

THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLINGUISTIC PROCESSES IN LANGUAGE USE AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

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This work develops the ideas of how language learning strategies are implicated in language learning on the one hand, and the importance of memory-based language in such strategic choice. We would like to attempt to relate strategic behaviour to underlying psycholinguistic processes and to some recent SLA research. Some models of increasing complexity are presented here. These clarify the functioning of the three stages of information processing: input, central processing, and output, as well as the interaction between these stages and the way material is represented in memory. The models show the way that, at each stage, there is a tension between attention to rule and form, on the one hand, and memory, on the other.

It is known that comprehension and communication strategies give the user greater ability to handle language successfully, but at the cost that syntax is deemphasized, even temporarily sacrificed, to enable communication and meaning extraction to proceed [3]. In the short term, while a language learner is engaged in actual communication, this is obviously beneficial, since it enables the learner to continue interaction. But in the longer term it may well be the case that the de-emphasis on syntax, when it occurs consistently, will have a negative effect on the process of interlanguage change and development. Learners may become effective communicators at a certain level of structural control, but not proceed beyond that level without considerable difficulty. This state of affairs can be represented quite usefully in terms of the constraints of the human information processing system, an approach that has virtue that language development can be related to a much broader context.

Let us consider the memory functioning. An influential model of memory functioning (Figure 1) within cognitive psychology suggested two major stages are implicated [1, 2]. The short-term memory system is considered to be limited in capacity,

and to require conscious effort and control. It is likely to be serial in operation. The long-term memory system, in contrast, is very large in capacity, can operate in parallel fashion, and may not be always susceptible to conscious control.

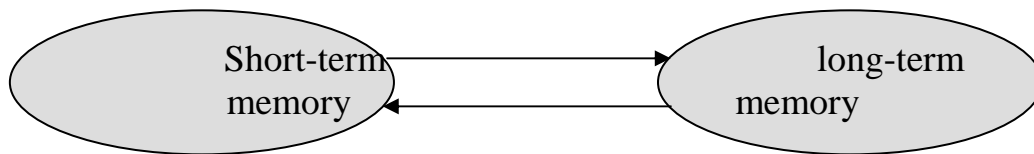


Figure 1. The functioning of memory systems

Figure 1 proposes that when input is received, the person involved has only a limited-capacity memory system available, and that such a limitation plays a fundamental constraint on how the input is handled.

References

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2. Baddeley A, (1990). *Human memory: Theory and Practice*. Needham Heights.
3. Gathercole S.E., Baddeley A.D, (1990). The role of phonological memory in Vocabulary Acquisition. A study of young children learning new names // *British Journal of Psychology*, issue 81: 439 – 454.