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LEARNER LANGUAGE

In this chapter we focus on second language learners' developing knowledge and use of their new language. We examine some of the errors that learners make and discuss what errors can tell us about their knowledge of the language and their ability to use that knowledge. We look at stages and sequences in the acquisition of some syntactic and morphological features in the second language. We also review some aspects of learners' development of vocabulary, pragmatics, and phonology.

Studying the language of second language learners

Knowing more about the development of learner language helps teachers to assess teaching procedures in the light of what they can reasonably expect to accomplish in the classroom. As we will see, some characteristics of learner language can be quite perplexing if one does not have an overall picture of the steps learners go through in acquiring features of the second language.

In presenting some of the findings of second language research, we have included a number of examples of learner language as well as some additional samples to give you an opportunity to practise analysing learner language. Of course, teachers analyse learner language all the time. They try to determine whether students have learned what has been taught and how closely their language matches the target language. But progress cannot always be measured in these terms. Sometimes language acquisition is reflected in a decrease in the use of a correct form that was based on rote memorization or chunk learning. New errors may be based on an emerging ability to extend a particular grammatical form beyond the specific items with which it was first learned. In this sense, an increase in error may be an indication of progress. For example, like first language learners, second language learners usually learn the irregular past tense forms of certain common verbs before they learn to apply the regular simple past *-ed* marker. That means that a learner who says 'I buyed a bus ticket' may know more

about English grammar than one who says 'I bought a bus ticket'. The one who says 'buyed' knows a rule for forming the past tense and has applied it to an irregular verb. Without further information, we cannot conclude that the one who says 'bought' would use the regular past *-ed* marker where it is appropriate, but the learner who says 'buyed' has provided evidence of developing knowledge of a systematic aspect of English. Teachers and researchers cannot read learners' minds, so they must infer what learners know by observing what they do. We observe their spontaneous language use, but we also design procedures that help to reveal more about the knowledge underlying their observable use of language. Without these procedures, it is often difficult to determine whether a particular behaviour is representative of something systematic in a learner's current language knowledge or simply an isolated item, learned as a chunk.

Like first language learners, second language learners do not learn language simply through imitation and practice. They produce sentences that are not exactly like those they have heard. These new sentences appear to be based on internal cognitive processes and prior knowledge that interact with the language they hear around them. Both first and second language acquisition are best described as developing systems with their own evolving rules and patterns, not as imperfect versions of the target language.

In Chapter 1 we saw that children's knowledge of the grammatical system is built up in predictable sequences. For instance, grammatical morphemes such as the *-ing* of the present progressive or the *-ed* of the simple past are not acquired at the same time, but in sequence. Furthermore, the acquisition of certain grammatical features is similar for children in different environments. As children continue to hear and use their language, they are able to revise these systems so that they increasingly resemble the language spoken in their environment. Are there developmental sequences for second language acquisition? How does the prior knowledge of the first language affect the acquisition of the second (or third) language? How does instruction affect second language acquisition? Are there differences between learners whose only contact with the new language is in a language course and those who use the language in daily life? These are some of the questions researchers have sought to answer, and we will address them in this chapter as well as in Chapters 5 and 6.

Contrastive analysis, error analysis, and interlanguage

Until the late 1960s, people tended to see second language learners' speech simply as an incorrect version of the target language. According to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), errors were often assumed to be

the result of transfer from learners' first language. As we saw in Chapter 2, however, not all errors made by second language learners can be explained in terms of first language transfer alone. A number of studies show that many errors can be explained better in terms of learners' developing knowledge of the structure of the target language rather than an attempt to transfer patterns of their first language. Furthermore, some of the errors are remarkably similar to those made by young first language learners for example, the use of a regular *-ed* past tense ending on an irregular verb.

