

## 1. THE ACQUISITION-LEARNING DISTINCTION

The acquisition-learning distinction is perhaps the most fundamental of all the hypotheses to be presented here. It states that adults have two distinct and independent ways of developing competence in a second language.

The first way is language **acquisition**, a process similar, if not identical, to the way children develop ability in their first language. Language acquisition is a subconscious process; language acquirers are not usually aware of the fact that they are acquiring language, but are only aware of the fact that they are using the language for communication. The result of language acquisition, **acquired competence**, is also subconscious. We are generally not consciously aware of the rules of the languages we have acquired. Instead, we have a "feel" for correctness. Grammatical sentences "sound" right, or "feel" right, and errors feel wrong, even if we do not consciously know what rule was violated. Other ways of describing acquisition include implicit learning, informal learning, and natural learning. In non-technical language, acquisition is "picking-up" a language.

The second way to develop competence in a second language is by language **learning**. We will use the term "learning" henceforth to refer to conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them. In non-technical terms, learning is "knowing about" a language, known to most people as "grammar", or "rules". Some synonyms include formal knowledge of a language, or explicit learning.

Some second language theorists have assumed that children acquire, while adults can only learn. The acquisition-learning hypothesis claims, however, that adults also acquire, that the ability to "pick-up" languages does not disappear at puberty. This does not mean that adults will always be able to achieve native-like levels in a second language. It does mean that adults can access the same natural "language acquisition device" that children use. As we shall see later, acquisition is a very powerful process in the adult.

Source: Krashen, Stephen D. (1982) *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press. Excerpt from (2009) First Internet edition, p. 17.