mistakes before they occur.

### **2.7. Error analysis model (EA)**

The abandonment of the predictive nature of contrastive analysis implies a change in the strategy of scholars. The mistakes made by students in their productions will be observed and then the linguistic systems will be compared. This new attitude focuses attention on real productions and this makes evident the inadequacy of recourse to the idea of transfer of the mother tongue to explain the errors. Thus, it becomes clear that the complexity of the problems observed requires an overhaul of the theoretical models applied.

Within this framework, error analysis proposes, on the one hand, a theoretical objective: to better explain the learning processes and, on the other hand, a practical objective: to propose grounded pedagogical proposals. To achieve this, the focus is on the study of learners' productions.

The error analysis model assumes that the learning process is a phase in which errors and failed attempts are inevitable and necessary. Such errors and attempts constitute what Corder (1971) called “transitional dialect”, which undergoes a sequence of changes as learning takes place. The “interlanguage” concept of Selinker (1972) accounts for these stages and is defined as a type of transfer and learning strategy whose factors determine that transitional dialect that begins with the L1 and approaches the L2.

## **3. Factors that intervene and determine the acquisition of a language**

Selinker (1972: 213) states that “one cannot accept a theory of second language learning that does not reserve a priority place for differences between learners”. The factors that intervene and determine ASL are numerous and varied. Stern (1983: 338) takes into account the factors involved in the process of learning a second language and the relationships that exist between them, and that have given rise to the different learning models.

### 3.1. Individual factors

#### a) Age

The appropriate age for the acquisition of a second language (ASL) has been a highly debated topic as well as one of the most studied factors for its degree of complexity and relationship with the rest of the factors involved in the ASL. This debate has opened a great controversy between different researchers and the theories that they defend. On the one hand, there are theories that defend the learning of a language as a unique process that can be concluded as a child or as an adult. It should be noted that adults would learn more easily. These theories argue that age does not affect the outcome of learning but it does affect rhythm. So, the greater the cognitive maturity and the greater the experience, the greater the acquisition (Ausubel and others, 1990).

Other theories indicate that we can find different difficulties in each of the areas of learning related to the age at which the individual learns. Hatch (1978) and McLaughlin (1987) state, for example, when acquiring an L2, adults often encounter obstacles in phonology. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1994) observe that adults outperform children in syntax, in negotiation of meaning and, consequently, achieve better *input*.

Finally, we will highlight the theories that argue that children tend to be more at an advantage, especially in the last stages of ASL. Some educators such as Erasmus, Montaigne or Locke were in favor of starting learning at an early age.

From the point of view of neurolinguistics, there has been talk of a “critical period”, where the individual is able to learn other languages more easily. After that period the skill diminishes because of the loss of brain plasticity. That period would correspond to the years before puberty, since it is a biologically active period in linguistic development. Larsen-Freeman and Long point out that the reasons are theoretical and practical:

[...] from a theoretical point of view, those who have concluded from the data that children and adults acquire differently and/or achieve different results, propose different learning mechanisms and processes for each. Conversely, theorists who believe that children and adults can achieve a similar ASL will propose something like a model according to which  $L1 = L2$ , and where the acquisition mechanisms and processes work regardless of the age of the learner (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1994: 139).

Schumann (1976) explains that children acquire a second language more quickly because of the greater social and emotional permeability they present to the influence of languages.

As we have seen, we are faced with a controversy that, as Stern (1983: 366) points out, has not served to clarify or to determine at what age the teaching of a foreign language should begin. However, we can say that it is a factor that intervenes in the rhythm and results of the target language.

## b) Aptitude

The concept of “aptitude for languages” would correspond to the speed with which the target language is acquired, so that it is common to affirm that there are students who have a special gift for learning languages that others lack. This “gift” is closely related to the concept of “special skills”, which have been described and evaluated with the help of measurement techniques by educational psychology.

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1994: 152) consider the definition of the term “aptitude” used by Carroll.

The concept of aptitude corresponds to a notion that, when we approach an exercise or a specific learning program, should be attributed to the individual, who possesses an active condition that allows them to learn—as long as they are motivated and have the possibility of doing so. It is presumed that this ability depends on a certain combination of more or less constant characteristics in the individual (Carroll, 1981: 84).

Carroll proposed four independent skills to determine the ability to acquire a foreign language. These are subsequently developed by Skehan (1998):

1. Ability to encode phonetics: an ability to identify distinctive sounds, to establish associations between these sounds and the symbols that represent them and to retain such associations.
2. Grammar sensitivity: ability to recognize the grammatical functions of words (or other linguistic entities) in syntactic structures.
3. Ability to learn a language inductively: ability to infer or deduce the rules that govern a series of linguistic materials provided they are samples that allow such inferences.
4. The relationship between language learning capacity in the mother tongue and in the second language, which is similar in each person.
5. Ability to handle decontextualized material, such as that found in formal language use tasks: grammar, reading, writing or vocabulary.

Together with Sapon (1959), Carroll designed a test to carry out a language proficiency measurement technique: Modern language aptitude test (MLAT). It was developed to measure the ability of adolescents and adults in a foreign language and consists of five subtests:

1. Learning numbers: students have to memorize the name of certain numbers in an imaginary language, and write them down to make new combinations that they have to listen to.
2. Phonetic writing: associate graphic symbols and sounds.

