

# Exploring the Development of Linguistic Competence: English Learning as a Foreign Language

*Exploración del desarrollo de la competencia lingüística: el inglés como lengua extranjera*

**ABSTRACT:** This general review explores the importance of linguistic competence (LC) in developing communicative competence (CC) among English as a foreign language (EFL) learners with a Spanish language background. An area of interest to be addressed is explicit and meaningful instruction (EI) of grammar, phonetics, morphology, and spelling meaningfully; that is through tasks focused on meaning. Chomsky's (1965) notion of LC, along with Hymes' (1972) notion of CC will be dealt with to support the development of this general review (De Bona, & Machado, 2012). However, the LC proposed in the Canale and Swain (1980) model of CC (Salazar, 2015) is mainly considered from the perspective of what EFL learners need to know about language through EI of the aforementioned linguistic aspects in a meaningful way. This general review will be based considering research in which EFL learners have received explicit grammar instruction through periodic communicative activities. E-books and peer-reviewed articles related to research on LC development of the CC of EFL learners will be considered. Several topics will be discussed in order to support the development of linguistic competence in English language learners.

**KEY WORDS:** Linguistic competence, communicative competence, explicit instruction, implicit instruction, EFL learning.

Luis Antonio Balderas Ruiz

Universidad Autónoma de  
Nuevo León  
tonybalderas@hotmail.com

Recibido: 18/01/2018

Aceptado: 28/08/2018

VERBUM ET LINGUA

NÚM. 13

ENERO / JUNIO 2019

ISSN 2007-7319

**RESUMEN:** En esta reseña general se explora la importancia de la competencia lingüística (CL) en el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa (CC) del inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE) en aprendientes hispanohablantes. Un área de interés a tratar es la instrucción explícita (IE) y significativa de la gramática, la fonética, la morfología y la ortografía de manera significativa, es decir, a través de actividades enfocadas en el significado. La noción de CL de acuerdo a Chomsky (1965), junto con la de Hymes (1972) se abordarán para apoyar el desarrollo de esta reseña (De Bona, & Machado, 2012). Sin embargo, la CL propuesta en el modelo de CC de Canale y Swain (1980) (Salazar, 2015) es considerada desde la perspectiva de lo que los aprendientes necesitan saber acerca de la lengua, a través de la IE de

los aspectos lingüísticos antes mencionados, de una manera significativa. Para la realización de esta reseña se considerarán investigaciones en las cuales los aprendientes de ILE han recibido instrucción explícita de la gramática principalmente a través de actividades comunicativas periódicas. Se tomarán en cuenta libros electrónicos y artículos arbitrados relacionados a la investigación sobre el desarrollo de la CL de la CC de aprendientes de ILE. Varios temas se discutirán para apoyar el desarrollo de la competencia lingüística en aprendientes del idioma inglés.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Competencia lingüística, competencia comunicativa, instrucción explícita, instrucción implícita, aprendizaje de ILE.

## Introduction

Linguistic competence (LC) is one of the important components of communicative competence (CC). Defining the concept of competence and CC is relevant in the development of this general review. The former is a term that comes from Latin and refers to “the ability of a person to do a particular thing, the degree of expertise that the person has in a particular area” (Stan, 2015). Whereas the latter, can be described “as a processing ability consisting of two components: analysis of knowledge and control of processing” (Laughlin, Wain, & Schmidgall, 2015). With respect to LC, such a component “broadly refers to the rules of grammar” (8).

Linguistic competence is also known as grammatical competence. As a scientific concept, Chomsky (1965: 15-16) states that “knowledge of a language involves the implicit ability to understand indefinitely many sentences. Hence, a generative grammar must be a system of rules that can iterate to generate an indefinitely large number of structures”. In this general review, such a competence, which is interrelated to the other components of the CC, has been considered taking into account Hymes` (1972) suggested inclusion of discursal and sociocultural components to

define CC (Esteik, 2014). However, Canale and Swain’s (1980) and later Canale’s (1983) model of CC, specifically with respect to grammatical competence, will be highlighted (Esteik, 2014)

Norris and Ortega (2000) carried out an excellent study related to the effectiveness of Second Language (L2) instruction through research synthesis and quantitative meta-analysis. The findings of their study, based on experimental and quasi-experimental research about such an instruction, were summarized by them from publications released between 1980 and 1998. Although the research analyzed in their study are not recent, they contribute, to great extent to the purpose and the development of the current general review. Some of these studies have been considered since they are relevant to support some of the topics and subtopics that will be covered below.

## Theoretical overview

Native language acquisition and foreign language learning are two concepts used to deal with the process of language development from those two different perspectives. The above can be firmly substantiated by Vygotsky, who affirms that “it is well known that to learn a foreign language at school and to develop one’s native language involve

two entirely different processes” (1986: 159). Thus, teachers and those involved in language development should be aware of the difference between language acquisition and language learning processes.

