

INTERACTIONIST THEORY OF LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

The interactionist approach (sociocultural theory) combines ideas from sociology and biology to explain how language is developed. According to this theory, children learn language out of a desire to communicate with the world around them. Language emerges from, and is dependent upon, social interaction. The Interactionist approach claims that if our language ability develops out of a desire to communicate, then language is dependent upon whom we want to communicate with. This means the environment you grow up in will heavily affect how well and how quickly you learn to talk. For example, infants being raised by only their mother are more likely to learn the word “mama”, and less likely to develop “dada”. Among the first words we learn are ways to demand attention or food. If you’ve ever tried to learn a new language, you may recognize this theory’s influence. Language classes often teach commonly used vocabulary and phrases first, and then focus on building conversations rather than simple rote memorization. Even when we expand our vocabularies in our native language, we remember the words we use the most.

Interactionism, also known as symbolic interaction, is one of the main perspectives in sociology. Interactionism uses a micro-level approach, focusing on social interaction in specific situations. While much of sociology focuses on broad social structures that shape society as a whole, symbolic interaction is a framework for building theory that sees society as the product of those everyday interactions between individuals. To an interactionist, perception is reality; the reality that people experience is variable and changing. Key thinkers in symbolic interaction include George Mead and Erving Goffman.