A simplified version of the CAH would predict that, where differences exist, errors would be bi-directional, that is, for example, French speakers learning English and English speakers learning French would make errors on parallel linguistic features. Helmut Zobl (1980) observed that this is not always the case. For example, in English, direct objects, whether nouns or pronouns, come after the verb ('The dog eats the cookie. The dog eats it.'). In French, direct objects that are nouns follow the verb (*Le chien mange le biscuit*—literally, 'The dog eats the cookie'). However, direct object pronouns precede the verb (*Le chien le mange*—literally, 'The dog it eats'). The CAH would predict that a native speaker of English might make the error of saying: *Le chien mange le* when learning French, and that a native speaker of French might say 'The dog it ate' when learning English. In fact, English speakers learning French are more likely to make the predicted error than French speakers learning English. This may be due to the fact that English speakers learning French hear many examples of sentences with subject-verb-object word order (for example, *Le chien mange le biscuit*) and make the incorrect generalization—based on both the word order of their first language and evidence from the second language—that all direct objects come after the verb. French-speaking learners of English, on the other hand, hearing and seeing no evidence that English direct object pronouns precede verbs, do not tend to use this pattern from their first language.

Eric Kellerman (1986) and others also observed that learners have intuitions about which language features they can transfer from their first language to the target language and which are less likely to be transferable. For example, most learners believe that idiomatic or metaphorical expressions cannot simply be translated word for word.

As a result of the finding that many aspects of learners' language could not be explained by the CAH, a number of researchers began to take a different approach to analysing learners' errors. This approach, which developed during the 1970s, became known as 'error analysis' and involved detailed description and analysis of the kinds of errors second language learners make. The goal of this research was to discover what learners really know about the language. As Pit Corder said in a famous article published in 1967, when learners produce 'correct' sentences, they may simply be repeating

something they have already heard; when they produce sentences that differ from the target language, we may assume that these sentences reflect the learners' current understanding of the rules and patterns of that language. 'Error analysis' differed from contrastive analysis in that it did not set out to predict errors. Rather, it sought to discover and describe different kinds of errors in an effort to understand how learners process second language data. Error analysis was based on the hypothesis that, like child language, second language learner language is a system in its own right—one that is rule-governed and predictable.

Larry Selinker (1972) gave the name INTERLANGUAGE to learners' developing second language knowledge. Analysis of a learner's interlanguage shows that it has some characteristics influenced by previously learned languages, some characteristics of the second language, and some characteristics, such as the omission of function words and grammatical morphemes, that seem to be general and to occur in all or most interlanguage systems. Interlanguages have been found to be systematic, but they are also dynamic, continually evolving as learners receive more input and revise their hypotheses about the second language. The path through language acquisition is not necessarily smooth and even. Learners have bursts of progress, then seem to reach a plateau for a while before something stimulates further progress. Selinker also coined the term FOSSILIZATION to refer to the fact that, some features in a learner's language may stop changing. This may be especially true for learners whose exposure to the second language does not include instruction or the kind of feedback that would help them to recognize differences between their interlanguage and the target language.

Analysing learner language

The following texts were written by two learners of English, one a French-speaking secondary school student, the other a Chinese-speaking adult learner. Both learners were describing a cartoon film entitled *The Great Toy Robbery* (National Film Board of Canada). After viewing the film, they were asked to retell the story in writing, as if they were telling it to someone who had not seen the film.

Read the texts and examine the errors made by each learner. Do they make the same kinds of errors? In what ways do the two interlanguages differ?

Learner 1: French first language, secondary school student

During a sunny day, a cowboy go in the desert with his horse. he has a big hat. His horse eat a flour. In the same time, Santa Clause go in a city to give some surprises. He has a red costume and a red packet of surprises. You have three robbers in the mountain who sees Santa Clause with a king of glaces that it permitted us to see at a long distance. Every robbers have a horse. They go in the way of Santa

Clause, not Santa Clause but his pocket of surprises. After they will go in a city and they go in a saloon. [...]

(unpublished data from P. M. Lightbown and B. Barkman)

Learner 2: Chinese first language, adult

This year Christmas comes soon! Santa Claus ride a one horse open sleigh to sent present for children. on the back of his body has big packet. it have a lot of toys. in the way he meet three robbers. They want to take his big packet. Santa Claus no way and no body help, so only a way give them, then three robbers ride their horse dashing through the town. There have saloon, they go to drink some beer and open the big packent. They plays toys in the Bar. They meet a cow boy in the salbon.

