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AN ANALYSIS OF RATIONALISM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

Several theories have been formulated so far regarding language acquisition, learning and teaching processes. The standpoints of these theories on language acquisition and learning process differ from each other in terms of the factors they focus on. Some theories focused on inner factors while others focused on external and environmental factors and tried to explain the learning process in light of these factors. The purpose of this study is to examine the basic principles of rationalist theory which is one of the main theories in the second language acquisition process and especially in English language education and to examine its contribution to the processes of language acquisition and learning. The study first examines the background of rationalist theory and compares it with empiricism, which is seen as a rival theory of rationalist theory. Then, the study explains various theories related to rationalist and empiricist theory and scrutinises the criticisms directed to the rationalist theory by considering both the strengths and weaknesses of the theory. Finally, the contributions of the rationalist theory and related theories to language teaching and English language education are reviewed. In the study, it was concluded that both theories were complementary rather than competing with each other and that a one-sided approach could not adequately explain the language acquisition and learning process.

Key Words: Language acquisition, English language teaching, rationalist theory, empiricism, behaviourist theory.

Özet

Dil edinim, öğrenim ve öğretim süreçleri ile ilgili olarak şu ana kadar birçok kuram geliştirilmiştir. Bu kuramların dil edinimi ve öğrenimi sürecine bakış açıları odaklandıkları etkenler açısından birbirinden farklılık göstermektedir. Öğrenme sürecini ele alırken kimi kuramlar çevresel faktörlere ağırlık verirken kimileri ise dışsal ve çevresel faktörlere ağırlık vermiş ve öğrenme sürecini bu faktörlerin ışığında açıklamaya çalışmışlardır. Bu çalışmanın amacı ikinci dil edinimi sürecinde ve özellikle İngiliz dili eğitiminde başlıca kuramlardan olan akılcı kuramın temel prensiplerini incelemek ve dil edinimi ve öğrenimi süreçlerine olan katkılarını incelemektir. Çalışma öncelikle akılcı kuramın arka planını irdelemekte, akılcı kuramın rakip kuramı olarak görülen deneyimcilik ile karşılaştırmaktadır. Daha sonra, çalışma akılcı ve deneyimcilik kuramıyla ilgili çeşitli teorileri açıklamış ve akılcılık kuramına yöneltilen eleştirileri, kuramın hem artılarını hem de eksilerini göz önünde bulundurarak analiz etmiştir. Son olarak akılcılık kuramının ve ona bağlı ilgili dil öğretimiyle yakından alakalı teorilerin İngiliz dili eğitimine vermiş oldukları katkılar dile getirilmiştir. Çalışmada her iki kuramın da aslında birbirinin rakibi değil tamamlayıcı olduğu ve tek taraflı bir yaklaşımın dil edinim ve öğrenim sürecini yeterli olarak açıklayamayacağı sonuçlarına ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dil edinimi, İngiliz dili eğitimi, akılcılık kuramı, deneyimcilik kuramı, davranışsal kuram.

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1. Introduction

To throw some light on language learning/teaching and language acquisition processes, many theories have been developed so far. The most well-known of these theories were listed by Demirezen (1988, 1989) as follows: (1) Behaviorist Theory, (2) Rationalist Theory (otherwise called cognitive theory), (3) Empiricist Theory (Audiolingualism), (4) Mentalist Theory and (5) Cognitive-code Theory. Although the Behaviorist and Mentalist theory are principally more appropriate for first language acquisition, the rest can account for foreign/second language acquisition. Of these, the Rationalist position, supported through some concepts like Nativism, Innatisim and Mentalism, holds that the human mind plays a crucial role in the acquisition of knowledge and language rather than the experiences human beings go through (Lyons, 1981). In this critical review, the attributes of the rationalist language acquisition theory will be explored and the weak and strong sides of this type of learning together with its criticisms will be discussed in a critical manner.

1.1. The Background of the Rationalist Theory

Rationalism is a type of position discussed within many fields, such as epistemology – the branch of philosophy related to theorizing about knowledge. Bechtel (1988) reported that the traditional rationalism appeared as the dominant philosophical tradition on the European continent during the 17th and 18th centuries. The three important representatives of this position were Descartes (1596- 1650), Leibniz (1646- 17 16), and Spinoza (1632-1677). Of these, Descartes is the one to talk about the characteristics of speech in his work, Discourse on Method. These characteristics are as follows according to Percival (1968, pp. 3-4):

1. Words reveal thoughts.

2. True speech differs completely from natural cries in that it does not indicate corporeal impulses.

3. Words used in true discourse are not merely sounds repeated by rote but are directly expressive of thoughts.

4. In genuine human discourse, what a person says is appropriate to 'whatever is said in his presence,' or is 'relevant to the subjects at hand.

