A look under the hood

A study of SLA beliefs and the underlying theories

Contents

1   Introduction

'For millions of years, mankind lived just like the animals. Then something happened which unleashed the power of our imagination. We learned to talk.' (Gilmour, D. et al. 1994, Track 9)

Ever since those first primitive utterances, mankind has been trying to understand how we acquired this gift. Is it simply an innate ability that we all possess from birth or is it a series of learned structures and behaviours that we acquire over time from our environment and interaction with others? Furthermore, how do learner beliefs and their understanding about the nature of language and learning compare to the theories governing how we as teachers view the process of language acquisition. In order to answer these questions we first need to understand how language is acquired.

2   First Language Acquisition Theories

Children acquire their first language at an extraordinary speed and to a degree of proficiency beyond pure chance. While we are able to recognize the different stages, the process remains a mystery. According to Lightbown and Spada (2006, p.10) there are three main theoretical positions: the behaviourist, the innatist, and the cognitivist/developmental.

2.1   The Behaviourist Approach

The traditional procedure for this approach is; stimulus, response followed by reward. Consequently, imitation and exposure to positive reinforcement are major factors. As Brown (2007, p.26) mentions:

'A behaviourist might consider effective language behaviour to be the production of correct responses to stimuli. If a particular response is reinforced, it then becomes habitual, or conditioned. Thus children produce linguistic responses that are reinforced.'

Essentially, traditional behaviourism is the personification of the metaphorical donkey and the carrot; the donkey is the child, the desired linguistic response is the cart and the reinforcement, is the carrot.

This view however was challenged by Skinner, when he deemphasized the role of the stimulus believing it was the reinforcers that follow a response that increase the probability of recurrence and thus the possibility of habituation (Brown, 2007, p. 89).

2.2   The Innatist Approach

At the other end of the spectrum are the innatists who believe that we are born, preprogrammed with all the knowledge to acquire language (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.15).

2.2.1   *Universal Grammar*

Noam Chomsky theorized that all human languages are innate and that the same universal principles underlie them all (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.15). This was the basis of his theory of Universal Grammar; a kind of hard disk pre-packed with all the basic properties and procedures of the grammars of the world (Shortall in Willis and Willis, 1996, p.34).

2.2.2   *Critical Period Hypothesis*

The CPH suggests that there is a period in human development when the brain is predisposed to acquire languages more easily than at any other time (Lightbown and Spada in Candlin and Mercer, 2001, p.36). This period lasts until around puberty.

2.3   The Cognitivist/Developmental Approach

In contrast to behavourists who believe, they can teach it and to innatists who believe, we are born with it, cognitivists and developmentalists believe that you only need to be exposed to language in order to acquire it.

2.3.1 *Interactionism*

Interactionists feel that language acquisition is similar to and influenced by the acquisition of other skills and knowledge and that it is directly related to the child's experience and cognitive development (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.19). Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky supported this view and concluded that language develops primarily from social interaction and that in a supportive interactive environment; children are able to advance to a higher level of knowledge and performance than if left to develop independently (Brown, 2007, p.20). He called such an environment the Zone of Proximal Development.

2.3.2 *Connectionism*

While agreeing with the interactionist principle that exposure is essential to language acquisition, connectionism goes even further by suggesting that exposure is all that is necessary:

> '…children acquire links or connections between words and phrases and the situations in which they occur…when children hear a word or phrase in the context of a specific object, event, or person, an association is created in the child's mind between the word or phrase and what it represents. Thus, hearing a word brings to mind the object and seeing the object brings to mind the word or phrase.' (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.23)

3 Second Language Acquisition Theories

People have little problem achieving mastery of their first language. However, attaining the same level of proficiency in a second language is a different matter. SLA theories can also be categorized as behaviourist, innatist or cognitivist/developmental.

3.1 The Behaviourist Approach

3.1.1 *Behaviourism*

Teaching approaches such as ALM and PPP have long been linked to behaviourist theory due to their dependence on habit formation and the role of practice in their classes (Shortall in Willis and

Willis, 1996, p.31). Language development is viewed as the formation of habits and automated responses to pre-rehearsed dialogues hence teaching materials and teacher training emphasize mimicry and rote learning (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.34).

3.1.2 *Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis*

In keeping with the then popular behaviourist theory, it was hypothesized that habits formed in the first language would interfere with the acquisition of the second target language (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.34). Essentially the CAH suggests that a first language can be contrasted with the target second language to predict the errors that a learner will make (Shortall in Willis and Willis, 1996, p.31). Robert Lado (1957) cited in Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) (in Willis, 1997, p.65) clarifies:

> 'Those elements that are similar to the learner's native language will be simpler for him, and those elements which are different will be difficult.'

3.2 The Innatist Approach:

3.2.1 *Universal Grammar*

Although Chomsky made no direct attempt to connect his theory of UG with SLA, other linguists have argued that because learners end up knowing more about the target language than could conceivably be learned from exposure alone, that UG must be available to second language learners as well (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.35).

3.2.2 *Krashen's Monitor Model*

Influenced by Chomsky, Stephen Krashen put forward the Monitor Model for SLA defined by the following five hypotheses.