3. Tracks for spelling: detect a word from the phonetic interpretation of it.
4. Words within sentences: identify words or phrases in a sentence whose syntactic function is equal to that of other different structures.
5. Associated pairs: study how some words of your mother tongue are translated into an artificial language for a short period of time and then take a multiple choice test in which you have to recognize the translations.

Pimsleur (1966), on the other hand, differentiates three components in the aptitude factor:

1. Verbal intelligence: familiarity with words and ability to reason analytically about verbal material.
2. Motivation.
3. Auditory ability.

The language proficiency test designed by Language Aptitude Battery (Pimsleur, 1966), (especially for teenagers), consists of six parts:

1. Average score
2. Interest
3. Vocabulary
4. Linguistic analysis
5. Distinction of sounds
6. Correspondence sound/symbol.

Between the tests of Carroll and that of Pimsleur (1966), we find similarities:

1. Ability to recognize and discriminate speech sounds.
2. Ability to establish relationships between sounds and graphic representation.
3. Ability to recognize formal characteristics of languages: grammatical sensitivity.

Most scholars consider aptitude to be a learned and not innate factor. Neufeld (1978) believes that the ability to learn the second language depends on previous learning experiences and Krashen (1981) considers, similarly, that aptitude is related exclusively to learning, and not to acquisition.

### **c) Intelligence**

Intelligence as a set of skills to process linguistic information inductively. Ability that increases with the learner's age and as a consequence all stored knowledge is developed and expanded.

Determining the degree of intelligence of an individual poses difficulty since it is subject to other factors such as memory, attention, etc. Different intelligence tests calculate different aspects such as the ability to understand, the ability to relate concepts or the individual's ability for abstraction. In the field of linguistics, we also have tests that analyse verbal intelligence and assess the degree of learning ability of linguistic analysis. However, Gardner (1983) considers that the human being has different intelligences that develop in a different way and, therefore, the intelligence tests cannot predict the degree of success of the student in all skills involved.

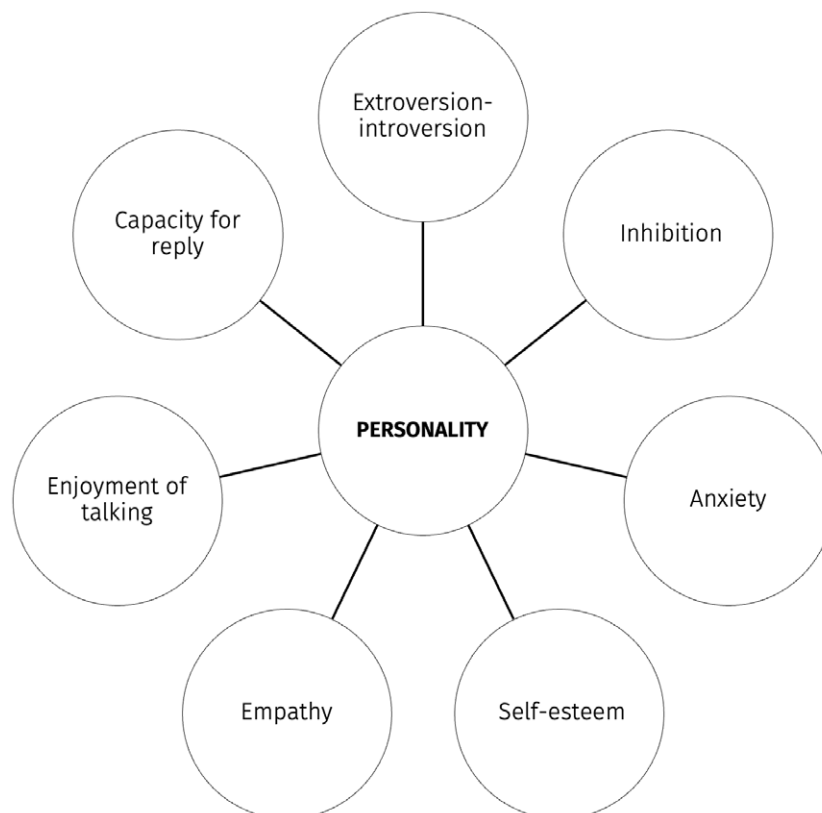
#### d) Personality

The personality of the student can influence the learning of foreign languages or second languages but the measurement of this factor is sometimes difficult as well as the continuity in the investigation, which is what determines its reliability. Personality characteristics are more important in the learning process, in the acquisition of conversation and exchange skills.

It is possible to highlight different personality traits or characteristics that would influence the acquisition of second languages:

**FIGURE 1**

Features that influence the acquisition of second languages (Belda Torrijos, 2016)



Extroversion-Introversion. It is believed that introverted students do not learn as quickly as extroverts because of the characteristics associated with extroversion, active attitude and the ability to take risks. These characteristics, however, can also be detrimental to the learning process and, therefore, it should be considered that introverted students might listen, think and learn the same or more than others.

Inhibition. Factors such as fear of failure, fear of feeling inferior, fear of not feeling part of the group...can limit or prevent class participation or the learner's ability to express what they have learned.

Anxiety. Every human being shows greater or lesser anxiety. There will be less learning when the degree of worry or distress is at its highest level. When anxiety is at an average level it can benefit learning as long as it responds to the ability to take risks.

Self-esteem. The fear of rejection has a strong impact on the learning process. The student should be proud of their learning skills and successes.

Empathy. So that learning does not fail, empathy is decisive to perceive the subjective experience of the learner. On the other hand, when a second language is learned, listeners must understand the speaker's intentions and emotions and try to understand the message.

