

# Foreign language learning: phraseology and discourse

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## Summary

Learning a foreign language involves a combination of extra-linguistic (age, motivation, socio-cultural environment, etc.) and purely linguistic factors. The influence of linguistic factors has often been studied from two radically different perspectives: cross-linguistic influence (or transfer) and developmental issues (see Cook 1993, Ellis 1994 or Gass 1996). While proponents of the cross-linguistic trend support the existence of positive and/or negative transfer from the learner's mother tongue, other theoreticians suggest that all foreign language learners, irrespective of their mother tongue, are faced with similar developmental issues.

Although Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies have gained wide recognition, some major methodological issues or weaknesses should be addressed :

- the term Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has often been used as a general term encompassing all aspects relating to the 'mastering of a language which is different from the mother tongue', hence disregarding or blurring important differences between second language and foreign language or between acquisition and learning
- the transfer and developmental perspectives have often been studied separately, using different research methodologies, hence losing the benefit of cross-fertilization (Oshita 2000, Granger 2002)
- the amount of solid empirical data used to support the theories is often very scarce
- more attention has been devoted to phonology, lexis or syntax, while other domains such as phraseology or discourse have been largely neglected
- more attention has been devoted to the early stages of learning
- the influence of classroom practice has too often been neglected, disregarding the fact that studying FLL inevitably involves considerations not only of learners' performances per se but also of the teaching and learning methods which have helped the learners attain their proficiency level in foreign languages. The present project aims to address the above-mentioned issues and has three main objectives:

THEORETICAL: studying

- both developmental and cross-linguistic influence on the learning of foreign languages
- in two (so far) largely neglected areas, i.e. phraseology and discourse

- at more advanced proficiency levels

METHODOLOGICAL:

- demonstrating the importance of corpus data and methodology to complement experimental data
- evaluating automatic language analysis

APPLIED: reinforcing the link between theory and practice in FLL research by

- taking classroom practice into account in FLL research
- integrating research findings in teaching practice (adapting the curriculum, improving teaching methods and offering tailor-made tools for advanced learners)