The acquisition of a native language (Krashen, 1982) occurs without consciously paying attention to language form. On the other hand, second language learning takes place through conscious attention to the form and rules of language. Thus, Cadierno (1995) states that “by formal instruction is meant any attempt by teachers to intervene directly in the process of interlanguage construction by providing samples of specific features for learning”, which include grammar, lexis, morphology, syntax, semantics and phonology as part of the linguistic component of communicative competence according to Canale and Swain’s (1980) model; this will be considered in this general review from the perspective of how learners’ linguistic competence in EFL may be affected positively through explicit and meaningful instruction of linguistic aspects.

Throughout time, theories of language acquisition and language learning have been topics of debate among linguists and researchers (Esteki, 2014). Those theories have been influencing one another in an attempt to contribute to an understanding of how languages are acquired and learned. In a review of studies related to the impact of formal instruction, Krashen (1999) interprets DeKeyser’s (1997) results “as showing that conscious learning and subconscious acquisition of language are different”. Chomsky’s theory about first language acquisition influenced Krashen’s (1982) model of second language acquisition, known as the Monitor Model, which

was first described in the early 1970s (Lightbown, 2013). Chomsky’s ideas on how language acquisition develops and is stored in the mind has been considered in research related not only to first language acquisition but also to second language learning (38).

The findings of some of the studies analyzed by Norris and Ortega (2000) provide us with evidence that supports the development of this general review. Treatment versus control groups were compared and contrasted in terms of focused L2 instruction. Their findings and results show that such instruction, including those studies whose treatment involved an explicit focus on L2 structures, is effective. The method used for the analysis of the studies was based on research synthesis and quantitative meta-analysis of research done on L2 instruction. Their study is limited since their findings are generalized. L2 instruction needs to be subjected to empirical replication and be enhanced through changes in research practices (418).

Cadierno (1995) engaged in a study on formal instruction from a processing perspective. Findings of that study reveal that processing provides learners with knowledge available for comprehension and production, whereas the traditional type of instruction provides knowledge only for the latter. These findings were obtained through an experimental study in which three instructional treatments, including a traditional group, a processing group and a group receiving no instruction at all were analyzed. A limitation of this study is that only one linguistic item was researched in this study, the past tense verb morphemes.

Day (2001) conducted an experimental classroom-based study in which there

was an experimental and a control group. A pretest and posttest were used to evaluate 315 grade 7 French immersion students' language proficiency. The finding of this study provides evidence that "classes which had experienced an approach that integrated formal, analytic, and functional communicative activities in teaching the conditional made significantly greater advances in their ability to use this form in writing than did those classes that had not experienced this approach" (74). A limitation of this study is that only one aspect of the grammatical structures of French was considered in the development of this study. Additionally, it was limited to observation of the use of such an aspect in writing; speaking ability should also be taken into account in future research to observe the correct use of the conditional.

#### The relationship between concept formation and language acquisition and language learning

An awareness of the processes involved in how human beings construct meaning and learn a language from a socio-cultural perspective should also be considered in the development of language acquisition and learning. Learning processes differ from context to context and from individual to individual. The audience, in which literacy and language learning is intended to be developed, should be taken into account since learning experiences may vary socio-culturally speaking at a collective or individual level (Vygotsky, 1986). This is important to consider, not only when teaching ESL or EFL but also when culturally and linguistically diverse learners are present.

From a socio-cultural point of view,

concept formation in children may be developed through meaningful communication in social interactions with other individuals (Vygotsky, 1986). This social communication and interaction children have with other people provides them with an opportunity to learn that words convey meaning which varies socio-culturally. Formal and informal concept formation can be used as a means to help teachers and those involved in language teaching comprehend the relationship existing between such concepts and likewise, language learning and acquisition.

Formal and informal concepts are also known as scientific and spontaneous concepts, respectively. These are acquired by children during childhood. The former refers to those concepts that are learned consciously by the child; such "scientific concepts evolve under the conditions of systematic cooperation between the child and the teacher" (Vygotsky, 1986: 148). The latter refers to those concepts that evolve unconsciously in everyday life experience, in other words "...the child is not conscious of them because his attention is always centered on the object to which the concept refers to, never on the act of thought itself" (171). These two types of concepts are related to the language acquisition and language learning processes.

#### Prior knowledge of the first language in EFL learning

The comparison and contrast between spontaneous and scientific concept formation development and native and foreign language acquisition can provide teachers with a better understanding of how the relationship between scientific concept

formation and foreign language learning developments can be mastered through an awareness of such processes. Knowledge of the foreign language depends to some extent on knowledge of the native language in the same way as scientific concepts depend on spontaneous concepts (Vygotsky, 1986). Thus, the relationship between spontaneous and scientific concept formation development and foreign language learning and native language acquisition shows the importance of considering previous knowledge and background language resources English Language Learners (ELLs) bring to the classroom when learning a foreign language.