A liking for conversation. This capacity, like extroversion/introversion, can have a positive or negative impact on the results of the ASL.

Capacity for reply. This characteristic refers to the response mechanisms of each individual produced by internal and external factors such as motivation.

### **e) Attitude**

Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert at McGill University, Canada (Gardner and Lambert, 1959), and, later, Gardner and others (1979), began studies on students' social attitudes, values and motivation in relation to other individual factors. The research focuses on prejudices, stereotypes and social attitudes towards ethnic, religious and linguistic groups. Gardner and Lambert focused their attention on the students' attitude towards language classes considering attitudes towards the community and people who speak the language under study, attitudes towards learning languages in general and attitudes towards learning language.

Burstall and others (1974) and others like Spolsky (1969) consider that there are other factors that influence attitude and motivation in ASL:

In a typical situation of linguistic learning there are a number of people who maintain attitudes among themselves that can be significant: the learner, the teacher, the classmates and the par-

ents of the learner and the speakers of the language. Each relationship can perfectly reveal itself as a factor that controls the learner's motivation to acquire the language (Spolsky, 1969: 273).

Focusing on these factors cited by Spolsky (1969), Larsen-Freeman and Long (1994: 163) point out several factors that would interfere with the acquisition of second languages:

1. Parents. Gardner and Lambert (1972) argue that parents' attitudes towards second language speakers are directly reflected in their children. Stern (1975) points out that the attitudes of parents towards the language that their children study directly determines success or school failure.
2. Peers. The influence and attitudes of classmates in the classroom is another factor that will influence learning. Detroit social dialects and observed that they were grouped by sex, age and socioeconomic status, and the main reason was the influence of peers.
3. The learning context. Students' attitudes towards the context where learning takes place can be decisive. Schumann (1976) affirms that if the teacher's program does not meet the student's expectations, the students may have negative attitudes towards the learning situation to the point of abandoning the study of the language.
4. Teachers. Gardner and Lambert (1972) consider that teachers' attitudes are decisive for student learning. The attitude of the teachers, their personality, their teaching style, the teaching materials they use, how to address students, etc., will determine the quality and quantity of student learning.
5. Ethnicity. Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) affirm that belonging to an ethnic group determines attitudes and behavior towards those who are not members of the group and consequently influences the mastery of the second language. The theory of social accommodation explains that during conversation there are changes in speech that can be translated into convergence and these changes would be translated as the desire of the speaker to belong to the community of speakers of the target language. Speakers modify their speech to resemble listeners more closely.

Finally, attitude can also vary positively or negatively depending on the success or failure obtained from learning. Skehan (1998) confirms that success acts as a reward and reinforces or increases motivation and failure decreases the expectations, sense of effectiveness and overall motivation of the student.

### 3.2. Internal factors

Internal factors are related to everything that includes the knowledge of the world that the individual possesses, the mother tongue and their linguistic competence. These factors focus the learner's processing of information, the individual perception they have of



the world around them, how they acquire the information and how they use that information in a given situation. All this is determined by the cognitive style of the individual. It is difficult and confusing to measure the cognitive style because each has its singularity and as a consequence it is difficult to specify its degree of influence in the acquisition of second languages.

There are students who capture information related to their environment and collect data. These students study the target language understood as a whole, structurally, while there are others who do not relate the concept to its surroundings and formulate rules, they study the language analytically, word for word. The first group appear to communicate better in the target language, but they make more mistakes. The latter think more about what they are going to say, they make less mistakes but they have little fluidity.

Spontaneity will be another factor to take into account, the greater the spontaneity, the less reflection and, consequently, the greater the number of errors.

### **3.3. External factors**

Factors external to the individual establish the rhythm and degree of knowledge of the target language, among others. The input, the output and the formal instruction are all important.

#### **a) Input**

The input is essential in learning an L2, since it is the input of information and responds to the following question: What does the L2 student learn? For the input to achieve its final goal it must be understood or absorbed (intake). The context is essential for the input, since in the first studies that were carried out on the ASL it was understood that the way in which a student assimilated an L2 depended solely on the input that surrounded the student. It consisted of repeating what was heard or perceived through the input so that later L2 was achieved.

However, neither the learners of an L1 nor those of an L2 simply repeat what they hear or observe, since mistakes are constantly made. Subsequently, a new theory appeared that contradicted the previous one, in which the input was understood not only as the information that surrounds the student but also as a result of conflict between that information and the parallel structure of abstract and concrete information already possessed by the individual. Through the confrontations arising, the learner makes cognitive associations, so that in one way or another the use of language is established. In short, the focus of study is which particularities of the input intervene to a greater degree in the acquisition of L2 to obtain a more adequate environment and facilitate ASL. Thus, Krashen talks about the "input hypothesis" in order to explain how an L2 is obtained, underlining the fact that the input must be understood in a way that understanding the language favors the learning of the target language.