However, Rationalism is also a matter of serious concern within linguistics with which we are more concerned in this paper. The Rationalist theory of language learning, which is basically a philosophical theory of epistemology in its essence, was developed by A. N. Chomsky in 1965. Then, it came into being partly as a reaction to the Empiricism. Chomsky was involved in many rows with empiricists regarding the question of "what the mind must be like in order to account for our ability to learn language" (Stitch, 1979, p. 330). Stitch (1979) reported that Chomsky developed his arguments by taking a rationalist position while explaining what goes on in mind when one is learning a language and further added "[a]ccording to Chomsky, what happens is that the learner comes to a tacit knowledge or an internal representation of the rules of a grammar" (p. 330; italics in original). Further, Lakoff (1968) provided an extended explanation to this by summarizing the rationalist view of language as follows:

The general grammar results from what is inborn, or 'habits of mind,' and here 'mind' means 'the human mind,' rather than the mind of one national group or individual. The particular grammar consists of bylaws, aptly so-called since laws are arbitrary and changeable, as are these rules. (p. 8)

Chomsky was regarded as a rationalist since he was influenced by the theses of the traditional rationalism while developing his own linguistic theory, yet without accepting all the assumptions of the traditional rationalism. To be called a rationalist, one, at least, had to adopt one of three theses to be summarised below.

1.1.1. The Intuition/Deduction Thesis

This thesis argues that we can know some propositions, S; in a particular subject area by intuition alone and some others can be knowable by us by deducing from the intuited propositions. By intuition and deduction, we are provided with knowledge a priori, the knowledge gained independently of sense experience (Wedgwood, 2002).

1.1.2. The Innate Knowledge Thesis

Some truths in a particular subject area, S, are known by us as part of our rational nature. We do not learn our innate knowledge through sense experience or intuition and deduction. It is just within our nature from birth. Namely, human beings are endowed with it (Markie, 2017)

1.1.3. The Innate Concept Thesis

We have some of the concepts we utilize in a particular subject area, S, as part of our rational nature. Namely, human beings do not gain these concepts from their experiences (Markie, 2017).

However, Chomsky does not accept any of these theses wholly. He has his own understandings of these theories. He gives us a theory of innate learning capacities or structures rather than a theory of innate knowledge. His views differ from the so-called traditional rationalists since he does not back up the Innate knowledge thesis. To explain language acquisition from a rationalist point of view, Chomsky (1975) puts forward that learners are assumed to have an innate knowledge of universal grammar that captures the common deep structure of natural languages. It should be noticed that language learners do not know any particular propositions defining the universal grammar.

1.2. Basic Principles of Rationalism

Chomsky, considered to be the originator of the Rationalist Theory in linguistics, made a serious attack on the theses and concepts established by the empiricists who claim that "all human knowledge was derived from primitive sensory experiences, via specified operations of association and abstraction" (Anthony & Horstein, 2003, p. 6). Chomsky's principal criticism of the Empiristic language learning theory is based on the argument that the development of language and its learning cannot be accounted with the assumption that "[i]nsofar as we have knowledge in the subject, our knowledge is a posteriori, dependent upon sense experience" (Markie, 2017, para. 22) due to the following principles:

- "Learning results from internal mental activity. Language learning is a type of general human learning and involves the acquisition of a complex cognitive skill" (Omaggio, 2001, p. 70). That is to say, language is a species-specific, genetically determined capacity

- Biological mechanisms govern language learning. Therefore, it is not a habit structure gained through experience but innate for the most part (Chomsky, 1966). In addition, language learning and development stem from the thoughts of the human mind.

- Rationalists stress innate aspects of the mind in their accounts of behaviour and learning (Chomsky, 1966). These innate aspects consist of thoughts. Therefore, the function of language is to serve for the expression of thought that is essentially creative (Lyons, 1981).

- Adherents of a rationalist approach to language teaching put an emphasis on gradation, moving step-by-step from the known to the unknown and the concern for an ordered hierarchically-organized curriculum (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004).

Chomsky is regarded as a Cartesian who is both a rationalist and mentalist as opposed to a behaviourist and mechanist. He was also influenced by romantic theorists like Schlegel, Herder, and Wilhelm von Humboldt. The following ideas are attributed to this tradition and similar ideas were also adopted by the advocates of transformational grammar, most prominently by Chomsky himself. These ideas are reported by Chomsky (1966, p. 229) as follows:

- There is a creative aspect of language use since Cartesians take language as an expression of human creativity in essence.