There are similar psychological relationships between spontaneous and scientific concepts and native and foreign language acquisition respectively. The native language may contribute to the learning of a foreign language in certain circumstances. According to Vygotsky, (1986) “while learning a foreign language, we use word meanings that are already well-developed in the native language, and only translate them; the advanced knowledge of one’s own language also plays an important role in the study of the foreign one, as well as those inner and outer relations that are characteristic only in the study of a foreign language”. Foreign language learning and native language acquisition vary in that the former makes use of the semantics of the latter one as its foundation (159).

#### Importance of developing linguistic competence in adult EFL learners

Linguistic competence, which is sometimes known as language competence, is an essential component of communicative com-

petence. Such a component involves learning aspects related to vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and spelling. Each aspect provides many challenges for adult EFL learners. For this reason, English language learners need to develop their linguistic competence so they can make use of the foreign language adequately in oral and written forms in different social contexts. This can be attained through teachers who make use of explicit instruction of each aspect of the linguistic competence meaningfully; that is through tasks focused on meaning.

Linguistic competence along with the other components of the communicative competence as suggested by Canale and Swain’s (1980) and later Canale’s (1983) model (Esteki, 2014; Koran, 2015), plays a very significant role in the development of aspects related to the other three competences of such a model. All of these competences are interrelated and should not be treated as isolated components from one another when learning a foreign language. Nevertheless, since the linguistic one, itself, deals mainly with language aspects, it deserves strict attention (Parmenter, & Byram, 2012) in developing the form of language through explicit instruction utilizing tasks focused on meaning.

Exploring the development of the linguistic competence of English as a foreign language in adult language learners deserves special attention. Explicit instruction in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and/or spelling in meaningful ways should be understood not only as knowledge language learners need to know about these linguistic aspects, but also as a means to develop communicative competence in

written and oral form. The purpose of the above is to try to find out if adult language learners develop EFL linguistic competence the same way they acquired their native language and also if such learners can benefit from explicit instruction of linguistic aspects through meaningful contexts, that is, through tasks focused on meaning.

### Linguistic competence

Exploring the development of the linguistic component of communicative competence is addressed in this review taking into account the knowledge a foreign language learner should have about language itself. However, the main intention is to contribute to the actual use of a foreign language in real life situations. According to Fahrutdinova, Fahrutdinov, & Yusupov, (2016: 1286) “it is not just about knowing the language, but about the ability to use it in real communication, in the practical language acquisition and, consequently, the development of ‘communicative competence’”. To arrive at this finding, theoretical, empirical and experimental data were used as part of the methodology of their study. One of the main limitations has to do with the methodological conditions in the formation of foreign language communicative competence.

There are four competences (linguistic, sociolinguistic, discursive, and strategic) as subdivisions of communicative competence according to Canale and Swain’s (1980) and later Canale’s (1983) model (Esteki, 2014; Koran, 2015). The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), apart from the aforementioned competences, includes the sociocultural and social dimensions of communicative

competence (Parmenter, & Byram, 2012). However, the development of the grammatical (linguistic) competence is the one this general review will be focused on.

Linguistic competence development as part of communicative competence in language acquisition and foreign language learning may develop in a different way. Therefore, this general review intends to explore how such language processes take place in terms of developing communicative competence. Fahrutdinova, Fahrutdinov, and Yusupov (2016: 1286) state that “forming foreign communicative competence of learners is not worked out yet”. For this reason, this general review aims to contribute to this theme, specifically with respect to linguistic competence development. Chomsky (1965) defines linguistic competence as the implicit grammatical knowledge language users have in the same speech community. On the other hand, linguistic performance refers to the actual use of such knowledge in specific contexts (Ifantidou, 2014; Salazar, 2015).

The linguistic competence development in language acquisition may differ from the one developed in foreign language learning. Grammar and some other aspects of the linguistic competence develop during the unconscious acquisition of the native language (Fei, & Zou, 2016). However, the interest in this general review is to explore the development of the linguistic competence of communicative competence in a foreign language. Therefore, to support the interest in the topic for this general review, in analyzing scientific theory, there is evidence of many theories related to research done on the structure of communicative competence from native scientists’ perspec-

tives, and from scientists that have carried out studies on the structure of communicative competence in foreign methodology and didactics (Fahrutdinova, Fahrutdinov, & Yusupov, 2016).

The definition of competence and how competence is developed is important to consider in this general review. In a study carried out by Fahrutdinova, Fahrutdinov, and Yusupov (2016) several works related to the notion of communicative competence and the approach to competence building in contemporary education have been considered as meaningful in their research regarding communicative competence development. Similarly, there is a special interest in this general review to compare and contrast native language acquisition and foreign language learning development.