In relation to this, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1994: 208) turn to Chomsky to affirm that the input “is degenerated in the sense that it is inappropriate in different ways. It usually does not contain negative tests or information for the learner to determine what cannot be produced in a given language”. An example of this may be the input inequalities between the L1 and L2. In an L1 the fact that the teacher is not accustomed to correcting in an obvious, systematic way the grammatical mistakes that children make, we find that many teachers simply modify the student's mistakes. Research also demonstrates that the speech that adults use with children is different from normal speech, that is, adjustments are made to make understanding easier. Although there are certain parallels between learning an L1 and an L2 in relation to the input, we can also see various differences between the two. Age is an element that establishes the type of input that the individual obtains, for example, children learn L1 with input modified and adapted for them. This might not be the case initially, but only in cases where the interlocutor notices the lack of understanding of the L2 learner. At such time, the input is modified – the extent and type of modification depending on the topic being talked about and the knowledge that the L2 student possesses. That is, when the student's lack of knowledge is greater, the greater the change or transformation of the input.

In this way, continuing with the input differences between L1 and L2, a simple input in L1 is still correct; however, in L2 the input may be incorrect as can be seen in the following example:

- a) First communication between a native and an L2 student with a very limited knowledge of the target language: “Me gustaría saber, solo te apetece, si quieres venir a tomar café” (The student does not understand).
- b) Second communication: “Quiero tomar un café contigo” (Understanding fails again).
- c) Third communication: “Tú tomar café” (The student has managed to understand).

In short, when the input has to undergo modifications to make comprehension easier for an L2 learner, it is begun by adapting while trying to respect the grammar rules, although if there is still lack of comprehension, then the interlocutor will have to use other incorrect ways so that the individual can understand what is being said. Likewise, the L2 student will communicate differently from the children who learn L1 in terms of the use of messages and intentions, because it is essential for an L2 learner to communicate even if they later have other needs such as, for example, integration into a group, establishing personal relationships, etc. However, further mention must be made of intake, that is, the absorption or acquisition of the input, since it is important. Krashen (1981) describes intake as follows:

“Intake” is, simply, where language acquisition comes from, that subset of linguistic input that helps the acquirer acquire language (Krashen, 1981: 101).

In this way, *input* and *intake* intervene so that the target language is learned with greater agility, in the order that the learner follows and in relation to the new elements that

are being incorporated and that at the same time will influence in the greater or lesser mastery of the L2.

The order of the elements previously mentioned, that are integrated into the interlanguage, is usually not very variable to the point that we are able to generalize on how the structures are assimilated or learned in relation to the cognitive processes that are needed for this learning. In relation to the order of the elements, Kim Griffin (2005: 134) designates it as a “route” and makes the following statement: “This route consists of the L2 learner's incorporation of unanalysed linguistic formulas, structures that he builds, and loose elements that he observes with great frequency”. It demonstrates how altered structures can become in sequencing or order due to the greater or lesser degree of accessibility to these structures.

As for the speed or agility that the student can achieve, it will have to do with these two factors: the *input* and the *intake*. All this will depend on the following aspects: the diversity of information, its quality and the possibility of generating hypothesis in the target language.

### **b) Output**

*Output* is considered another very relevant external factor, since it is about the giving of information and is related to everything that the individual uses, linguistically, to talk. The output helps in the development of an accessible input by the native speaker, because it is they who receive the information that the L2 student has produced and, therefore, can assess the level of interlanguage so that the native speaker can adapt the level of their speech and, thus, facilitate comprehension. However, Swain (1995) states the following:

Under some conditions, output facilitates second language learning in ways that are different from, or enhance, those of input [...] Noticing a problem ‘pushes’ the learner to modify his / her output. In doing so, the learner may sometimes be forced into a more syntactic processing mode than might occur in comprehension. Thus, output may set ‘noticing’ train, triggering mental processes that lead to modified output (Swain, 1995: 371).

Therefore, the *output* will help to simplify the learning of an L2, since the interlocutor can force the learner to modify their *output*, as previously explained in the output hypothesis.

### **c) Formal instruction**

Finally, we consider formal instruction. Various studies underline how formal instruction positively influences in sequencing (for example, the use of grammar rules) and the speed of learning of the L2.

But we should ask ourselves, to what extent does formal instruction determine the acquisition of an L2? Formal instruction is immediately involved in the sequencing of learning of the different structures that constitute the target language. Likewise, the student finds very different degrees of difficulty during the process of these structures (for example, “comen”

is simpler than “lo comen” and this is simpler than “se lo comen”) or also, lack of univocity (the use of irregular forms in the verbal paradigm), or the degree of conceptual abstraction. Therefore, linguists have the ability to institute a sequential order, referring to interlanguage structures from lesser to greater degree of difficulty in processing.

During the previous century, the idea arose that learning an L2 was exactly the same as learning an L1 and, therefore, the assimilation of the target language was limited to the parameters of the mother tongue. Accordingly, mechanical learning was proposed in which the formal instruction of an L2 was transformed into a kind of practice or rehearsal, that is, the L2 was conceived as a cluster of rules that the student had to learn and then repeat. But luckily, linguists realized that this process was not appropriate for the type of learning in which sequencing is manifested naturally in the process of developing knowledge of the target language.

Formal instruction does not only play a part in sequencing but also influences the speed of the acquisition of the L2. This only happens, however, when the language is not spontaneous, since in the natural use of a language, the student has a sequence that is related to the importance of learning in order to communicate.

In short, the learning of an L2 requires a process in which students start reproducing the target language until they reach a level of free and independent communication. Achieving such a point of mastery of the L2 involves a large number of very significant factors that, at the same time, include others such as those previously mentioned: individual or internal and external.

#### **4. Contributions of psycholinguistics**

We have used psycholinguistics several times before, not only in order to define what language learning is, but to schematically understand the cognitive processes that originate in L2 thanks to the student. However, we believe it necessary to dedicate a section to this science, due to the great contributions that it has made, especially to the field of applied linguistics.