3.2.3 *The Acquisition - Learning Hypothesis*

Krashen (1983) asserts that there are two language systems, one for conscious learning; where the

focus is on form and rule learning and the other for unconscious and natural acquisition; in which no particular attention is given to language form. Krashen (1983) contends that the two systems are completely separated and that what is learned does not filter into the acquired system (cited in Willis, 1997, p.86).

3.2.4   *The Monitor Hypothesis*

Krashen (1983) here states that all utterances are initiated by the speaker's acquired system and that the learned system merely plays a monitoring role, allowing for alterations or corrections. However, such editing can only occur if the following three conditions are met: the speaker has enough time, is concerned about correctness and has learned the relevant rules (Jordan, 2004, p.179).

3.2.5   *The Natural Order Hypothesis*

As with FLA, grammatical structures are acquired in a predictable sequence; although this does not apply to learned structures (Willis, 1997, p.87). The order of acquisition is not governed by simplicity and is independent of the order in which the grammatical structures are taught (Jordan, 2004, p.179).

3.2.6   *The Input Hypothesis*

According to Krashen (1983), understanding comprehensible input leads to SLA (Brown, 2007, p.295). He states that we acquire language by understanding input which is a little beyond our current level of acquired competence (Willis, 1997, p.87). This is represented by the equation [i + 1], i symbolizing the level of acquired language up to now and + 1 corresponding to language that is just one step beyond that level (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.37).

3.2.7   *The Affective Filter Hypothesis*

In order to explain individual variation in SLA and why some learners never acquire full competence despite being exposed to large quantities of comprehensible input; Krashen (1983)

proposed the affective filter, a type of internal processing system that subconsciously screens input based on the learner's motivation, attitude, needs and emotional state (Jordan, 2004, p.180). Negative factors such as lack of motivation, anxiety or dislike of the L2 culture prevent the learner from making use of available input, thereby affecting the learner's progress with regard to acquisition though not necessarily to learning (Willis, 1997, p.87).

3.2.8   *The Critical Period Hypothesis*

Research supporting a CP in FLA seems absolute, as for SLA, the existence or non-existence of a cut-off point such as in FLA is still a topic of debate (Singleton in McGroarty, 2001, p.82). Regardless of their lack of success, adult learners are not total failures. Two speculations have been advanced to explain this: Firstly, that there is a sensitive period rather than an all or nothing critical period and secondly that this sensitive period affects different linguistic domains differentially (Han, 2003, p.47). As defined by Patkowski (1980) (cited in Han, 2003, p.48):

> 'The sensitive period notion holds only that absolute, native like proficiency in all aspects of language (including vocabulary and syntax) is impossible to attain for the adult learner; it does not hold that extremely high, quasi-native levels cannot be attained in one or more areas. Furthermore, it must be insisted that what is referred to as the eventual level of proficiency attained after a sufficient period of exposure to and immersion in the target language under optimal sociolinguistic and affective conditions.'

3.3   The Cognitivist/Developmental Approach

Given that SLA often falls short of full success, cognitivists and developmentalists see SLA as the building up of knowledge that will eventually become automatic. As with any other skill, at first even simple tasks (like a greeting) require a lot of attention and concentration, but over time these processes become automated requiring almost no thought at all and allowing several tasks to occur simultaneously and seem spontaneous (Brown, 2007, p.300).

3.3.1 *The Interaction Hypothesis*

According to this theory, language is acquired as learners interact and attempt to communicate in the target language; in effect 'learning by doing' (Nunan, 1999, p.51). Michael Long (1983) (cited in Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.43) describes the relationship:

> 'Interactional modification makes input comprehensible, comprehensible input promotes acquisition therefore, interactional modification promotes acquisition'.

As pointed out by Lightbown and Spada, (2006, p.44) modification can include elaboration, slower speech, gesture or even the addition of other contextual cues.

3.3.2 *The Output Hypothesis*

While observing students in an immersion program in Canada, Merrill Swain (1985) found that despite receiving massive amounts of comprehensible input, their second language development was not supporting the input hypothesis. She concluded that output was at least as significant as input, if not more so, suggesting that opportunities to produce language were important for acquisition (Nunan, 1999, p.45).

3.3.3 *Connectionism*

As introduced above as an explanation for FLA, connectionists believe that learners of a second language gradually accumulate knowledge solely through exposure without ever needing to learn the rules.

4 Learner Beliefs

Beliefs about the nature of language and learning are built up over time by the learner and include all that they understand about themselves as learners and thinkers, including their goals and needs. Hence, they can be viewed as a component of metacognitive knowledge (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005, p.1). With regard to teacher beliefs, Bailey et al explained in Freeman and Richards (1996,

p.11) "…we teach as we have been taught…" assuming that this is also true of the learner; the way a learner has studied will undoubtedly affect how they perceive the process of language acquisition. Perception of success and expectancy can also play major roles in the creation of learner beliefs, realistically high levels can help to build confidence whereas unrealistically high levels tend to promote incompetence (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005, p.4).

5   Rationale

The perceptions, attitudes and metacognitive knowledge that learners bring with them to the classroom are recognized as significant contributory factors to learning performance and success (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005, p.1). Therefore, it is only logical that when studying SLA these beliefs are also looked at and their implication to the acquisition process assessed.