There is a relationship between concept formation and language acquisition and foreign language learning. Concept formation is classified as spontaneous and scientific concepts. The former, which is developed unconsciously by human beings during childhood, resembles native language acquisition, whereas the latter, which evolve through the cooperation between the teacher and children (Vygotsky, 1986), are similar to foreign language learning. Eleanor Rosch's prototype theory of concept formation highlights the importance of contexts in the formation of concepts (Álvarez, Ballesteros, Berro, Carvajal, & Ciria, 2015).

Developing linguistic competence meaningfully plays a very important role in learning English as a foreign language. However, according to Fei, & Zou (2016: 779) "second language acquisition class-

rooms generally use fictional or virtual dialogue, and focus on the form rather than the content". Thus, this general review intends to explore how the form of the language can be developed through meaningful content, making use of explicit instruction of linguistic aspects. The concept of linguistic competence is being addressed in this general review from a general perspective. The CEFR provides six levels or steps which are used to calibrate language communicative proficiency and progress in language learning. These levels which are interpretations of the basic, intermediate and advanced proficiency levels are classified as follows: Basic User (A1=Breakthrough, A2=Waystage); Independent User (B1=Threshold, B2=Vantage); and Proficient User (C1=Effective Operational Proficiency, C2=Mastery) (Council of Europe, 2001: 22-24). Among the different dimensions involved in the development of language communicative proficiency, the linguistic one is absolutely essential (Parmenter, & Byram, 2012). Such a dimension of communicative competence will be explored in more detail in the following paragraphs.

There are different reasons why some individuals need to learn foreign languages voluntarily or involuntarily. However, regardless of the necessity for learning EFL, the development of foreign communicative competence should be an integrative objective at all stages of foreign language teaching (Fahrutdinova, Fahrutdinov, & Yusupov, 2016). This is important to consider since learners of English as a foreign language will not only make use of this language with native speakers, but also with nonnative ones. Before trying to develop linguistic competence in EFL learners, it is necessary

to develop such competence in native and non-native English teachers first.

#### Non-native English-speaking teachers and native English-speaking teachers

In teaching EFL there are some aspects that need to be considered for teachers to develop linguistic competence in their language learners. In a study carried out by Ma (2012), the perceptions non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) had of themselves and their native counterparts in terms of weaknesses and strengths of factors related to their teaching and knowledge of linguistic aspects were explored. Obviously, native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) were perceived to be superior in listening, speaking, reading, pronunciation and vocabulary. However, for example, with respect to the teaching of grammar, NESTS “are not sure how to teach” (Ma, 2012: 10). On the other hand, although NNESTs show more linguistic weaknesses in EFL contexts, their bilingual language ability, multicultural awareness, and experience in L2 learning were seen as their strengths (Ma, 2012). Also, NNESTs’ strengths can be observed in their language learning experience and their understanding of learners’ needs, abilities and difficulties (11). Nevertheless, their weaknesses were found in their lack of self-confidence, insufficient knowledge of American culture and their ‘foreign accent’ (Ma, 2012). However, not only NNESTs but also EFL learners’ perceptions towards NNESTs and NESTs need to be considered for supporting the argument for the importance of developing linguistic competence in such learners.

EFL learners need to develop different dimensions related to communicative com-

petence. This general review aims to explore the development of aspects of the linguistic competence through explicit instruction meaningfully. Some other studies have explored the perceptions EFL learners have about learning such aspects from NNESTs and NESTs. Being a native speaker of English does not necessarily mean to have developed communicative competence in terms of knowledge about the language. Considering oral performance, however, native speakers of English as teachers of such a language can serve as a pronunciation model for learners (Sung, 2014: 37). As mentioned above, this general review will concentrate on the linguistic dimension which is one of the components of communicative competence according to Canale and Swain’s (1980) and later Canale’s (1983) model (Esteki, 2014; Koran, 2015).

Several studies have explored each aspect of linguistic competence from different perspectives. Through exploring literature for this general review, the observation of how grammar, vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation require special attention in teaching EFL learners through explicit and meaningful instruction is expected. However, a lack of knowledge of pronunciation rules and the didactics required, and consequently mispronunciation problems in this language, are expected to be the reason why EFL learners prefer NESTs over NNESTs with respect to this specific aspect.

#### Individual differences and explicit instruction

Teaching aspects of the linguistic competence through explicit instruction meaningfully is understood as teaching the form of

the language explicitly through meaningful content. Lightbown and Spada (2013) provide an example related to the counter-balance hypothesis in which findings of a comparative study with respect to recasts in different instructional settings show that “learners who receive L2 instruction that is focused on meaning/content need feedback that directs their attention to form more explicitly” (143).