(unpublished data provided by M. J. Martens)

Perhaps the most striking thing here is that many error types are common to both learners. Both make errors of spelling and punctuation that we might find in the writing of a young native speaker of English. Even though French uses grammatical morphemes to indicate person and number on verbs and Chinese does not, both these learners make errors of subject–verb agreement, both leaving off the third person *-s* marker and overusing it when the subject is plural ('a cowboy go' and 'three robbers in the mountain who sees' by Learner 1 and 'Santa Claus ride' and 'they plays' by Learner 2). Such errors reflect learners' understanding of the second language system itself rather than an attempt to transfer characteristics of their first language. They are sometimes referred to as 'developmental' errors because they are similar to those made by children acquiring English as their first language. Sometimes these are errors of overgeneralization, that is, errors caused by trying to use a rule in a context where it does not belong, for example, the *-s* ending on the verb in 'they plays'. Sometimes the errors are better described as SIMPLIFICATION, where elements of a sentence are left out or where all verbs have the same form regardless of person, number, or tense.

One can also see, especially in Learner 2's text, the influence of classroom experience. An example is the use of formulaic expressions such as 'one horse open sleigh' which is taken verbatim from a well-known Christmas song that had been taught and sung in his ESL class. The vivid 'dashing through the town' probably comes from the same source.

For those who are familiar with the English spoken by native speakers of French, some of the errors (for example, preposition choice 'in the same time') made by the first learner will be seen as probably based on French. Similarly, those familiar with the English of Chinese speakers may recognize some word order patterns (for example, 'on the back of his body has big

packet') as based on Chinese patterns. These are called transfer or 'interference' errors. What is most clear, however, is that it is often difficult to determine the source of errors. Thus, while error analysis has the advantage of describing what learners actually do rather than what they might do, it does not always give us clear insights into why they do it. Furthermore, as Jacquelyn Schachter pointed out in a 1974 article, learners sometimes avoid using certain features of language that they perceive to be difficult for them. This avoidance may lead to the absence of certain errors, leaving the analyst without information about the learners' developing interlanguage. That is, the absence of particular errors is difficult to interpret. The phenomenon of 'avoidance' may itself be a part of the learner's systematic second language performance.

Developmental sequences

Second language learners, like first language learners, pass through sequences of development: what is learned early by one is learned early by others.

Among first language learners, the existence of developmental sequences may not seem surprising because their language learning is partly tied to their cognitive development and to their experiences in learning about relationships among people, events, and objects around them. But the cognitive development of adult or adolescent second language learners is much more stable, and their experiences with the language are likely to be quite different, not only from the experiences of a little child, but also different from each other. Furthermore, second language learners already know another language that has different patterns for creating sentences and word forms. In light of this, it is more remarkable that we find developmental sequences that are similar in the developing interlanguage of learners from different backgrounds and also similar to those observed in first language acquisition of the same language. Moreover, the features of the language that are heard most frequently are not always easiest to learn. For example, virtually every English sentence has one or more articles ('a' or 'the'), but even advanced learners have difficulty using these forms correctly in all contexts. Finally, although the learners' first language does have an influence, many aspects of these developmental stages are similar among learners from many different first language backgrounds.

In Chapter 1 we saw some developmental sequences for English child language acquisition of grammatical morphemes, negation, and questions. Researchers in second language acquisition have also examined these features, as well as others.

Grammatical morphemes

Some studies have examined the development of grammatical morphemes by learners of English as a second language in a variety of environments, at different ages, and from different first language backgrounds. In analysing each learner's speech, researchers identify the OBLIGATORY CONTEXTS for each morpheme, that is, the places in a sentence where the morpheme is necessary to make the sentence grammatically correct. For example, in the sentence 'Yesterday I play baseball for two hours', the adverb 'yesterday' creates an obligatory context for a past tense, and 'for two hours' tells us that the required form is a simple past ('played') rather than a past progressive ('was playing'). Similarly, 'two' creates an obligatory context for a plural *-s* on 'hours'. For the analysis, obligatory contexts for each grammatical morpheme are counted separately, that is, one count for simple past, one for plural, one for third person singular present tense, and so on. After counting the number of obligatory contexts, the researcher counts the correctly supplied morphemes. The next step is to divide the number of correctly supplied morphemes by the total number of obligatory contexts to answer the question 'what is the percentage accuracy for each morpheme?' An accuracy score is created for each morpheme, and these can then be ranked from highest to lowest, giving an ACCURACY ORDER for the morphemes.