What today is called psycholinguistics, was initially termed language psychology. The discipline was strengthened by others such as social psychology, communication sciences and cognitive sciences, transforming it into an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary science. It emerged in the 1950s, with linguistics and communication theory as its primary basis. However, the first contributions of psycholinguistics to the teaching/learning of second languages were based on a system of repetition and memorization. All this caused criticism between researchers, resulting in a shift towards more open and flexible approaches. In this way, during the sixties, the relevance of individual differences and cognitive variables began to be contemplated in relation to L2 learning. That is, theories of information processing

became important. Chomsky's model was adopted, as it highlights the difference between linguistic performance and competence.

The transformation that took place was so radical that from then on Psycholinguistics began to revolve around the approach of how a particular grammar is achieved based on the existence of Chomsky's innate mechanism. This approach, centered on the mother tongue, produced the so-called evolutionary psycholinguistics.

The seventies and eighties represented an important productive stage because various hypotheses from the field of social anthropology, sociology and communication sciences were collated. Together, all of them caused a great improvement in the understanding of processes of acquisition, comprehension and production of language. However, Juan Mayor (2004: 45) points out that, in the seventies, those factors participating in the acquisition and teaching of an L2 were established as follows:

- a) Communicative competence, in which discourse analysis predominates and as a result pragmatics and context become very important.
- b) Cognitive competence, in which there originates "a shift from linguistic competence to cognitive competence" named by the author, which focuses and exposes the need to establish links between cognitive processing and linguistic processing.

This approach was consolidated in the nineties when we can observe the first serious theoretical models and research on the internal classification of the cognitive system, specifically of human language.

Today, the study of the acquisition of an L2 is based on theories that are necessary for a truly empirical investigation. This would indicate that they contain a large number of factors enabling the explanation of the acquisition process. However, we must take into account that underlined by Corder:

It is virtually impossible to control all the factors involved, even if we knew, in principle, how to identify them; particularly, factors such as motivation, prior knowledge, aptitude, learning outside the classroom, teacher performance. Consequently, the conclusions obtained from these experiments cannot be generalized with confidence for other teaching situations (1992: 105).

Having outlined the origins and background of psycholinguistics, we will analyse its objectives. Psycholinguistics is a science that deals with studying language acquisition taking into account the processes that are carried out in the use of language, that is, it studies the processes involved in the understanding, acquisition and reproduction of human language.

The purpose of psycholinguistics is to present a description of the psychological processes that occur in individuals when they create and understand statements. This is recognized as "lan-

guage performance". In this way, it is essential to study how the individual obtains that ability, which Corder names "language acquisition". Therefore, the *modus operandi* used to achieve the acquisition of the language at the same time will be the primary objectives of psycholinguistics.

From this point, the need arises to create a close union between teaching procedures and learning processes. This refers to the types of procedures that originate specific learning processes. However, unfortunately, these procedures that cause learning, are often insufficient for some processes to be done. Thus, Corder emphasizes the importance of maintaining a differentiation between teaching and learning of an L2. "Until we have a much better idea of what these processes are, we cannot create—on a systematic basis and based on principles—the necessary conditions for optimal learning" (Corder, 1994: 106).

Juan Mayor (2004: 47) in his analysis of the contributions of psycholinguistics to the teaching-learning of L2, proposes several general models for the acquisition of a second language. They are models that serve as a guide for most empirical research and where a descriptive character is observed:

- a) The Krashen Motorization model hypothesis was one of the most significant theories in the 1970s and early 1980s. Krashen pointed out that there were two independent knowledge systems in the performance of an L2, these systems were: 1) The acquired system, a system that applied to learners the same language learning qualities that children used, that is, the way in which a child develops their first language or mother tongue in a natural way and that, in addition, does not reflect on the grammar rules of the same. 2) The system learned as a consequence of formal teaching and with a conscious knowledge of grammar rules. To access this learning system, three conditions must be met: having enough time (such as being able to perform an exercise in the classroom), the student must be aware and reflect on the form (for example a grammar test) and the learner must know the rule. "Krashen pointed out that the "natural order" is the superficial manifestation of the acquired system; the alteration of the order would be due to the Motorization, or intrusion of the system learned in acting exercises that favor its use" (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1994: 221). Therefore, what the Motorization hypothesis seeks is to establish a link between acquired and learned systems of an L2.
- b) The competition model of Bates and MacWhinney is based on the explanation of the linguistic behaviour of the individual but from a functional perspective. It consists of determining a correlation between form and function, so the fundamentals of convergence and competition are used. The purpose of this model is to reach an agreement between linguistic forms and functions. It differentiates four hypothetical links that are established between the different processing strategies: 1) The L2 strategies are acquired and used only in the L2. 2) The strategies of L1 are transmitted to L2. 3) The tactics of the L2 end up controlling and relieving those of the L1. 4) The new tactics acquired when learning L2 overlap L1 and L2.

- c) Synthesizing what has been explained so far, psycholinguistics will analyse acquisition, the processes that are taking place in the individual and how they carry out the implementation of the language, investigating the comprehension of the language and its production and acquisition using experimental methods like the ones we have seen. Marcos Marín and Sánchez Lobato, naming Dubois (1979), add the following:

Psycholinguistics is particularly interested in the processing through which speakers attribute meaning to their statement, “word associations” and the creation of verbal habits, general communication procedures (the subject's motivations, personality, communication situation, etc.), by learning languages, etc. (Marcos Marín and Sánchez Lobato, 1991: 21).