Individual differences play a very important role in learning English as a foreign language. In a study carried out by He (2013) with respect to the development of grammatical competence, it was found that individual aspects, such as language aptitude, motivation, personality, learning strategies, previous educational background and even learner’s gender may influence their foreign language process of grammar acquisition in a foreign language. Such individual differences can work in the development of pronunciation, too. Therefore, those differences should be considered in teaching aspects of linguistic competence regardless of their implicit or explicit instruction.

Some other studies have been explored to examine their relationship to implicit and explicit instruction. In these studies, research has been conducted on the development of spelling rules at the morphological and phonological levels under different conditions, such as, explicit-instruction, implicit-instruction, or control-group conditions. Explicit instruction favored students who were instructed explicitly in terms of spelling rules considering the two levels aforementioned (Cordewener, Bosman, & Verhoeven, 2015). Their research provides us with an important contribution

for the development of this general review in terms of the relationship and difference there is between implicit and explicit instruction and implicit and explicit learning, respectively.

Implicit or explicit instruction of any of the aspects of the linguistic competence should take into account not only individual differences, but also the surrounding circumstances. For example, Kissling (2013: 721) states that in “evaluating the evidence regarding the value of pronunciation instruction, it is crucial to limit the scope of analysis and define precisely for whom and under what conditions the instruction is being evaluated”. In an attempt to improve Chinese students’ production of stress in English words in an EFL setting, explicit, implicit and noticing instruction were compared, with results indicating that all groups had improved at the same rate in a posttest administered soon after instruction, but in the delayed posttest, the explicit group turned out to be significantly better (723-725).

With respect to communicative competence as knowledge about the language EFL learners have to develop to become competent communicatively (orally speaking) the important role each aspect of the linguistic competence plays in their learning should be considered. Nisbet, and Tindall (2015) developed a framework for teaching vocabulary explicitly and meaningfully considering five key research-based principles. Although all of the principles are relevant to vocabulary development through explicit instruction, principle three is highlighted for its relationship to this general review since it deals with the importance of drawing attention to aspects of

language, such as phonology, syntax, morphology, pragmatics, and semantics.

### Explicit and implicit instruction in children and adults learning an L2

Explicit instruction of aspects of the linguistic component meaningfully has been one of the main objectives in exploring literature for this general review. Skill-building theories hold that children under seven years of age and younger individuals can learn a language through incidental learning, without being aware of passing through this process of learning. There is usually an agreement in teaching language to older children or adults through explicit learning and teaching (Long, 2015).

Adult L2 acquisition can be done incidentally and implicitly to a certain extent, but the results usually fall far short of native-like abilities, but are of considerable importance to language teaching. There are positive and negative factors and aspects that may influence adults' successful or unsuccessful results in second language acquisition respectively. The yield is limited when adults are learning linguistic aspects such as lexis or collocations purely incidentally since it is usually less successful and too slow paced for practical reasons (1424).

Adults, so defined, are partially disabled second language learners in two ways; one is by having learned their first language successfully, and by a rather weaker capacity for learning implicitly and not being able to verbalize abstract knowledge about problems they have faced in Second Language Acquisition (L2A), due particularly to age-related declines in the efficiency of instant-based learning. One more important aspect that occurs in second language

acquisition is what is known as developmental sharpening, which refers to habits adults bring from their experience in L1 learning from the time of birth. Such habits may influence adult second language learning negatively due to the fact that they were acquired as established attractors in their first language. This is what is known as 'learnt attention' (1523).

There are some linguistic features that adults fail to acquire in L2A, mainly non-salient features such as inflectional morphology and case, among others that may be difficult for learners to acquire through an implicit learning process. Additionally, there are fragile features that are usually the same ones that are vulnerable in a variety of situations in which language is involved. The above is based not only on linguistic but also psycholinguistic qualities, which would turn out to be more accurate (Long, 2015).

### Code-switching and explicit instruction

Previous sections of this general review have already dealt with the difference between language acquisition and language learning; native and foreign language acquisition in children and adults respectively, and how explicit instruction in EFL can support adults' language learning of not only linguistic aspects, but also some other factors related to the target language. Explicit instruction of such aspects through the use of the target language in adults taking English courses for the first time, might turn out to be difficult for most, if not for all of them, but it is not the intention to generalize since in this general review, we have already explored the idea that learners' learning styles, individual needs, etc.

have to be considered in the EFL classroom, where code-switching, as a pedagogical practice, could support adult L2 learning.

As we know, throughout the history of language teaching and learning there have been different approaches, methods, techniques, and specific practices in the teaching of EFL. Code-switching, which is one of those practices, has been defined as the “communicative exchange of two language codes by people who contribute to such particular codes. Code-switching is manifested in this exchange by a number of social and linguistic factors” (Samani, & Narafshan, 2016: 718). Nowadays, in theory, language teaching has been considered to be completely intra-lingual; that is, teachers mainly use the target language. However, students have preferred to make use of the native language as a learning strategy (Samani, & Narafshan, 2016).