The overall results of the studies suggested an order which, while not identical to the developmental sequence found for first language learners, was similar among second language learners from different first language backgrounds. For example, most studies showed a higher degree of accuracy for plural than for possessive, and for *-ing* than for regular past (*-ed*). Stephen Krashen summarized the order as shown in Figure 4.1. The diagram should be interpreted as showing that learners will produce the morphemes in higher boxes with higher accuracy than those in lower boxes, but that within boxes, there is no clear pattern of difference.

The similarity among learners suggests that the accuracy order cannot be described or explained in terms of transfer from the learners' first language, and some researchers saw this as strong evidence against the CAH. However, a thorough review of all the 'morpheme acquisition' studies shows that the learners' first language does have an influence on acquisition sequences. For example, learners whose first language has a possessive form that resembles the English *'s* (such as German and Danish) seem to acquire the English possessive earlier than those whose first language has a very different way of forming the possessive (such as French or Spanish). And even though 'article' appears early in the sequence, learners from many language backgrounds (including Slavic languages and Japanese) continue to struggle with this aspect of English, even at advanced levels. For example, learners may do well in supplying articles in certain obligatory contexts but not others. If the

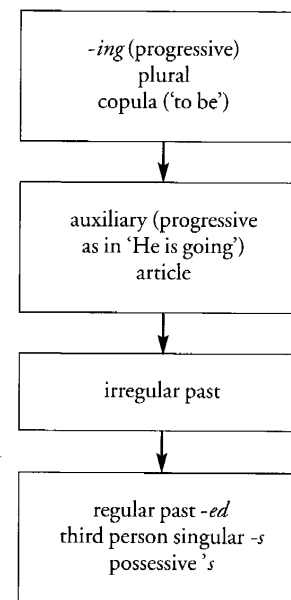


Figure 4.1 Krashen's (1977) summary of second language grammatical morpheme acquisition sequence

language sample that is analysed contains only the 'easier' obligatory contexts, the learner may have a misleadingly high accuracy score. Another reason why something as difficult as English articles appears to be acquired early is that the order in the diagram is based on the analysis of correct use in obligatory contexts only. It does not take into account uses of grammatical morphemes in places where they do *not* belong, for example, when a learner says, 'The France is in Europe'. These issues have led researchers to question the adequacy of obligatory context analyses as the sole basis for understanding developmental sequences.

The morpheme acquisition literature raises other issues, not least of them the question of why there should be an order of acquisition for these language features. Some of the similarities observed in different studies seemed to be due to the use of particular tasks for collecting the data, and researchers found that different tasks tended to yield different results. Nevertheless, a number of studies have revealed similarities that cannot be explained by the data collection procedures alone. As with first language acquisition, researchers have not found a single simple explanation for the order. Jennifer Goldschneider and Robert DeKeyser (2001) reviewed this research and identified a number of variables that contribute to the order.

Salience (how easy it is to notice the morpheme), linguistic complexity (for example, how many elements you have to keep track of), semantic transparency (how clear the meaning is), similarity to a first language form, and frequency in the input all seem to play a role.

Negation

The acquisition of negative sentences by second language learners follows a path that looks nearly identical to the stages we saw in Chapter 1 for first language acquisition. However, second language learners from different first language backgrounds behave somewhat differently within those stages. This was illustrated in John Schumann's (1979) research with Spanish speakers learning English and Henning Wode's (1978) work on German speakers learning English.

Stage 1

The negative element (usually 'no' or 'not') is typically placed before the verb or the element being negated. Often, it occurs as the first word in the sentence because the subject is not there.

No bicycle. I no like it. Not my friend.

'No' is preferred by most learners in this early stage, perhaps because it is the negative form that is easiest to hear and recognize in the speech they are exposed to. Italian- and Spanish-speaking learners may prefer 'no' because it corresponds to the negative form in Italian and Spanish (*No tienen muchos libros*). They may continue to use Stage 1 negation longer than other learners because of the similarity to a pattern from their first language. Even when they produce negative sentences at more advanced stages, they may also use Stage 1 negatives in longer sentences or when they are under pressure. Thus, similarity to the first language may slow down a learner's progress through a particular developmental stage.

