Instructor : Mr BOUNADJA Semestre:1

Level : First year

Module : SHS

Course : Four/ Second Language vs. Foreign Language Learning

INTRODUCTION

The field of language learning is indeed a complex domain of study as it can vary suiting four main pillars. These are the learner, the teacher, the learning context, and the target language. Researchers in education have realized this fact because they no longer consider second language education to be the same as first language education so much so that. When dealing with foreign language education, they tend to ignore the equally important distinction existing between first and second language acquisition on one hand, and foreign language learning on the other. So let us bring into light the fundamental features of foreign language learning as opposed to first and second language learning.

Language status

Prior to discussing the features of their learning, it is important to identify what is meant by first, second, and foreign languages. The status of a given language is not always the same to its learner, its teacher and their learning context. For example, consider the case of a Moroccan student learning English from an English man in Sri Lanka. English is for the teacher his first language but would be a second language in the context of this country. On the other hand, for the Moroccan student, who has had Arabic and French as his second languages, English would be a foreign language.

If this is the case, the status of a target language may vary according to the person or the context in question. However, our focus in this lecture will be on the status of a language with regard to its learner.

I/ First Language

A first language of a learner is often the same as generally termed as his ‘mother tongue’. In such situation, the first language is the language of his mother. However, the direct increasing number of mixed marriages, as a direct consequence to global migration, has resulted in children who are compelled to learn more than one language at home. Children may select either their mother’s or father’s native language as a first language. They can even adopt the language of the host country as their first language to the detriment of their parents’ native tongues.

In any case the very first language(s) that a child would master because of its use at home, at school and day-to-day communication in the society which they live in is the first language. More importantly, the first language is the one you share thoughts, emotions and beliefs with a country’s majority of population.

II/ Second Language

Children learn their second language at school. It is generally another local language (French for English-speaking Canadians) or an international language (French for Moroccans) that is considered as important in the country where the learner resides. The designation of a non-native language as a second language depends on the close historical, geographical, and socio-economical ties that the two countries of origin and the other share. Sometimes, a second language is of a minority community in its native country (Arabic for Tamazight in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya). However, even in such case, the learner has a close relationship with his second language and uses it in his day-to-day life.

III/ Foreign Language

A ‘foreign language’ has generally no direct link with the person’s immediate social or personal environment. A target foreign language is a personal choice of the learner because of academic or professional reasons.

Like first and second language education, foreign language education too is a heterogenous composed of different forms of learning. These are the specific features of learner, teacher and learning context. Foreign language learners may differ in age, have different objectives and capacities. Their teacher may be native or non-native speaker of the target language. They may learn in learning environments that are favorable or unfavorable to language acquisition.

All in all, first language learners are generally small children while most of second language learners are young children and adult foreign language learners on the other hand in their vast majority are adults. We could argue that children continue to learn their first and second languages even after growing up. However, adult learners are not considered as formal language learners. Second language learners do follow lessons of target language even as adult but are limited in number. Thus, first and second language learners hardly represent outsiders of their age group. However, foreign language learners are primarily represented by adults and may also include a large number of young children and adolescents. Here, foreign language learners include the most varied range of learner age group.