### Translanguaging

Translanguaging is a tool that teachers can use in the EFL teaching and learning process. Such a linguistic device can be used to help learners succeed in the attainment of a second language. García and Li Wei (2014: 80) describe translanguaging as “flexibility language learners have to control their own learning”. It is important to note that by making use of such a tool, students can feel more confident during their language learning process. Making use of the native language to make things clear for students whenever they feel uncertain about the target language, is one of the advantages of such an instructional practice. Therefore, for example, utilizing a native language in class, such as Spanish,

can be useful for teachers when providing feedback and guidance for learners in the development of EFL skills. While learning English, students, through the use of the native language, can have a better control of their own process of learning of a foreign language (García and Li Wei, 2014).

### Long’s contributions to explicit and implicit instruction

The literature explored for the development of this general review is relevant to the topic since it mainly deals with teaching aspects of the linguistic competence of EFL through explicit and meaningful instruction. As a consequence, Long’s (2015) contributions to the topic of this general review, through its work done on *Second Language Acquisition and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)*, will mainly be considered and described below. His comments on explicit instruction and related concepts will be dealt with to support the development of this general review.

Long (2015) differentiates between implicit and explicit learning. Implicit learning occurs without awareness of the knowledge or input being taught. On the other hand, explicit learning is intentional and the individual is conscious of the knowledge being obtained. Such implicit and explicit learning, along with memory and knowledge are two separate systems and processes whose end products are stored in different areas of the brain. According to my opinion, there are some factors and aspects that should be considered in determining what type of instruction to use with a group of learners or individually. Age is a key point in deciding between implicit and explicit instruction. For example, in

teaching children before the sensitive and critical period, implicit instruction would give better results, although as Long (2015) mentions, it is very difficult to demonstrate implicit learning without ambiguity. Even though it is said that adults require explicit instruction in SLA in some cases, a combination of implicit and explicit instruction in language teaching may be considered under certain circumstances when teaching children or adults.

Explicit learning which includes focal attention, is necessary to improve implicit processing in adult SLA, but it is still controlled. Also, he explains that both implicit and explicit learning remain the dominant, default processes in SLA. Based on the above, focusing on the form as a teaching goal for adult learners could be an advantage to help such learners succeed in their acquisition of a second language, obviously considering pedagogical tasks necessary to reach this objective. This situation can be expected to become a genuine factor of a theory of Instructed Second Language Acquisition (ISLA), whereby efficiency, not sufficiency or necessity, is the feature for inclusion (Long, 2015).

Learning implicitly results to be weaker in adults than in children. Such learning can be improved by explicit learning whose purpose is to develop in adult learners an awareness of aspects related to the linguistic component of communicative competence in second language acquisition. Although the main objective of explicit learning is not to teach students to learn through the process known as declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge-automatization, skilled performance, and fluency can be attained by some individuals this way. Personally

speaking, I agree with the idea that a role for explicit learning must gain recognition, as has been shown by reviews and research in that learning explicitly is faster than learning implicitly, at least when simple linguistic objectives are involved.

Attention, as is noticing, is one more stage in the process of language acquisition, the former being a prerequisite for the latter in which what is noticed is held and processed in the short-term memory to be later compared to what is stored in the long-term memory. The Interaction Hypothesis “holds that the important brief opportunities for attention to linguistic code features, and for explicit learning (cf. explicit teaching) to improve implicit input processing, occur during negotiation for meaning” (Long, 2015: 1893).

The role of negative feedback in SLA plays a very important role in the Interaction Hypothesis. Such feedback can successfully be provided either implicitly or explicitly when dealing with mistakes made in aspects related to the linguistic component, mainly phonological, grammatical and lexical aspects. Recast is a technique used in language teaching to correct learners’ mistakes while avoiding interference during the communication process. Such a technique is the most common form of negative feedback in the classrooms (1963).

Adult individuals’ success and failure in SLA vary among themselves. There are two more problems in need of explanation when dealing with adults second language acquisition. There are differences in the level of competence and proficiency adult learners have individually, despite their comparable features and opportunities for learning, which are found in such learners.

From my personal point of view, this is one more important reason why individual differences should be considered in language teaching. Every learner is unique and assimilates knowledge in different ways. Multiple intelligences, learning styles and needs analysis, among other aspects, should be considered in second language acquisition to provide learners with the necessary tools and pedagogic tasks to succeed in their learning. Thus, individual and linguistic differences, particularly perceptual saliency, are mainly responsible for the variability in the attainment of L2.

