**UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR THEORY /INNATIVISM**

**Introduction**

Universal grammar theory came out as a reaction to the behaviorist learning theory. It is an anti-behaviourist theory that is based on several principles that are totally different from those of Behaviorism.

**Anti-Behaviorist Notion**

The Universal Grammar Theory/Innativism claims that language acquisition is too complex to be explained by a simple observation of some particular behaviour. There are mental and biological factors that strongly intervene and affect second language acquisition. In addition, language is a purely human faculty that distinguishes humans from animals. Thus, we can not explain second language learning in the same way as animals’ behaviours. Animals do not have a language. Besides, humans are different because they have been endowed with an innate biological mental mechanism that enables them to learn language. Such mechanism has been referred to as the LAD or the language acquisition device. Chomsky claims that there is a strong evidence that actually supports the existence of the LAD. He argues that children are exposed to an incorrect, incomplete and sometimes diformed language through their mothers, fathers and caretakers. This kind of language is usually called motherese. For instance, children usually at an early age usually hear words such as dada father, grandpa, baba food, booboo, it hurts, moomoo- baby, cookoo- bird, but they still end up using correct forms and structures. This confirms the premise that children do not learn language just from the input they receive from the environment. Language learning is not just a habit formation process.

Children must be prepared to learn language. Their brains are programmed and equipped with a language acquisition device that facilitates language learning. Another supporting evidence for Chomsky’s claim is that children have the ability to produce new structures that they have never been exposed to before. Obviously, this refutes the behaviourist claim that children only learn from imitation and only repeat what they hear from others. This proves that children use their creativity to produce new utterances. Moreover, children learn language so fast that there is no need for explanatory sessions, providing feedback such as reward or punishement or corrections as suggested by behaviourists. Furthermore, language is a process of hypothesis testing in the Chomskian view. This process allows children to develop their own language rules by testing them in the real world. They make a hypothesis about what they want to say and assess its accuracy in the real world. Inaccuracies are instantly modified till they achieve their communicative intent. In sum, children learn from their language failures.

**Language Acquisition Device**

It is a mechanism, a device that exists in the human brain. It is similar to a drive in a laptop or a computer. It is responsible for language learning and consists of two main elements namely principles and parameters. Principles are the invariable abstract units/entities that characterize the grammar of all languages. In other words, they are the common grammatical characteristics that are shared by all human languages. For instance, all world languages have subjects, verbs, objects and adverbials. Thus, principles are a form of underlying grammar for all languages, a sort of universal grammar. Parameters, however, are language-specific entities that differ from one language to another as it is the case with structure of the sentence, the feminine form, the order of modifiers and adverbs. They are the main distinguishing features between world languages. For instance, the parameters of the Arabic language dictate that the verb should come first followed by the subject and object. In English and many other foreign languages, it is indicated that the verb and object follow the subject. In addition, some languages such as Arabic and French have feminine forms while others do not. There are also instances where adjectives are placed after the noun as it is the case with Arabic. Those differences diverse to lists. As a result, L2 learners need to readjust those parameters when learning a second language.

 **CAR DRIVING ALGERIA A READJUSTEMENT OF**

**THE SAME PRINCIPLES ENGLAND PARAMETERS**

LAD loses its efficiency as it is limited by an expiration time. According to the critical period hypothesis, age is decisive factor in second language acquisition. Lenneberg postulates that there is a time window which makes language learning effortless and natural. However, such device can be activated only before puberty. Thus, LAD ceases to function normally right after puberty. Seliger has a different interpretation for the CPH. He puts forward that there multiple critical periods for several language aspects. For instance, the critical period of pronunciation ends sooner than that of grammar vocabulary. This explains why many adults cannot achieve a native like accent. Nevertheless, they can master the foundational rules of the language at a very high level of fluency because the critical period for grammar and vocabualry lasts longer than that of pronunciation. Long suggests a diffrent explanation for the critical period hypothesis. He argues that the CPH differs from one person to another and one language aspect to another. According to his Mental Muscle Model, LAD is compared to a muscle that needs to be used so as to remain active. If it gets long periods of rests and inactivity, it will cease to function. A child who has learnt his mother tongue in addition to a second and third language from the external environment can easily learn a fourth language in middle or high school. This could be attributable to the fact that his LAD has remained constantly active since a long period of time. However, if a child learns a second language years after having acquired his mother tongue, he will face some serious problems during the learning process because of the long waiting periods between his first and second language.

**Innativism and its Implications to Second Language Acquisition**

According to the innativists/ universal grammar theory, L2 learners need to readjust their parameters in order to be able to learn a second language. Also, the interrelaion between the L1 and L2 facilitates learning. In fact, sharing similar structural rules renders the learning process easier. For instance, a Spanish native speaker will find Italian easier to learn than Arabic because Spanish and Italian are very related and similar in so many language aspects. In addition, age is a defining factor that contributes positively to second language acquisition.The earlier a person starts to learn a language, the easier it gets to achieve native-like proficiency. Like most language learning theories, UGT has been targeted by many forms of criticism.

**Limitations for UG Theory**

One of the main limitations for the UGT is that it is exclusively concerned with syntax and ignores pragmatic, semantic and discourse aspects of language. Another important criticism that has been leveled against UGT is its focus on the role of mental and biological factors and ignores the social and psychological variables. It has also been criticized for its preocupation with linguistic competence and its dismissal of performance.