6   Participants

The participants in this study were 54 adults, 35 adult students and the parents of 19 small children. All were native speakers of Japanese.

7   Method

For this study a Likert-scale questionnaire based on Horwitz's (1988) Beliefs about language learning inventory (BALLI) was administered. The statements used in the survey (see appendix 1) were adapted from similar inventories by Horwitz (1988), Cotteral (1995) and Lightbown and Spada (2006) as a means of assessing the students' and the children's parents' beliefs towards the nature of language and learning.

8   Results

Data collected from the questionnaires was charted and percentages calculated to facilitate inter-group comparison (see appendices 2 and 3). Areas of agreement, disagreement or uncertainty were then colour coded to aid in distinguishing areas of interest, particularly statements that resulted

in agreement or disagreement between the two groups (see appendix 3). The data was then processed and the statements were changed to reflect the opinions of the respondents and ranked in descending order (see appendices 4 and 5).

9   Analysis and Discussion

9.1   Areas of Agreement on SLA Beliefs

The following discussion will look at some of the main areas where the adult students and the children's parents agreed and try to account for this concurrence (see appendices 4 and 5).

9.1.1   *To learn successfully all you need is enough exposure to the target language*

Both groups showed significant support for the connectionism idea that exposure to language is the key mechanism in acquisition. Many of the parents explained their desire for their children to be taught by a native English speaker on the basis that they would 'absorb' the language. A possible rationale for this is the parents' own experience studying English in the Japanese school system where the emphasis was on grammar translation rather than communication, with very little exposure to the target language. However, as pointed out by Singleton, (in Mayo, 2003, p.17) time spent in the company of native speakers only seems to help with the quality of L2 pronunciation. While it is true that performance will improve with exposure, chances to produce meaningful language should not be overlooked and neither should the possibility that a lack of formal instruction could lead to fossilization (Willis, 1997, p.51). Ellis, (referred to in Nunan, 1999, p.45) also concluded that it was quality rather than quantity of the exposure that mattered.

9.1.2   *Practice makes perfect*

This age old adage fits almost any situation where a new skill is being learned, be it learning how to write the alphabet or remembering a speech, the importance of practice cannot be denied. That being said, this behavourist assumption that by we can improve simply by practicing is very attractive and misleading. With regard to more mechanical skills the merits of practice can easily be

observed and evaluated. However, it has been suggested by Lightbown in Willis (1997, p.44) with regard to language learning and in particular the production of spontaneous language that controlled practice will not make production automatic and that even successful production under controlled conditions may not guarantee spontaneous production. In order to see the benefits of practice on language learning we need to expand the traditional parameters of practice to include, exposure to and comprehension of a language feature and not only rely on repetitive drills such as those found in ALM (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.39).

9.1.3 *People don't learn languages in the same way*

Taking into account different language backgrounds, learning experiences and the fact that people are told throughout their lives that they are unique, the statement above appears logical. This deep belief in individuality may be the reason why this notion is popular among the adult students and the children's parents. Nevertheless, testament agreeing with Krashen's Natural Order Hypothesis has been discovered in the developing interlanguage of learners from different language backgrounds. These developmental sequences were found to be similar to those observed in the first language acquisition of the same language, which shows that, just as in FLA, there are also predictable developmental sequences in SLA (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.82, 92).

A plausible explanation is that the adult students and the children's parents view success as a means of determining learning, consequently someone who has a mastery of a language would be perceived to be a better learner than someone who is still struggling. This variation could be explained by language learning aptitude, styles or preferences. It is important to emphasize that developmental stages are not closed and that learners can utilize sentences typical of several stages at the same time and that progress to a higher stage does not always mean the learners produce fewer errors (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.92-93).

9.1.4 *Motivation is an important factor in language learning*

Motivation can be defined in terms of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation depending on the learner's goals and needs. Van Lier (in Candlin and Mercer, 2001, p.97) adds that extrinsic rewards can have a negative effect on intrinsic motivation and diminish a learner's motivation and desire to learn. A student's motivation cannot be controlled by the teacher, but creating a supportive environment where students can experience success can help (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.85). The idea that a learner's motivational state might affect their success is in keeping with Krashen's Affective filter hypothesis illustrated above and as expected, all of the participants agreed with this statement. It is reasonable to presume that all of them have at some stage in their lives experienced the benefits of motivation.

9.1.5 *The earlier a second language in introduced in school programmes, the greater the likelihood of success in learning*

The concept that younger is better is generally accepted by SLA researchers and lends itself to the critical period hypothesis. This is corroborated by Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson's (2000) claim (cited by Singleton in Mayo, 2003, p.10) that:

> 'Younger learners acquire second languages automatically from mere exposure, while older learners have to make conscious and labored efforts',

This inferred difficulty for post-puberty learners is the likely reason why both the children's parents and the adult students agreed with this idea. The children's parents might view early English education as a chance to give their children an opportunity that they perceive they never had. By learning from a younger age they hope their children will succeed where they had failed. As for the adult students they probably see their late introduction as a potential reason for their fossilization and lack of improvement. Ellis (1985), on the other hand asserts, that it may not be as simple as that:

> '…while age does not alter the route of acquisition, it does have a marked effect on rate

and ultimate success…For example, in terms of rate, <u>adults appear to do better than children</u> (6 to10 years), while teenagers (12-15 years) appear to outperform both adults and children' (cited in Nunan, 1999, p.41)

Furthermore the decision of when to introduce a second language into a school should be based on the student's needs and the school's language objectives, and not age related generalizations. Lightbown and Spada (2006, p.186) explains:

> 'When the objective is native-like performance in the second language, then it may be desirable to begin exposure to the language as early as possible,…when the goal of the educational programme is basic communicative skill for all students,…it can be more efficient to begin second language teaching later.'