There are two strong predictors in SLA literature: Age of onset or the age which is an important aspect to consider in learning and teaching a language, and aptitude for languages which explain part of the variance among students, but do not have sufficient explanatory potential at the level of differential achievement within learners. The above variables are strongly interconnected and interrelated with each other, especially as far as the aptitude for learning implicitly is concerned. For a theory to be adequate, it must account, not only for how adults achieve whatever they do in a second language, but also for the differences among those learners, within individuals, and in the level of language features and constructions (Long, 2015).

One more aspect to consider is the one related to those stated variables that can be relevant in determining whether learners will be successful or unsuccessful in their use of L2 and learning outcomes, themselves. Cognitive variables take over when students confront the learning activity itself. Sensitivity to input, (not only to negative input) is the most reliable predictor

of success and failure, taking into account the EFL level of knowledge an individual possesses. Such a factor is quite variable among learners and is a key component of language aptitude. Hypothetically speaking, a combination between the interaction of input sensitivity and perceptual saliency is necessary to account for success and failure at the level of both individual learners and individual structures (Long, 2015).

### Reflections

Different processes take place in the development of a native language, ESL or EFL. It is necessary to raise an awareness of those processes in not only native, but also nonnative language teachers, and those involved in the teaching and learning processes. Language acquisition and language learning are two different concepts that have been misinterpreted by some people in the language teaching field.

There is research supporting the stance that language acquisition and language learning are two different processes. Native speakers acquire their language unconsciously; that is, they are not aware of the way they develop their language skills. According to some linguists, there is a critical period when children develop language as described above. During this period, children are, psycholinguistically speaking, equipped to develop proficiency in one, two or more languages they have been exposed to since birth. However, having acquired one or more languages during childhood does not necessarily mean that children have developed conscious knowledge about their language; that is to be able to talk about what they know about their language or languages in terms of

morphology, phonology, lexicon and orthography.

Communicative competence is a concept that has been investigated by language scientists throughout time. Most research has been done on how native speakers of a language develop such competence. However, the literature considered in this general review shows that even though there are some authors that affirm that communicative competence in foreign language methodology and didactics has been researched by scientists, some others state that foreign communicative competence has not been worked out yet.

Communicative competence has been defined from different perspectives by Chomsky (1965), Hymes (1972) and other linguists. Different components that are part of communicative competence have been suggested by linguists such as Hymes, Canale and Swain, among others. These components are the linguistic, sociolinguistic, discursive, pragmatic, strategic, social and cultural ones. The former according to the CEFR, is the specific component that needs to be developed since it is mainly related to the form of the language itself.

There are different methods and approaches that have arisen in an attempt to contribute to the teaching and learning process of a foreign language like English, for example. All of them have as an objective to contribute to the development of foreign language communicative competence. However, in most cases, the methodology and didactics of foreign language teaching as applied by EFL teachers do not consider learning styles, multiple intelligences and individual needs for learning a foreign language.

Most teachers are concerned with fulfilling the requirements of the lessons in the book only through the use of the foreign language, trying to avoid the use of the native language, and expecting all EFL learners, regardless of their age, to develop their skills in the target language almost the same way they acquired their native language. Explaining aspects of the form of the foreign language is not dealt with since teachers and learners are supposed to be teaching and learning EFL, respectively, through communicative activities, all of the learners being expected to learn the foreign language inductively without explicit instruction of linguistic competence aspects.

Adult EFL learners should be taught in a different way from that used in teaching learners who are still in the critical period. In the case of Spanish speakers learning English as a foreign language, the knowledge already acquired in their first language can be used for teaching them aspects of the form of the target language. Translanguaging and Code-switching, as mentioned above, are tools that have been proposed in foreign language teaching in order to make things clear for EFL learners, for example, whenever they have a question about the target language.

The objective in making use of translanguaging and code-switching in EFL teaching is not to translate everything, but to contribute to language learning, specifically with respect to questions EFL learners have about grammatical, phonological, lexical or orthographic rules. These are rules which have to be taught meaningfully; that is through tasks focused on meaning, to develop linguistic competent

skills for learners to become communicatively competent, not only in their knowledge about the target language, but in making use of such knowledge for successfully communicating in written and oral form in different social contexts with native or nonnative speakers of English around the world.

Code-switching in second and foreign language teaching has been a subject of debate regarding its benefit in language learning (Samani, & Narafshan, 2016). Nevertheless, for the purpose of this general review, such a pedagogical practice has been considered an important one to explore for its contribution and support in the development of aspects of linguistic competence. In language classrooms, there are usually learners with different levels of proficiency in the foreign language. There are many answers with respect to how much of a role the native language should play in EFL classrooms (Iyitoglu, 2016). There are different reasons why teachers make use of code-switching in the classroom. One of those reasons has to do with facilitating understanding of grammatical rules and structures (261).

