

Lecture 1 SLA *Theories of Second Language Acquisition*

Various theories and hypotheses about how a second language can be learned have been put forward to attempt to understand the complexities of acquiring an additional language and its relationship with other fields.

- Research in SLA is indeed closely related to several disciplines including linguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, education and neurosciences.
- There's no precise date of the beginning of SLA hypotheses and views, but two articles can be regarded as instrumental in the field:
 1. Corder's essay 'The significance of learner's errors' (1967);
 2. Selinker's article 'Interlanguage' (1972).

Corder rejected behaviourists' views on SLA and put forward the idea that learners make use of intrinsic internal linguistic processes, including native language, motivation...

Selinker's argument emphasizes the idea that L2 learners possess their own linguistic/individual systems, independent from both L1 and L2 (Interlanguage).

Thus, the trend in the late 1960's and early 1970's explored Corder's and Selinker's views which refuted behaviourist theories of language acquisition (Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis), pointing out that L2 learners' language is systematic and the errors they make are not random but rule-governed. Thus, the notion of '*interlanguage*', developed by Selinker in 1972 – coined in two other labels the same year: Corder's '*transitional competence*' and Nemser's '*approximative system*' – proposed the hypothesis that "L2 learners have internalized a mental grammar, a natural language system that can be described in terms of linguistic rules and principles." (White 2003:19).*

In the 1980's, Stephen Krashen's theories became the prominent paradigm in SLA. Krashen suggested that language acquisition is driven solely by *comprehensible input*, that is, input learners *can* understand. The **Input Hypothesis** collectively represented his theories.

* White, L. (2003). 'On the Nature of Interlanguage Representation: Universal Grammar in the Second Language'; in *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* Doughty & Long (2003); Blackwell Publishing Ltd.