9.1.6   *The learner should try and use L2 as much as possible inside the classroom*

No one can deny that using a language being learned is a good thing. Two theories that share this observation; the interaction hypothesis and the output hypothesis, agree that "learners need to speak in order to learn." Nunan, (1999, p.51) suggests that:

> '…language is acquired as learners actively engage in attempting to communicate in that target language…' and that '…acquisition will be maximized when learners engage in tasks that "push" them to the limits of their current competence.'

This is expanded on by Swain (2005, 1995) (cited in Brown, 2007, p.298-299) with her definition of the three major functions of output in SLA: For learners to notice their own linguistic shortcomings, to try out and test various language hypotheses and to reflect on language through interaction with peers.

As implied earlier, the parent's memories of studying English may not be pleasant. It is possible that they associate more communicative classes with being fun and interesting, unlike the grammar

translation of their youth.

While they stated that they believe speaking in class is important, many of the adult students are reluctant speakers (Nunan, 1999, p.231). However, the fact that they acknowledged its importance leaves this researcher with a sense of hope of someday seeing them gain the confidence to speak. Although, according to Nunan (1999, p.45), Ellis (1984) found that those learners who interacted least in class appeared to improve the most, inferring, maybe that they are just fine the way they are.

9.2 Areas of Disagreement on SLA Beliefs

The following discussion will look at some of the main areas where the adult students and the children's parents disagreed and try to shed light on the source of the difference of opinion (see appendix 6).

9.2.1 *Learning a second language is the same as learning your first language*

What is interesting here is the disparity between the two groups. The children's parents are clearly of the opinion that the above view is true whereas the adult students completely reject it. Without further investigation it is only possible to speculate as to the origin of these results.

In the case of young learners, differences in learner characteristics and the environments in which first and second language acquisition occur are major determining factors (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.29). Given that all children achieve perfect mastery of their first language; the notion that their child can effortlessly acquire a second language could be intoxicating for the parents. If so, they fail to allow for the amount of exposure to language, communication opportunities and error correction their children face on a daily basis in their L1. Also, assuming that language acquisition is facilitated in the interactionist or connectionist manner, one hour of second language instruction a week cannot be compared to 7 days of mother tongue exposure. By asserting that SLA is the same as FLA, the parents may in fact be declaring that they believe there is no need for them to actively

participate in their children's second language education.

Concerning adult learning, Willis (1997, p.86) points out that a major difference between FLA and SLA is that a second language learner already has knowledge of one language system and is likely to view the second language in light of this. Taking this into consideration, as well as the time spent studying and the obvious lack of success felt by the adult students it is easy to see why they regarded the idea of SLA being the same as FLA to be false.

9.2.2   *Learning about pragmatics is important*

Communicating effectively in a language involves more than knowing a few words and phrases. Even learners with a substantial vocabulary and a good grasp of syntax and morphology can encounter difficulty. Gaining the knowledge to understand and be able to interpret requests, respond to polite compliments or apologies, recognize humour and manage conversations is equally if not more important for the learner in order to survive outside the classroom (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.101).

With a 77 percent majority in agreement it is obvious that the adult students understand this and see the potential from its study. Most have probably at some point been in a situation where they could understand the words, but had no idea of their implied meaning. From the opposing results it is apparent the children's parents do not share this belief. Perhaps they feel that pragmatics is better suited to more mature learners who already have a strong background in grammar and syntax. English language education in Japan is for the most part focused towards high school and university entrance examinations, both of which require very little use of pragmatics.

9.2.3   *Mistakes by second language learners are usually due to interference from their first language*

L1 is a significant factor in the acquisition of L2 and the effect can either facilitate or interfere with

production and comprehension of the new language. The most visible effect is of course interference in the form of errors. In the early stages many of the errors can be attributed to the learner trying to operate L2 in the same fashion as L1 (Brown, 2001, p.65-66). As Lightbown and Spada (2006, p.187) explain not all errors are causes for alarm:

> 'Learners from different language backgrounds often make the same kinds of errors, and some of these errors are remarkably similar to those made by first language learners. In such cases, second-language errors are evidence of the learners' efforts to discover the structure of the target language itself rather than attempts to transfer patterns from their first language.'

Just over half of the adult students embraced this idea compared to an almost equal number of the children's parents who opposed it. For the adult students being able to blame L1 for errors could be a means to explain away their own mistakes. More than likely though, they have noticed first hand errors influenced by their native language. The children's parents on the other hand might not notice when the child's L1 is interfering and may conclude any errors they make are the result of inadequate instruction by the teacher and thus the teacher's responsibility.