- The superficial phonetic structure of a sentence is distinguished from the underlying semantic structure, thus, the rationalists believe that "deep" structure of meaning does not in general parallel "surface" structure of sound.

- Explanation is considered to be more important than the sole description and thus universal grammar is advocated by the rationalists.

- Acquisition and use of language are believed to be based on innate capacities of the native speaker.

2. Rationalism vs. Empiricism

When a theory of learning aims to explore how knowledge comes to reside in the human mind, it is not surprising that philosophers are involved in the issue to address some of the relevant issues (Archibald, 1998). To explain these issues, two contrasting theories have emerged. Archibald (1998) reports the first one as "an empiricist learning theory that assigns a great deal of importance to the environment as a shaper of the mind, or a shaper of the knowledge being acquired" (p. 62). According to him, the learner experiences certain forms in the linguistic input (also referred to as the primary linguistic data) and then he has to specify what rules construct those forms. On the other hand, the rationalist position supports "the view in which scientists [learners] come up with ideas, make inferences and deductions, and only then appeal to observation to confirm or refute predictions [language use]" (Isaac & Reiss, 2008, p. 266). To see the main differences between two positions, it is helpful for us to

explore some of the characteristics of each theory. Archibald (1998) clarifies some of them as can be shown below.

Table 1
Properties of Empiricism and Rationalism

Empiricism (externalism)	Rationalism (internalism)
e.g. David Hume, B.F. Skinner	e.g. Rene Descartes, A. N. Chomsky
* emphasis on environment	* emphasis on innate structure
* mind is a tablet of hot wax that is shaped by the environment	* mind is a dark museum in which innate structure is triggered by the environment.
* powerful learning mechanisms are innate	* rich representational structure is innate
* inductive learning, Specific -> General (Data) -> (Rules)	* deductive learning, General -> Specific (UG)->(Language-specific grammar)
* negative evidence helpful	* negative evidence unhelpful
*learner as hypothesis tester (little linguist)	* learning is a parameter setting
* unconstrained hypothesis space	* constrained hypothesis space
* non-modular architecture	* modular architecture

These two basic approaches to the theory of mind have caused many theories of language acquisition to emerge in foreign/second language instruction. The underlying assumptions and claims of each theory will be provided in the following section names. Now, we turn to these related theories of language acquisition.

3. Related Theories to Rationalism and Empiricism

In this part, the most well-known theories, principles of which are mostly based either on rationalism or empiricism are summarized with their distinguishing assumptions and principles to language acquisition. Roughly, it can be claimed that the empiricist approaches emerged before the rationalist ones, which in fact appeared as a reaction to the externalist empiricism. Some of these theories are the following:

3.1. Behaviourist Theory (Empiricist)

It was founded by J.B. Watson in America in the 1950s. It draws on two types of conditioning to actualise the learning process. The first one is classical conditioning in which learning is believed to occur through associating an involuntary response with a stimulus. The other one is operant conditioning which equates learning with the association of a voluntary behaviour and a consequence. That is, in classical conditioning, the learner adopts a passive role whereas in operant conditioning the learner need to be active in order to yield a consequence. Some of the main points of Behaviorist Theory are summarised below by Omaggio (2001, p. 57).

1. Human learning and animal learning are similar.
2. The child's mind is a tabula rasa. There is no innate pre-programming specifically for language learning at birth.
3. Psychological data should be limited to that which is observable.
4. All behavior is viewed as a response to stimuli. Behavior happens in associative chains; in fact, all learning is associative in nature.

5. Conditioning involves the strengthening of associations between a stimulus and a response through reinforcement.
6. Human language is a "sophisticated response system" acquired through operant conditioning.

3.2. Universal Grammar Theory (Rationalist)

The founder N. Chomsky pronounced this theory in the mid-1960s. The main points are listed below (Omaggio, 2001, p. 59):

1. Language is a species-specific, genetically determined capacity.
2. Language learning is governed by biological mechanisms.
3. The ultimate form of any human language is a function of language universals, a set of fixed abstract principles that are innate.
4. Each language has its own "parameters" whose "settings" are learned on the basis of linguistic data.
5. There is a "core grammar," congruent with universal principles, and a "peripheral grammar," consisting of features that are not part of universal grammar.
6. Core grammar rules are thought to be relatively easier to acquire, in general, than peripheral rules.