Stage 2

At this stage, 'no' and 'not' may alternate with 'don't'. However, 'don't' is not marked for person, number, or tense and it may even be used before modals like 'can' and 'should'.

He don't like it. I don't can sing.

Stage 3

Learners begin to place the negative element after auxiliary verbs like 'are', 'is', and 'can'. But at this stage, the 'don't' form is still not fully analysed:

You can not go there. He was not happy. She don't like rice.

At this stage, German speakers, whose first language has a structure that places the negative after the verb may generalize the auxiliary-negative pattern to verb-negative and produce sentences such as:

They come not [to] home. (*Sie kommen nicht nach Hause*)

Stage 4

In this stage, 'do' is marked for tense, person, and number, and most interlanguage sentences appear to be just like those of the target language:

It doesn't work. We didn't have supper.

However, some learners continue to mark tense, person, and number on both the auxiliary and the verb:

I didn't went there.

Questions

In the 1980s, Manfred Pienemann and his colleagues undertook studies that related the second language acquisition of German and English. Pienemann, Johnston, and Brindley (1988) described a sequence in the acquisition of questions by learners of English from a variety of first language backgrounds. An adapted version of the sequence is shown in Stages 1–6 below. The examples come from French speakers who were playing a game in which they had to ask questions in order to find out which picture the other player was holding. As we saw for negation, the overall sequence is similar to the one observed in first language acquisition. And again, there are some differences that are attributable to first language influence.

Stage 1

Single words, formulae, or sentence fragments.

Dog?

Four children?

Stage 2

Declarative word order, no inversion, no fronting.

It's a monster in the right corner?

The boys throw the shoes?

Declarative order with rising intonation is common in yes/no questions in informal spoken French. French speakers may hypothesize that in English, as in French, inversion is optional.

Stage 3

Fronting: *do*-fronting; *wh*-fronting, no inversion; other fronting.

Do you have a shoes on your picture?

Where the children are playing?

Does in this picture there is four astronauts?

Is the picture has two planets on top?

French has an invariant form 'est-ce que' that can be placed before a declarative sentence to make a question, for example, *Jean aime le cinéma* becomes *Est-ce que Jean aime le cinéma?*—'[is it that] John likes movies?' French speakers may think that 'do' or 'does' is such an invariant form and continue to produce Stage 3 questions for some time.

Stage 4

Inversion in *wh*- + copula; 'yes/no' questions with other auxiliaries.

Where is the sun?

Is there a fish in the water?

At Stage 4, German speakers may infer that if English uses subject-auxiliary inversion, it may also permit inversion with full verbs, as German does, leading them to produce questions such as 'Like you baseball?'—*Magst du baseball?*

Stage 5

Inversion in *wh*- questions with both an auxiliary and a main verb.

How do you say *proche*?

What's the boy doing?

French-speaking learners may have difficulty using Stage 5 questions in which the subject is a noun rather than a pronoun. They may say (and accept as grammatical) 'Why do you like chocolate?' but not 'Why do children like chocolate?' In this, they are drawing on French, where it is often ungrammatical to use inversion with a noun subject (**Pourquoi aiment les enfants le chocolat?*).

Stage 6

Complex questions.

question tag: It's better, isn't it?

negative question: Why can't you go?

embedded question: Can you tell me what the date is today?

Pienemann's developmental sequence for questions has been the basis for a number of studies, some of which will be discussed in Chapter 6. Alison Mackey and her colleagues have done a number of these studies, and she provided the data in Table 4.1. These examples come from three adult Japanese learners of English as a second language who were interacting with a native speaker in a 'spot the differences' task. In this task, learners have similar but not identical pictures and they have to ask questions until they work out how the picture they can see is different from the one their interlocutor has. Note that progress to a higher stage does not always mean that learners produce fewer errors.