9.2.4 *Teachers should use materials that expose students to structures that they haven't been taught yet*

Explained earlier with regard to Krashen's input hypothesis, exposure to material beyond a learner's current level may be a key factor in facilitating acquisition. This approach helps to promote motivation by providing a challenge to keep the learner interested and motivated (Brown, 2007, p.295). When communicative competence is the desired result it is important to remember that outside the classroom the learner will be exposed to many forms and structures that they have not neither mastered nor come across before (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.191). Knowing how to manage these situations could be the difference between success and failure.

The adult students' disagreement could be interpreted as permission to use resources that better reflect the real world as opposed to the sterile, prefabricated and level conscious content they are accustomed to. The children's parents' agreement could be the result of past experiences with English. Having themselves not been taught strategies for dealing with the unknown, the prospect of their children being exposed to such resources and being able to learn maybe beyond their comprehension.

9.2.5 *Students learn what they are taught*

Anyone who has tried to teach a language can tell you that this is simply not the case. Recalling Krashen's natural order hypothesis, Krashen claims that acquisition does not apply to learned structures and is independent to teaching (Jordan, 2004, p.179). Rod Ellis (1993, p.4) adds:

> '…what is taught is not necessarily learned since what is learned is controlled by the learner and not the teacher, not the textbooks, not the syllabus.'

As shown in the results, the children's parents regard learning English to be different to learning other academic subjects. Whereas subjects like math and science are viewed as compulsory, English's voluntary nature and the fee involved put it in a different light. English class is maybe seen as no different from any other service that can be purchased. Therefore, it is this researcher's hypothesis that the parents set higher expectations on English. This is alluded to by actions such as immediately quizzing their children on the contents of a class directly following its conclusion and their lack of willingness to help with and monitor their child's homework. If their child is having difficulty; it is the fault of the teacher and nothing else.

The adult students alternatively appear to realize that the above position is not true. Experience gained from years of studying and the continued trouble with patterns that they have had numerous encounters with could account for this.

9.2.6 *The teacher should only use the student's L2 when teaching*

As mentioned by Brown (2001, p.99):

> 'The rule of thumb is usually to restrict classroom language to English unless some distinct advantage is gained by the use of their native language, and only then for brief stretches of time'.

Foreign language classes are inherently different to those of a second language, in that they usually have very limited target language exposure. For that reason, using the learner's L1 could severely undermine any attempt by the teacher to create an environment where real communication can be facilitated. Once that happens, it is conceivable that the need to use L2 in the classroom would become a moot point.

Monitoring the amount of L1 used in the classroom seems to be the main issue here. The adult students obviously disagreed with this assumption on the grounds that they now and then need to confirm difficult grammar points, whereas the children's parents are coming with the idea that an English only class is like a mini immersion programme. Both points of view are warranted and acceptable.

10 Implications and limitations of the results

Research (Cotterall, 1995) suggests that attitudes towards learning, and the perceptions and beliefs that determine them may have an effect on learning behaviour and conceivably success (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005, p.4). By being aware of the nature of these beliefs and their underlying philosophies it is possible to predict potential areas of resistance and enhance the process of language learning. These beliefs will shape overall lesson planning, the selection of content and the form of interaction decided on by the teacher (Burns in Freeman and Richards, 1996, p.158). In addition, through identification of these beliefs and reflection on their likely impact on language learning and teaching; areas where there is a positive effect can help with future syllabus design and

teaching practices (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005, p.2). In short the valuable insights provided will result in better classes and parental encounters that encourage and facilitate learner development and growth through awareness and understanding.

Where unsuccessful learning experiences have resulted in the formation of negative beliefs toward language and learning, as may be the case with the children's parents; it is necessary to attend to the affective and cognitive components of their attitudes and develop a pedagogical base from which to defend and teach (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005, p.9). If these beliefs are the result of limited knowledge and or experience; providing new information or simply discussing the nature of language in class (or after), may be effective (Horwitz, 1988, p.292).

It is important to remember that the beliefs profiled here were selected by the researcher and may not accurately represent the beliefs held by the participants. The normative approach used obviously fails to capture the true complexity of a personal belief system and may have lead to misunderstandings concerning questionnaire items (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005, p.8).

11   Conclusion

What can be seen from the results of this study is an eclectic nature towards theories, with both groups accepting truths from each of the three defined perspectives. There is a definite lean towards innatism with a hint of behaviourism and cognitivism /developmentalism; in that both groups believe that learning a language is as natural as breathing but also accept that exposure and practice are important factors. Before any final conclusions can be made further study is necessary. However, trying to pinpoint the learner's position on various beliefs may be a futile pursuit, due to the dynamic nature of learner beliefs, what they believe today may be different from what they believe tomorrow.

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13   Appendices

13.1   Appendix 1:   SLA Beliefs: Questionnaire

Beliefs About Language Learning

Key:

Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the answer that best describes your opinion.