However, we must bear in mind that in the study of comprehension, the scientist or researcher can change the *input* and then see the alterations that are made throughout the process at the *output* level. On the other hand, it does not happen in the same way in the time that the production of the individual is studied in L2, because the possibilities of changing the *input* in this case are very low.

With respect to the previous comment by Marcos Marín and Sánchez Lobato, throughout the comprehension of the language there is a succession of processes that intercede in the input of stimuli to which a meaning is determined. This procedure is made up of several processes at the same time, where each process fulfils a certain task. They are ordered in different levels as we can see below:

- a) Basic level. This is the comprehension of phonemes and letters, is about identifying and analysing samples of primary language, both orally and in writing. In this way, the new information from outside is confronted with what the individual has in his mind.
- b) Lexical level. This is the recognition of words and their meanings. At this level the student is able to contrast the information processed in the previous level with the words that are located in a kind of mental lexicon.
- c) Syntactic and semantic level. In relation to the syntactic task, the learner links the connection that appears between the words of the same sentence, and, on the other hand, semantics investigates the global meaning of the sentence.
- d) Textual level. This is the incorporation of the text or speech into the individual's mind. In fact, this is the purpose of the language comprehension process, since understanding a language demands an individualistic processing of the components of a sentence and also adding the information in more general units of meaning. But, in all certainty, an integration is needed because the really interesting thing is how the learner manages to recognize and connect the different parts of a text or a conversation and also link it to their previous knowledge.

As for the study of language production, psycholinguistics tries to explain the mental processes that occur in the mind of the L2 student and how they are capable of transforming a mental representation of language into either acoustic format, that is, orally, or by writing. But we must point out that, when using a methodology that accounts for these processes, we are faced with the independent variables of each individual, which obviously belong to the subjective realm. This fact has probably been one of the causes for the lack of studies carried out in this field, at least if we compare them with those carried out in relation to language comprehension. However, more and more works are appearing, dealing with a large number of phenomena that are associated with linguistic production.

This has resulted in the study of the processes involved in the linguistic production of an L2 being divided into several fields such as, for example, the study of grammatical processes, oral or written processes, and even the phenomena that occur in conversational contexts.

Finally, we can say that psycholinguistics has made relevant contributions in relation to the study of learning of an L2 and these contributions continue to increase and develop. It may be of relevance to know the type of strategies and procedures performed in L2 acquisition in order to bring about improvement and, in this way, help the student to reach the highest level of proficiency in L2.

## **5. Contributions of sociolinguistics**

Sociolinguistics, as well as psycholinguistics, has been strengthened by the link between various currents and doctrines such as ethnoinguistics, sociology, dialectology and linguistic geography.

The term 'sociolinguistic' emerged in 1952 for the first time, in the work of Currie, but the first study made using this discipline was not carried until 1964, in the city of Los Angeles, by twelve specialists, under the supervision of W. Bright. However, the linguist Saussure had previously approached this notion when he affirmed that the language of the human being was still a social product.

As mentioned earlier, this science has benefitted from other lines of research, through different schools and ways of working that have converged in an identical field of study. Therefore, regarding contributions to language teaching, Francisco Moreno Fernández (2004: 86) affirms the following:

This discipline has taken some years to order its internal sections, which has probably delayed, for example, the complete development of an approach applied to the teaching of languages and other fields of manifest interest.



But how can we define sociolinguistics precisely? We could say that it is an interdisciplinary science that is responsible for studying both the field of linguistics and sociology, so it investigates language use within society and, at the same time, it attempts to include social behaviours, that is, culture, context, socioeconomic status, linguistic varieties, dialects, and so on. Therefore, “the object of study of sociolinguistics is language as a system of signs, but considered within a social context” (Francisco Moreno Fernández, 1998: 300).

Within sociolinguistics there are two branches:

- a) Synchronic sociolinguistics, which focuses on its structure and on the variants that occur in the language in different environments and that will be conditioned by the attitudes of individuals.
- b) Diachronic sociolinguistics is based on the study of linguistic change, acquisition and dissemination of languages.

It could be said that the most important thing about sociolinguistics is how it has been able to contribute a different perspective in relation to the study of language, in which it gives greater importance to the oral language. However, similarly, in the field of language teaching, the need to study social variables has emerged. Therefore, sociolinguistics intervenes in such a way in applied linguistics that socio-situational contextualization or varieties are essential, since studies reveal that better results for L2 will be achieved if the linguistic content is able to adjust to the functional needs of the students and that these needs are covered throughout the entire course.

This means that we should look towards language in its social context, as the varieties discovered, whether social or dialectic, should be considered in the teaching of an L2.

This is also the case with culture. We can see this reflected in the words of S. P. Corder, who links language and culture:

The members of a community share sets of political or ethical beliefs; they largely share the way they interpret the world, the way they classify objective phenomena and the meaning they give to that classification. The communities [...] agree on the right or wrong ways of doing things: dressing, eating, marrying, worshiping, educating their children, etc. All these things constitute their culture (1992: 67).