Possessive determiners

A developmental sequence for the English possessive forms 'his' and 'her' has been observed in the interlanguage of French- and Spanish-speaking learners. In English, the choice of 'his' or 'her' (or 'its') is determined by the

natural gender of the possessor. In French and Spanish (and many other languages), the correct form of the possessive determiner matches the grammatical gender of the object or person that is possessed. This can be illustrated with the following translation equivalents for French and English:

- Sa mère* = his mother or her mother
- Son chien* = his dog or her dog
- Ses enfants* = his children or her children

Note that when the object possessed is a body part, French often uses a definite article rather than a possessive determiner.

Il s'est cassé le bras—He broke the [his] arm.

Joanna White (1998) studied the acquisition of possessive determiners by French-speaking students, adapting a developmental sequence that was first proposed by Helmut Zobl (1984). White found a total of eight steps in the sequence, but they can be grouped into four main stages. The examples shown in Stages 1–4 below come from French-speaking students learning English, describing cartoon drawings of family events and interactions.

Stage 1: Pre-emergence

No use of 'his' and 'her'. Definite article or 'your' used for all persons, genders, and numbers.

- The little boy play with the bicycle.
- He have band-aid on the arm, the leg, the stomach.
- This boy cry in the arm of your mother.
- There is one girl talk with your dad.

Stage 2: Emergence

Emergence of 'his' and/or 'her', with a strong preference to use only one of the forms.

- The mother is dressing her little boy, and she put her clothes, her pant, her coat, and then she finish.
- The girl making hisself beautiful. She put the make-up on his hand, on his head, and his father is surprise.

Stage 3: Post-emergence

Differentiated use of 'his' and 'her' but not when the object possessed has natural gender.

- The girl fell on her bicycle. She look his father and cry.
- The dad put her little girl on his shoulder, and after, on his back.

Stage 4

Error-free use of 'his' and 'her' in all contexts including natural gender and body parts.

The little girl with her dad play together. And the dad take his girl on his shoulder and he hurt his back.

English speakers learning French, or other languages that use grammatical gender as the basis for choosing possessive determiners, also have to learn a new way of determining the gender of the possessive determiner. Learning the grammatical gender of each and every noun further adds to the challenge.

Relative clauses

Second language learners first acquire relative clauses that refer to nouns in the subject and direct object positions, and only later (and in some cases, never) learn to use them to modify nouns in other sentence roles (for example, indirect object and object of preposition). A summary of the observed pattern of acquisition for relative clauses is shown in Table 4.2. It is referred to as the 'accessibility hierarchy', and it reflects the apparent ease with which learners have 'access' to certain structures in the target language.

Part of speech	Relative clause
Subject	The girl who was sick went home.
Direct object	The story that I read was long.
Indirect object	The man who [m] Susan gave the present to was happy.
Object of preposition	I found the book that John was talking about.
Possessive	I know the woman whose father is visiting.
Object of comparison	The person that Susan is taller than is Mary.

Table 4.2 Accessibility hierarchy for relative clauses in English (adapted from Doughty 1991)

Unlike the study of grammatical morphemes, negation, and questions, the study of relative clauses was not inspired by research on child language. Rather, it came from patterns found in studies of a large number of languages by Edward Keenan and Bernard Comrie (1977). They found that those languages which included the structures at the bottom of the list in Table 4.2 would also have those at the top, but the opposite was not necessarily true. Subsequently, Susan Gass (1982) and others found that if a second language learner could use one of the structures at the bottom of the list, he or she would probably be able to use any that precede it. On the other hand, a learner who could produce sentences with relative clauses in the subject or direct object positions (at the top of the list) would not necessarily be able to use them in any of the positions further down the list.

Despite the similarity of the general pattern that has been found, several types of first language influence have been observed in the acquisition of relative clauses. First, it has been observed that for learners whose first language does not have a particular clause type (for example, object of comparison), it is more difficult to learn to use that type in English. Second, where learners have a first language with a substantially different way of forming relative clauses (for example, Japanese and Chinese, where the relative clause precedes the noun it modifies), they may avoid using relative clauses even when their interlanguage is fairly advanced. Third, first language influence is seen in the errors learners make. For example, Arabic speakers often produce both the relative marker and the pronoun it replaces (for example, 'The man who I saw him was very angry'), as they would in Arabic.