3.3. Monitor Theory (Rationalist)

S. Krashen claimed that a learner's learned system acts as a monitor to what they are producing, and this is named as The Monitor Theory. The main points of this theory can be summarised as follows (Omaggio, 2001, p. 63):

1. Adults have two distinct ways to develop competence in a second language: acquisition, which is a subconscious process, and learning, which is conscious.
2. Acquisition is similar to the process by which children acquire their native language. Learning involves conscious knowledge of rules.
3. When acquisition is natural, the order in which certain grammatical features of the language are acquired is predictable.
4. Learning can function only as an "editor" of what is produced since acquisition is the sole initiator of all second-language utterances. Learning can serve as a "monitor" of performance only under certain conditions.
5. We acquire new structures only when we are exposed to "comprehensible input" (i +1). Input does not need to be deliberately structured or planned for the acquirer. If communication is successful, i+1 will happen automatically.
6. For acquisition to take place, the learner must be motivated, have a good self-image, and be free from anxiety.
7. Error correction should be minimized in the classroom, where the main purpose of instruction should be to provide comprehensible input.

3.4. Cognitive Theory (Rationalist)

Jean Piaget: (1896- 1980). A cognitive theory of learning sees second language acquisition as a conscious and reasoned thinking process, involving the deliberate use of

learning strategies. The summary of its main principles is given below (Omaggio, 2001, p. 70).

1. Learning results from internal mental activity. Language learning is a type of general human learning and involves the acquisition of a complex cognitive skill.
2. Subskills involved in the complex task of language learning must be practised, automatized, and integrated into organized internal representations, or rule systems, in cognitive structure.
3. Internal representations of language are constantly restructured as proficiency develops.
4. Skills are automatized (learned) only after they have first been under "controlled processing." Controlled processing, which requires attention to the task, leads to automatic processing, where attention is not needed to perform the skill (Schneider and Shiffrin 1977; Shiffrin and Schneider 1977; McLaughlin 1987).
5. Some cognitive theorists (Anderson 1980, 1995; Ellis 1985) distinguish between declarative knowledge, which involves "knowing that," and procedural knowledge, which involves "knowing how."
6. Some researchers (Tarone 1982, 1983; Ellis 1985) maintain that learners' production is variable, depending on the degree of attention they pay to language form as they carry out various tasks. Informal tasks that demand little active attention elicit the "vernacular style," while tasks that require active attention and monitoring elicit the "careful style."
7. Ausubel (1968) emphasizes that meaningful learning, which is learning that is relatable to what we already know, is preferable to rote learning, which is arbitrary and verbatim. Only meaningful material can be integrated into an existing cognitive structure.

4. Criticisms of the Rationalist Theory

Chomsky referred to as a modern rationalist has been subject to many criticisms due to his linguistic theory. Much of the debate has come from the empiricist (behaviourist) position. The core of the dispute is based on whether language acquisition is an external or internal phenomenon. It may shed light on our understanding of this dispute if we start with the weak and strong sides of the rationalism.

4.1. Strengths of Rationalism

Rationalists hold the belief that the human mind has a key role in language learning which was neglected by the behaviourists. They recognized the internal elements like the mind and reasons that are invisible by disclaiming that language learning is a verbal behaviour which is observable. According to the rationalist focus, children's speech at a particular age tend to be correlated with other developmental milestones, including non-linguistics aspects of cognitive and physical development; they also produce forms that they have never heard and no adult would never use (Isaac & Reiss, 2008, pp. 270-271).

Rationalist position supports deductive (otherwise called analytical) approach to learning, the goal of which is the improvement of existing knowledge into a form easier or more efficient to use (Kondratoff, 1988, p. 122). In this type of learning, an analysis of

existing knowledge is conducted in order to find out which is most useful, which is also appreciated in general education. Parameter setting, in its simple terms, explains why we know how to generate grammatically correct language in many different cases without memorizing or even hearing them. Simply, parameter setting refers to certain general features of languages (Smith, 2004).

This position finds negative evidence –information about which strings are ungrammatical- unhelpful and advocates positive evidence believed to consist of grammatical instances of language to which children are exposed to (Ayoun, 2003).

Features among some languages common to all human languages in the world are called language universals and they are recognized by the rationalists (Stärk, 2010). According to this understanding, many languages around the world share similarities and an emphasis on these similarities might ease language learning in general. For example, many European languages like English, French and Italian have the same word order and many other common features. This helps the learner who knows one of these languages to learn another more easily and quickly.

4.2. Weaknesses of Rationalism

The Rationalist theory fails to recognize the external factors that enjoy a significant part in language learning and acquisition. We know that human beings are social entities living in a community. That is why they also learn language from each other in interaction.