Q1	It is possible to learn a language in a short time.	1	2	3	4	5
Q2	Making mistakes is harmful in language learning.	1	2	3	4	5
Q3	Learning a second language is not the same as learning your first language.	1	2	3	4	5
Q4	It is easier for children to learn a language than it is for adults.	1	2	3	4	5
Q5	It is important for learners to be able to pronounce all the individual sounds in the second language.	1	2	3	4	5
Q6	You shouldn't say anything in your second language until you can say it correctly.	1	2	3	4	5
Q7	It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	1	2	3	4	5
Q8	Learning a second language is different than learning other academic subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
Q9	Learning about pragmatics is important.	1	2	3	4	5
Q10	It is easier to learn something in your second language if it is similar to your first language.	1	2	3	4	5
Q11	To learn successfully all you need is enough exposure to the target language.	1	2	3	4	5
Q12	Practice makes perfect.	1	2	3	4	5
Q13	People learn languages in the same way.	1	2	3	4	5
Q14	It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	1	2	3	4	5
Q15	Languages are learned through imitation.	1	2	3	4	5
Q16	Motivation is an important factor in language learning.	1	2	3	4	5
Q17	Mistakes by second language learners are usually due to interference from their first language.	1	2	3	4	5
Q18	It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.	1	2	3	4	5
Q19	Grammatical rules should be presented one at a time.	1	2	3	4	5
Q20	Simple structures should be presented before more complex ones.	1	2	3	4	5
Q21	The earlier a second language is introduced in school programmes, the greater the likelihood of success in learning.	1	2	3	4	5
Q22	Learners' errors should be corrected by the teacher immediately to prevent the formation of bad habits.	1	2	3	4	5
Q23	Teachers shouldn't use materials that expose students to structures they haven't been taught yet.	1	2	3	4	5
Q24	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning grammar.	1	2	3	4	5
Q25	Students learn what they are taught.	1	2	3	4	5
Q26	Teachers should rephrase learners' errors rather than focusing on the mistake.	1	2	3	4	5
Q27	The teacher should be an expert at language teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
Q28	The teacher should be an expert at learning languages.	1	2	3	4	5
Q29	The teacher should be an expert at showing students how to learn languages.	1	2	3	4	5
Q30	The teacher should be a native speaker.	1	2	3	4	5
Q31	The teacher should be able to speak a second language.	1	2	3	4	5
Q32	The teacher should only use the student's L2 when teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
Q33	The learner should try and use L2 as much as possible outside the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
Q34	The learner should try and use L2 as much as possible inside the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
Q35	The learner should never question the teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
Q36	The learner should only use patterns that they have been taught.	1	2	3	4	5
Q37	The learner should correct their own mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5
Q38	The learner should correct their peers' mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5

13.2   Appendix 2:   SLA Questionnaire Results for Adult Students and Children's Parents

SLA Beliefs: Questionnaire Results	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	AS	CP	AS	CP	AS	CP
Q1 It is possible to learn a language in a short time.	7	3	6	3	22	13
Q2 Making mistakes is harmful in language learning.	1	3	2	2	32	14
Q3 Learning a second language is the same as learning your first language.	7	10	9	4	19	5
Q4 It is easier for children to learn a language than it is for adults.	24	15	12	3	2	1
Q5 It is important for learners to be able to pronounce all the individual sounds in the second language.	27	18	4	1	4	0
Q6 You shouldn't say anything in your second language until you can say it correctly.	1	2	3	5	31	12
Q7 It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	13	3	13	4	9	12
Q8 Learning a second language is different than learning other academic subjects.	18	10	4	6	13	3
Q9 Learning about pragmatics is important.	27	4	6	5	2	10
Q10 It is easier to learn something in your second language if it is similar to your first language.	27	12	6	4	2	3
Q11 To learn successfully all you need is enough exposure to the target language.	34	18	0	0	1	1
Q12 Practice makes perfect.	2	0	2	2	31	17
Q13 People learn languages in the same way.	1	0	2	3	32	16
Q14 It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	21	11	9	8	5	0
Q15 Languages are learned through imitation.	24	15	10	3	1	1
Q16 Motivation is an important factor in language learning.	35	19	0	0	0	0
Q17 Mistakes by second language learners are usually due to interference from their first language.	18	6	11	3	6	10
Q18 It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.	23	6	8	3	4	10
Q19 Grammatical rules should be presented one at a time.	14	9	11	9	10	1
Q20 Simple structures should be presented before more complex ones.	30	12	5	8	0	0
Q21 The earlier a second language is introduced in school programmes, the greater the likelihood of success in learning.	29	17	3	2	3	0
Q22 Learners' errors should be corrected by the teacher immediately to prevent the formation of bad habits.	26	18	6	1	3	0
Q23 Teachers shouldn't use materials that expose students to structures they haven't been taught yet.	1	9	6	6	28	4
Q24 The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning grammar.	10	4	11	10	14	5
Q25 Students learn what they are taught.	8	10	7	6	20	3
Q26 Teachers should rephrase learners' errors rather than focusing on the mistake.	22	13	8	5	5	1
Q27 The teacher should be an expert at language teaching.	19	12	10	5	6	2
Q28 The teacher should be an expert at learning languages.	17	12	13	6	5	1
Q29 The teacher should be an expert at showing students how to learn languages.	21	10	11	8	3	1
Q30 The teacher should be a native speaker.	15	9	15	9	5	1
Q31 The teacher should be able to speak a second language.	10	5	17	12	8	2
Q32 The teacher should only use the student's L2 when teaching.	6	12	10	7	19	0
Q33 The learner should try and use L2 as much as possible outside the classroom.	26	15	6	3	3	1
Q34 The learner should try and use L2 as much as possible inside the classroom.	32	18	2	1	1	0
Q35 The learner should never question the teacher.	16	12	12	7	7	0
Q36 The learner should only use patterns that they have been taught.	1	0	6	7	28	12
Q37 The learner should correct their own mistakes.	29	14	3	3	3	2
Q38 The learner should correct their peers' mistakes.	12	10	12	7	11	2