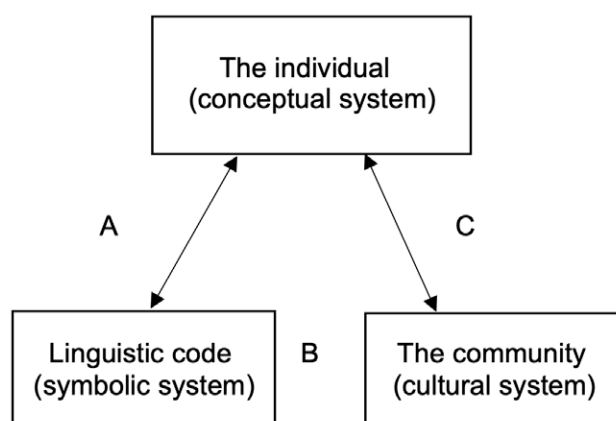
This leads us to believe that a group of people or community has a culture and a language of its own. Therefore, studying an L2 implies the learning of a culture, because obtaining a culture, regardless of whether it is part of our own community or another, foreign one, is done through language and even this is the one that intercedes between a culture and the individual.

Thus, language is seen as responsible for teaching culture that will help meet the needs of a community. In the same way, cultural differences will also be reflected in the language, revealing inequalities in their linguistic systems. This has generated controversy concerning language and ways of seeing the world, prompting questions such as: is it the language that establishes the culture or is it the opposite? Is language so because it is determined by the way in which individuals conceptualize the world—or vice versa?

In reference to this, and from the perspective of applied linguistics, we believe it is necessary to underline the words of Santos Gargallo (1999: 30): “the important thing is to know how things are done in each culture, only in this way can we be competent non-native speakers”.

## FIGURE 2

Shows a scheme in which we can see the link between the three factors: the individual, the language and the community (culture) (Corder, 1992: 10, 67-70)



In this regard, Corder (1992) believes that the sociolinguist constitutes the link between the linguistic code and the community, B, in other words, between the linguistic and cultural systems. Meanwhile, the psychologist will take care of the reciprocity that exists between the individual and the linguistic code, A. Finally, C is the correlation between the individual and the community. Therefore, it is important to remember what has been designated “cross culturally” in the context of learning an L2. Languages intervene differently, since the individuals of one community organize the world in which we live differently from the individuals of another community, so we are faced with lexical codification.

An example of this could be to observe how a language uses a single word to denominate a notion at the same time that another language makes use of different words (perhaps a paraphrase) to be able to express the same concept. For this reason, cultural inequalities are of different categories. If these categorizations are similar, this will be reflected in the similarity of the syntactic and semantic structures of the language. All this makes us think

that the learning of an L2 shows a recategorization in which the student has to learn to see the world from the perspective of the L2 community.

Following the study of Moreno Fernández (2004), the most important lines of research of sociolinguistics are the ones shown below.

### 5.1. Ethnography of communication

The ethnography of communication is a term that was introduced by the sociolinguist Hymes in 1962. This study aims to show the communicative behaviours of a group or community. It appeared after the realisation that to study fully linguistic phenomena it is not enough to consider only the internal structures of the latter but it is also essential to analyse the context in which these structures take place. Therefore, a good mastery of an L2 includes knowledge of linguistic structures at the same time as social, cultural, psychological rules, etc., of the community that uses that L2, within a given context. It is what we call “communicative competence”, which leads us to affirm that the ethnography of communication exposes the rules (implicit or explicit) governing communicative interaction. The method used is based on qualitative analysis. Its purpose is to analyse, above all, groups or communities of few members that will help in the teaching of the L2, language teaching being one of the most relevant objectives for the ethnography of communication. As we can see in the following statement: “The principles and concepts of the ethnography of communication are: speech community, communicative competence, repertoire, communicative situation, event and communicative act and routine” (Moreno Fernández, 2004: 89).

By the term “communicative repertoire” we refer to the varieties or dialects that a community usually uses and that are governed by certain rules. The “communicative situation” refers to those contexts in which the language is used, such as in the doctor's surgery, at a baptism, meetings and in all those other places in which “events” take place. The “communicative act” is a speech fragment introduced into the event. Finally, we refer to “routine” as those fixed manifestations of the language that are usually repeated.

All these notions are used when studying language teaching, although sometimes it has not been done from the point of view of language ethnography.

### 5.2. The sociology of language

The sociology of language deals with the social characteristics that constitute a language. It seeks to investigate the social problems that exist in a specific community.

There is a distinction between sociolinguistics and the sociology of language. This depends on whether the study is undertaken from the point of view of language or from that of

society. Sociolinguistics conducts a comparative study through language, while language sociology does so from the point of view of society.

Two essential notions within the sociology of language are “mastery” and “diglossia”. Diglossia is a situation in which two languages (or two varieties of the same language) are used under different conditions within a community, often by the same speakers. One language variety can be used in formal contexts and another variety in less formal environments, such as at home, among family. Mastery is evident when a linguistic variety is used as more appropriate than another variety in a specific context.

The sociology of language is also responsible for other very important notions such as “attitudes” and “linguistic planning”. This last term is very broad but mainly deals with analyzing the curricula that governments establish and impose in a community, taking into account its linguistic varieties. Marcos Marín and Sánchez Lobato (1991: 147) try to explain it in concise and simple terms:

[...] the normative work of language institutions and specialized committees, as well as all types of what is commonly called “linguistic cultivation” and all proposals for reform or standardization of languages.

Therefore, the planners are the ones in charge of selecting the kind of language education to carry out in the community, thus specifying which language or languages have to be taught and the necessary teaching hours that must be employed. After all, the sociology of language is primarily concerned, in its studies, in investigating social problems related to language teaching.

