Second language acquisition, psychological factors, cognitive factors.

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The cognitive perspective helps educators to understand language learners as people who are active processors of information. Learners need information to solve problems, reorganize what they know, their prior knowledge to achieve new learning, and actively choose to pay attention, ignore, and make other responses as they pursue their goals.

Student’s languages (primary languages) are usually well developed before they enter school. But for all children, the language used in schools is different from the language they know from home. Language is used in expanded ways at school to create meaning from print, to analyze and compare information, etc. All of these activities involve cognitive factors. Students learn in many different ways using a variety of strategies and styles. We will see the general cognitive processes that all individuals use to learn language.

COGNITIVE ACADEMIC LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

According to Cummins there are two different language skills (they are related though):

BICS - Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills. BICS involves those language skills and functions that individuals use to communicate in everyday contexts. This language is context embedded.

CALP - Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency. CALP is the language needed to perform schools tasks successfully. Such tasks generally are more abstract and decontextualized. This is also called context-reduced communication.

Thus, students need to master much more than everyday language or BICS to have access to the school curriculum.

When talking about learning English, it is true that conversational skills approach native-like levels within two years of exposure to English (in a total immersion situation), but five or more years are required to match native speakers in CALP.

CUP (Common Underlying Proficiency) believes that a second language and the primary language have a shared foundation and that once a student has a foundation in the native language, a second language builds upon this foundation. Students do not have to relearn in a second language how to communicate, how to think critically, how to read and write, etc.

AGE

Contrary to what people believe, adults proceed through early stages of syntactic and morphological development faster than children do; and older children acquire a second language faster than younger children. According to Cummins older learners acquire cognitive/academic proficiency more quickly than younger learners because the CALP in their native language is already developed.

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROCESSES
Two of these processes are transfer and generalization: Transfer is applying old learning to new situations. Generalization involves inferring or drawing conclusions in order to respond to a situation.

In language learning, transfer is more noticeable when students use rules from their first language that are not applicable to the second. This is known as negative transfer. In second language acquisition, the term overgeneralization is frequently used and refers to situations in which the students generalizes a rule to cases where it does not apply.

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

According to Krashen and Terrel there are three stages:

- Comprehension stage, also called the silent period or preproduction stage. The learner simply needs to absorb the sounds and rhythms of the new language, becomes familiar with words, etc.
- Early production stage. The students feels more confident and attempt to say words and phrases.
- Extending production or speech emergence. The student produces longer and more complex utterances, begins to recognize and correct his/her own errors and becomes more comfortable at initiating or sustaining conversations.

LEARNER STRATEGIES

Second language acquisition research divides the individual learner strategies into two types:

- Communication strategies, which are employed to transmit an idea when the learner cannot produce precise linguistic forms.
- Learning strategies, which relate to the individual’s processing, storage, and retrieval of language concepts.

Some verbal and non-verbal devices are:

Avoidance- avoiding use of sounds, structures, etc, that are beyond current proficiency.
Prefabricated Patterns- memorizing phrases to use when everything else fails.
Appeal to Authority- asking a native speaker for help or consult a dictionary.
Language Switch (code switching)- using the primary language for help in communication, but also for other purposes:

- emphasize a point.
- because a word is unknown in one of the languages.
- for ease and efficiency of expression.
- as a repetition to clarify.
- to express group identity and status.
- to quote someone.
- to interject in a conversation.
- to exclude someone.
- to cross social or ethnic boundaries.
- to ease tension in a conversation.

COGNITIVE STYLE

According to Brown, it refers to consistent and enduring tendencies or preferentes within an individual.