13.3   Appendix 3:   Percentage of Agreement or Disagreement with items

SLA Beliefs: Percentage of Agreement or Disagreement	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	AS	CP	AS	CP	AS	CP
Q1 It is possible to learn a language in a short time.	20%	16%	17%	16%	63%	68%
Q2 Making mistakes is harmful in language learning.	3%	16%	6%	11%	91%	74%
Q3 Learning a second language is the same as learning your first language.	20%	53%	26%	21%	54%	26%
Q4 It is easier for children to learn a language than it is for adults.	69%	79%	34%	16%	6%	5%
Q5 It is important for learners to be able to pronounce all the individual sounds in the second language.	77%	95%	11%	5%	11%	0%
Q6 You shouldn't say anything in your second language until you can say it correctly.	3%	11%	9%	26%	89%	63%
Q7 It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	37%	16%	37%	21%	26%	63%
Q8 Learning a second language is different than learning other academic subjects.	51%	53%	11%	32%	37%	16%
Q9 Learning about pragmatics is important.	77%	21%	17%	27%	6%	53%
Q10 It is easier to learn something in your second language if it is similar to your first language.	77%	63%	17%	21%	6%	16%
Q11 To learn successfully all you need is enough exposure to the target language.	97%	95%	0%	0%	3%	5%
Q12 Practice makes perfect.	89%	89%	6%	11%	6%	11%
Q13 People learn languages in the same way.	3%	0%	6%	16%	91%	84%
Q14 It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	60%	58%	26%	42%	14%	0%
Q15 Languages are learned through imitation.	69%	79%	29%	16%	3%	5%
Q16 Motivation is an important factor in language learning.	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Q17 Mistakes by second language learners are usually due to interference from their first language.	51%	32%	31%	16%	17%	53%
Q18 It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.	65%	32%	23%	16%	11%	53%
Q19 Grammatical rules should be presented one at a time.	40%	47%	31%	47%	29%	5%
Q20 Simple structures should be presented before more complex ones.	86%	63%	14%	47%	0%	0%
Q21 The earlier a second language is introduced in school programmes, the greater the likelihood of success in learning.	83%	89%	9%	11%	9%	0%
Q22 Learners' errors should be corrected by the teacher immediately to prevent the formation of bad habits.	74%	95%	17%	5%	9%	0%
Q23 Teachers shouldn't use materials that expose students to structures they haven't been taught yet.	3%	47%	17%	32%	80%	21%
Q24 The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning grammar.	29%	21%	31%	53%	40%	26%
Q25 Students learn what they are taught.	23%	53%	20%	32%	57%	16%
Q26 Teachers should rephrase learners' errors rather than focusing on the mistake.	63%	68%	23%	26%	14%	5%
Q27 The teacher should be an expert at language teaching.	54%	63%	29%	26%	17%	11%
Q28 The teacher should be an expert at learning languages.	49%	63%	37%	32%	14%	5%
Q29 The teacher should be an expert at showing students how to learn languages.	60%	53%	31%	42%	9%	5%
Q30 The teacher should be a native speaker.	43%	47%	43%	47%	14%	5%
Q31 The teacher should be able to speak a second language.	29%	26%	49%	63%	23%	11%
Q32 The teacher should only use the student's L2 when teaching.	17%	63%	29%	37%	54%	0%
Q33 The learner should try and use L2 as much as possible outside the classroom.	74%	79%	17%	16%	9%	5%
Q34 The learner should try and use L2 as much as possible inside the classroom.	91%	95%	6%	5%	3%	0%
Q35 The learner should never question the teacher.	46%	63%	34%	37%	20%	0%
Q36 The learner should only use patterns that they have been taught.	3%	0%	17%	37%	80%	63%
Q37 The learner should correct their own mistakes.	83%	74%	9%	16%	9%	11%
Q38 The learner should correct their peers' mistakes.	34%	53%	34%	37%	31%	11%

NB: All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

☐ AS and CP agree with the statement. ☐ AS and CP are both under a 50 percent consensus regarding the statement.

☐ AS and CP disagree with the statement. ☐ AS and CP disagree with each other.