Reference to past

A number of researchers, including Jürgen Meisel (1987), have observed the developing ability to use language to locate events in time. The research has shown that learners from different first language backgrounds and acquiring a variety of second languages, acquire the language for referring to past events in a similar pattern.

Like young children, learners with limited language may simply refer to events in the order in which they occurred or mention a time or place to show that the event occurred in the past.

My son come. He work in restaurant.
Viet Nam. We work too hard.

Later, learners start to attach a grammatical morpheme marking the verb for past, although it may not be the one that the target language uses for that meaning.

Me working long time. Now stop.

Past tense forms of irregular verbs may be used before the regular past is used reliably.

We went to school every day. We spoke Spanish.

After they begin marking past tense on regular verbs, learners may over-generalize the regular *-ed* ending or the use of the wrong past tense form, for example, the present perfect rather than the simple past.

My sister caught a big fish.
She has lived here since fifteen years.

Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig (2000) and others have found that learners are more likely to mark past tense on some verbs than on others. For example, learners are more likely to mark past tense in sentences such as 'I broke the vase' and 'My sister fixed it with glue' than in sentences such as 'She seemed happy last week' or 'My father swam in that lake'. These differences appear to be due to the 'lexical aspect', that is, the kinds of meanings expressed by the different verbs. Learners seem to find it easier to mark past tense on verbs that refer to something whose end point can easily be determined. These are referred to as 'accomplishments' and 'achievements' ('I *ran* three miles. My brother *took* an aspirin and *went* to bed'). For 'activities' that may continue for some period ('I *swam* all afternoon') or 'states' that may be perceived as constants ('He *seemed* happy to sit by the lake'), learners use simple past markers less frequently.

First language can have an influence here too. Laura Collins (2002) investigated the different English verb forms used by French speakers. The past tense that is most commonly used in spoken French and that is usually a translation of a simple past form in English is a form that resembles the present perfect in English. Thus, the equivalent of 'Yesterday he ate an apple' is *Hier il a mangé une pomme*—literally, 'Yesterday he has eaten an apple'. Teachers often comment on French speakers' tendency to overuse the present perfect. In Collins' study, learners completed passages by filling in blanks with the appropriate form of a verb. In places where English speakers would have used the simple past, French speakers did sometimes use the perfect (either present perfect or past perfect) forms. Furthermore, they used them more frequently than a comparison group of Japanese speakers. However, the French speakers were more likely to use perfect forms for achievement and accomplishment verbs than for the states and activities. Collins observes, 'The [first language] influence does not appear to override the effect of lexical aspect; rather it occurs within it' (p. 85).

Movement through developmental sequences

We have seen in this section that, as in first language acquisition, there are systematic and predictable developmental sequences in second language acquisition. However, it is important to emphasize that developmental stages are not like closed rooms. Learners do not leave one behind when they enter another. In examining a language sample from an individual learner, one should not expect to find behaviours from only one stage. On the contrary, at a given point in time, learners may use sentences typical of several different stages. It is perhaps better to think of a stage as being characterized by the emergence and increasing frequency of new forms rather than by the complete disappearance of earlier ones. Even when a more advanced stage comes to dominate in a learner's speech, conditions of stress

or complexity in a communicative interaction can cause the learner to 'slip back' to an earlier stage. Note that progress to a higher stage does not always mean that learners produce fewer errors. For example, a learner may produce correct questions at Stage 1 or Stage 3, but those correct forms are not based on underlying knowledge of subject-verb inversion. Correct questions at Stage 1 are chunks, not sentences that have been constructed from the words that make them up. At Stage 2, learners have advanced, in the sense that they are forming original questions, but the word order of those questions is the same as that of declarative sentences. At Stage 3, questions are formed by placing a question form (most often a *wh*-word or a form of the verb 'do') at the beginning of a sentence with declarative word order.

Another important observation about developmental sequences is the way they interact with first language influence. Learners do not appear to assume that they can simply transfer the structures of their first language into the second. However, as Henning Wode (1978) and Helmut Zobl (1980) observed, when they reach a developmental point at which they encounter a 'crucial similarity' between their first language and their interlanguage pattern, they may have difficulty moving beyond that stage or they may generalize their first language pattern and end up making errors that speakers of other languages are less likely to make.