### 5.3. Variationism

Variationism emerged in the sixties at the initiative of Labov with *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* (2006). Later, studies increased in number, with the contribution of the Canadian and Philadelphian schools, which followed in the footsteps of Labov. This line of research deals with variation, hence its name, with the changes that the linguistic system undergoes and how this happens in a given context.

Variationism has two main objectives: to study the language from the social context and to study linguistic change. However, with respect to the latter, the study of linguistic change, Blas Arroyo (2005: 29) points out:

[...] not all the factors of variation lead to linguistic change, there are also numerous aspects of the language in which either no variation is observed, or this is (almost) imperceptible.

Regarding the impact that variationism has on language teaching, the results are highly beneficial because it forms a solid base from which the learner can form strategies, given

that there is a whole range of variability in the use of language on different occasions. Perhaps the problem lies in the fact that, when the individual uses the L2 to communicate, being constituted by a large number of factors, at the time one of these factors changes, the act of communication also varies. In reality, the causes for which variability occurs in a conversation can be multiple, linguistic, personal, social (in which sociolinguistics will be concerned, that is, contextual variability), etc.

According to Moreno Fernández (1998: 308), one of the objectives that has prevailed in variationism has been the development of statistical techniques to diagnose variants of linguistic phenomena:

Variationism has dedicated part of its energies to perfecting a statistical test capable of measuring to what extent a series of linguistic (contextual and functional) and extralinguistic (social and situational) factors determines the appearance of each of the variants of a variable linguistic phenomenon.

Thus, we find what has been called “variable rule analysis”. It is based on the fact that this variable rule is linked to linguistic competence, therefore, it attempts to give an explanation of the degree and conditions in which a phenomenon occurs at the linguistic and social level.

Normally, sociolinguistics usually uses two types of statistics:

- a) descriptive, based on the quantification of data that are ordered and counted;
- b) of inference, where the results of the analyses are applied very reliably to larger groups that have not been fully analysed since it would be almost impossible to collect speech samples from a city of five million inhabitants.

The results of these sociolinguistic studies offer an overview of the most notorious linguistic uses compared to the less prestigious ones, that is, what are the most frequent uses within certain communities and what characteristics correspond to the changes made in that linguistic use. In short, they will determine which are the linguistic patterns or models that occur in a community.

#### **5.4. Languages in contact**

Despite not being specifically the subject of this study, below we offer a brief synthesis of languages in contact from the sociological perspective.

In relation to this, Moreno Fernández states that:

We speak of languages being in contact when any two languages or more establish contact in any situation. We are therefore faced with a broad concept, perhaps too broad, in which there

are many different situations, from bilingual communities to the teaching/learning contexts of foreign languages, passing through territorial borders (1998: 257).

Perhaps, the most interesting and beneficial in this section is to observe the relationships between studies conducted with languages in contact and applied linguistics, since they offer excellent results in both fields. We can emphasize the so-called “contextual theories”, studies that are based on the development of ASL and which highlight the experiences of individuals rather than the qualities they may have.

However, it is necessary to underline some relevant notions not only in linguistics but also in sociolinguistics such as “pidgin” and “Creole”. The process of “pidginisation” can be observed especially in immigrants who must necessarily acquire an L2 to communicate in a very simple way, but show no concern about linguistic correctness. Therefore, we speak of “pidgin” as a linguistic variety born from two or more languages in contact with the purpose that other individuals understand, so a very simple structure is used. In addition, we find two types of “pidgin”: one of an incipient type, whose objective is that the speaker feels satisfied in relation to his needs (for example the case of a sale-purchase), and another more elaborate type, which uses a more sophisticated structure than the previous one but at the same time, still has the simplicity that characterizes “pidgin”.

On the other hand, the term “Creole” has been used by sociolinguistics to designate the “pidgin” that has become the mother tongue of a group or a community. A distinction has been made by some linguists between “pidginisation” and “Creolisation” processes, understanding the process of “Creolisation” as that by which a “pidgin” achieves a structure similar to another language, but “Creolisation” has also been used to refer to the process of syntactic simplification that makes a language when used by individuals who do not have it as their mother tongue.

In conclusion, these phenomena can be said to occur thanks to the situations in which languages are in contact, especially in those cases of bilingualism. These phenomena produce linguistic changes that sometimes have a significant impact and that can be observed at all linguistic levels and the results can be temporary or constant.

## 6. Conclusion

Throughout our research we have presented the different studies on the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language. From a theoretical prism, we have presented the contributions of psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and ethnolinguistics in the learning strategies of the Spanish language and providing various theories and definitions on the acquisition of a second language, attending to the various communicative factors for a favorable linguistic exchange:

- Nativist theories: based on the fact that learning a language is an innate ability.
- Environmentalist theories: that argue that language is acquired taking into account social relationships and the different types of communication in that relationship.
- Interactionist theories: theories that unite both theories mentioned above. They are based on the innate factors of nativist theories and the external factors of environmentalist theories to explain the learning of a language.

We have presented the individual factors (age, aptitude, attitude, intelligence and personality), external factors (*input*, *output* and formal instruction) and internal factors (related to the individual's knowledge of the world) as well as the contributions of psycholinguistics and of sociolinguistics (ethnography of communication, sociology of language, variationism and languages in contact) in applied linguistics.

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