13.4   Appendix 4:   Adult Students: SLA Belief Ranking

RANK

1	Q16	Motivation is an important factor in language learning.
2	Q11	To learn successfully all you need is enough exposure to the target language.
3	Q13	People don't learn languages in the same way.
	Q34	The learner should try and use L2 as much as possible inside the classroom.
	Q2	Making mistakes isn't harmful in language learning.
4	Q6	You should try and say something in your second language even if you can't say it correctly.
5	Q12	Practice makes perfect.
6	Q20	Simple structures should be presented before more complex ones.
7	Q37	The learner should correct their own mistakes.
	Q21	The earlier a second language is introduced in school programmes, the greater the likelihood of success in learning.
8	Q23	Teachers should use materials that expose students to structures they haven't been taught yet.
	Q36	The learner should use any pattern even if they haven't been taught it.
9	Q10	It's easier to learn something in your second language if it is similar to your first language.
10	Q9	Learning about pragmatics is important.
11	Q5	It's important for learners to be able to pronounce all the individual sounds in the second language.
12	Q22	Learners' errors should be corrected by the teacher immediately to prevent the formation of bad habits.
	Q33	The learner should try and use L2 as much as possible outside the classroom.
13	Q15	Languages are learned through imitation.
14	Q18	It's necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.
15	Q26	Teachers should rephrase learners' errors rather than focusing on the mistake.
16	Q1	It 's impossible to learn a language in a short time.
17	Q4	It's easier for children to learn a language than it is for adults.
18	Q29	The teacher should be an expert at showing students how to learn languages.
19	Q14	It's important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.
20	Q25	Students don't learn what they are taught.
21	Q27	The teacher should be an expert at language teaching.
	Q32	The teacher shouldn't only use the student's L2 when teaching.
22	Q3	Learning a second language isn't the same as learning your first language.
23	Q17	Mistakes by second language learners are usually due to interference from their first language.
24	Q8	Learning a second language is different than learning other academic subjects.
25	Q28	The teacher should be an expert at learning languages.
26	Q35	The learner should never question the teacher.
27	Q30	The teacher should be a native speaker.
28	Q19	Grammatical rules should be presented one at a time.
	Q24	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning grammar.
29	Q7	It's easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.
30	Q38	The learner should correct their peers' mistakes.
31	Q31	The teacher should be able to speak a second language.

NB: The rankings are based on the percentage of agreement or disagreement with the statements. The statements have been changed to reflect that agreement or disagreement. Where there are undecided opinions the highest value in either the agree or disagree column was used.

13.5   Appendix 5:   Children's Parents: SLA Belief Ranking

RANK

1	Q16	Motivation is an important factor in language learning.
2	Q5	It's important for learners to be able to pronounce all the individual sounds in the second language.
	Q22	Learners' errors should be corrected by the teacher immediately to prevent the formation of bad habits.
	Q34	The learner should try and use L2 as much as possible inside the classroom.
3	Q11	To learn successfully all you need is enough exposure to the target language.
4	Q12	Practice makes perfect.
	Q21	The earlier a second language is introduced in school programmes, the greater the likelihood of success in learning.
5	Q13	People don't learn languages in the same way.
6	Q4	It's easier for children to learn a language than it is for adults.
	Q15	Languages are learned through imitation.
	Q33	The learner should try and use L2 as much as possible outside the classroom.
7	Q37	The learner should correct their own mistakes.
8	Q2	Making mistakes isn't harmful in language learning.
9	Q26	Teachers should rephrase learners' errors rather than focusing on the mistake.
10	Q1	It's impossible to learn a language in a short time.
11	Q20	Simple structures should be presented before more complex ones.
	Q32	The teacher should only use the student's L2 when teaching.
	Q35	The learner should never question the teacher.
	Q36	The learner should use any pattern even if they haven't been taught it.
12	Q28	The teacher should be an expert at learning languages.
13	Q6	You should try and say something in your second language even if you can't say it correctly.
	Q27	The teacher should be an expert at language teaching.
14	Q7	It isn't easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.
	Q10	It's easier to learn something in your second language if it is similar to your first language.
15	Q14	It's important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.
16	Q29	The teacher should be an expert at showing students how to learn languages.
17	Q38	The learner should correct their peers' mistakes.
18	Q8	Learning a second language is different than learning other academic subjects.
	Q17	Mistakes by second language learners aren't usually due to interference from their first language.
	Q18	It isn't necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.
	Q25	Students learn what they are taught.
19	Q3	Learning a second language is the same as learning your first language.
20	Q9	Learning about pragmatics is important.
21	Q30	The teacher should be a native speaker.
	Q19	Grammatical rules should be presented one at a time.
22	Q23	Teachers shouldn't use materials that expose students to structures they haven't been taught yet.
23	Q31	The teacher should be able to speak a second language.
24	Q24	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning grammar.

NB: The rankings are based on the percentage of agreement or disagreement with the statements. The statements have been changed to reflect that agreement or disagreement. Where there are undecided opinions the highest value in either the agree or disagree column was used.

13.6   Appendix 6:   Interesting Areas of Disagreement on SLA Beliefs

		AS	**CP**
Q 3	Learning a second language is the same as learning your first language.	Disagree	Agree
Q 9	Learning about pragmatics is important.	Agree	Disagree
Q 17	Mistakes by second language learners are usually due to interference from their first language.	Agree	Disagree
Q 23	Teachers shouldn't use materials that expose students to structures they haven't been taught yet.	Disagree	Agree
Q 25	Students learn what they are taught.	Disagree	Agree
Q 32	The teacher should only use the student's L2 when teaching.	Disagree	Agree