From my point of view students' attitudes with respect to the use of code-switching by their teachers in the language classroom should be considered since they are usually the ones interested in learning. In a study carried out by Samani and Narafshan (2016) learners' attitudes towards the use of code-switching by teachers in EFL classrooms were investigated, positive results were obtained with respect to the use of such a practice by their teachers. In research regarding learners' attitudes with respect to factors that could bring about

the use of code-switching by EFL teachers in their classrooms, it was found that students agreed that this practice enhances their understanding of aspects of the target language. Male and female attitudes towards this practice in EFL classrooms did not prove to be significantly different. Finally, as related to this general review, students' attitude towards teachers teaching language skills and subskills was strongly positive in their agreement regarding the use of code-switching to teach grammar, for example (Samani, & Narafshan, 2016).

### Conclusion

To conclude, it is important to notice that language acquisition and language learning are two different language processes that develop unconsciously and consciously respectively. The relationship existing between these two processes and concept formation provide us with an understanding of what acquiring and learning concepts and languages implies. In teaching EFL, there are different aspects to be considered in order to develop communicative competence in language learners. Age, learning styles, multiple intelligences, and individual needs, among other factors, need to be considered to make use of the appropriate methodology and didactics best suited for learners to reach their goal, that of becoming competent communicatively speaking.

Explicit instruction of aspects of the linguistic component of communicative competence in English as a foreign language through meaningful contexts, that is through activities focused on meaning, can contribute to the development of such competence, not only in terms of knowledge about language forms, but in the

actual use of the target language in real life situations. Both native and nonnative English teachers must develop linguistic competence, which involves knowledge of grammar, phonetics, lexicon and spelling. Having acquired the English language, in the case of native speakers, does not necessarily mean that they will be able to teach the target language when they lack knowledge of didactic theory and methodology with regard to the aforementioned linguistic aspects.

Teachers and learners' attitudes and perceptions towards the topic for this general review, that of exploring the development of linguistic competence in English learning as a foreign language, should be taken into account in order to support the relevance of this type of themes, which have as an aim, to contribute to the learning of English as a foreign language in adult L2 learners in a non-native context of EFL. This is important to consider since according to literature of some studies examined for this general review positive and/or negative results with respect to implicit and/or explicit instruction of aspects of linguistic competence have been obtained, but based on their specific contexts.

There is plenty of literature related to the debate between teaching L2, both implicitly and explicitly. The comparison and contrast between children acquiring their native language during the critical period and older children or adults learning an L2 has proven to be a relevant issue to explore since literature related to explicit instruction mainly through meaningful contexts, significantly supports the interest in the undertaking of this general review.

The work carried out by Long (2015), who deals with Second Language Acquisition and Task-Based Language Teaching, was mainly considered as part of the literature explored for the development of this general review for its contribution in terms of topics related to implicit and explicit instruction which lead to implicit and explicit learning or knowledge. Throughout the reading of Long's chapters, one could observe what some other linguists, language scientists, and language researchers in native and second language acquisition have discovered with respect to various topics related to L1 and L2 development.

Switching from a foreign to the native language of foreign language learners, as mentioned above, is a language process also known as code-switching; it is a concept that Long (2015) dealt with briefly, but can support the idea of the importance of making use of students' native language in making some aspects of the target language clear, not only in terms of explicit instruction of those aspects of linguistic competence that may be too abstract to be understood by language learners, but also to make things clear for them when instructions to proceed on a learning task have not been comprehended.

An awareness of the different factors involved in the teaching and learning processes of EFL should be taken into account. Both teachers and learners involved in the teaching and learning processes respectively, need to reflect on the different aspects of each component of communicative competence, not only in terms of knowledge about the language, but also in making use of such knowledge to become

communicatively competent, either in oral or written form in different social contexts.

Administrators will also benefit from the information provided in this general review since they will realize the importance of taking into account knowledge NESTs and NNESTs have about the English language so they can transmit it to their learners effectively. Stakeholders should understand that not because someone is a native speaker of a language, that person has really developed communicative competence in terms of knowledge about the language. They should train their foreign language teachers in developing aspects of linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, strategic, social and cultural competences so they can become communicatively competent, first in terms of what they need to know about their native and/or foreign language or languages they are teaching, and for them

to develop oral and written communicative competence so that, in turn, they can develop these competences in their EFL learners.

There are different factors and aspects that should be considered in teaching EFL learners. Learning styles, multiple intelligences, individual needs, age, etc. play a very important role in deciding upon the approach, method, techniques, strategies and language practices that would help learners develop the target language more effectively. Explicit instruction of aspects of the linguistic component of communicative competence in terms of knowledge about the language and for becoming communicatively competent, both in writing and speaking, could be one of those options in teaching EFL learners. The above considering activities focused on meaning.

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