The Universal Grammar (UG) developed by the linguist Chomsky in the 1950s claims that there is a universal grammar hardwired into the brain of all humans. All languages are considered species of this grammar and children learn their native languages using universal grammar as a support structure. However, the goal to discover the structure and laws of Universal Grammar remains unattained until now (Bolshakov & Gelbukh, 2004).

The inductive type of learning is ignored in the rationalist approaches by putting the focus on UG and passing from there to language specific-grammar, namely, following a deductive way of learning. The Rationalist theory only gives information about the meaning of words. However, empiricists give information about reality. Let us have a look at the examples below. Reality gained through experience is also of great importance for language learners.

- Bachelors are unmarried men. (Rationalist view - Analytic (Tautological) priori
- Bachelors tend to drink beer. (Empiricist view – synthetic) posteriori

There is little or no attention paid to the relationships and the social context of language learning in this approach to language learning. Rationalists undermined the empiricists' view that the source of human knowledge stemmed from primitive sensory experiences, via specified operations of association and abstraction (Hornstein & Antony, 2003). It is also accepted that some learning occurs by experiencing. Then, it is wrong to totally refuse the role of experiences in learning. Chomsky rejects languages being taught by conditioning or by drill and explicit teaching. However, drills are effective in learning some skills, especially when it comes to teaching vocabulary and pronunciation (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

5. Contributions of Rationalism to ELT

The notion of Universal Grammar has been subjected to many criticisms, especially with the advent of more innovative approaches and computational modelling to the study of language acquisition. Pinker and Bloom (1990) came up with evidence of exceptions to a list of properties claimed to be shared by all languages according to the UG theory. Gil (2000), reports that all languages have a UG according to the nativist idea. For him, this only indicates the intellectual dominance in the modern world of European speakers. It is not something that can be generalized for all languages around the world. In addition, Sampson (2010), by supporting the aforesaid criticisms, adds that "before modern times, the highest-status, most literary versions of non-European languages might have scarcely any of the grammatical apparatus which nativists take to be universal" (p. 103).

Chomsky's approach to syntax emphasizes the economy of explanation that might be achieved provided that the similarities in the structure of human languages were referred to biologically rooted, innate capacities of the human mind. According to this approach, one can generate an infinite number of statements from a finite group of words (minimalist program). Many critics complain that this understanding disregards scientific evidence and method.

Chomsky was also criticized by Marvin Minsky in one of his interviews for his exaggerated emphasis on syntax rather than on semantics concerned with how words are actually used to convey meanings among speakers and communicate ideas from one person to another. Karen Spärck Jones, a British computer scientist and one of the supporters of computational linguistics, a term coined to refer to linguistic activities in which the computer plays a central role (Jones & Kay, 1973) complains about Chomsky's grammatical theories (Transformational Grammar, Government-Binding, Principles and Parameters and Minimalism). The allegation is that these theories are difficult to implement computationally since practical applications of computational linguistics such as machine translation, information retrieval or question answering, necessitate a large number of structures of English, high efficiency and implementation on a computer (Jones, 2007).

Another point of criticism to Chomsky's rationalist linguistic theory comes from Pinker and Bloom (1990) who blame Chomsky for showing resistance to modern theories of language evolution. For them, Chomsky is hostile to the idea that language evolved for communication due to his emphasis on linguistic competence rather than communicative competence.

Dennett (1995) criticizes Chomsky's idea that language is solely a product of natural selection, namely, an innate capacity of the human mind. According to Chomsky, language is a mysterious gift given to the humankind. Dennett (1995) concludes that if the ability to learn a language is innate and genetically existent, then it has to go through an evolution. Even though Chomsky refused to accept this fact in his earlier arguments, he and his colleagues further readdressed the issue of the faculty of languages, acknowledging the fact that language faculty in the broad sense "may have evolved for reasons other than language" (Hauser, Chomsky & Fitch, 2002, p. 1569). This issue was also raised by Jackendoff and Pinker (2005) who criticized Chomsky and his friends. Their view of language evolution was taken as problematic in that "its dichotomization of cognitive capacities into those that are utterly

unique and those that are identical to nonlinguistic or nonhuman capacities, omitting capacities that may have been substantially modified during human evolution" are ignored by Chomsky and his friends (Jackendoff & Pinker, 2005, p. 211).

Chomsky's linguistic theories actually emerged as a reaction to the empiricist views of learning when they were at its zenith. Especially, the behaviourist theory of language acquisition caught a lot of attention due to its emphasis on habit formation process of language learning. Such an understanding of learning paid much attention to external factors during the learning process. In their perception, language was a verbal behaviour that could be observed in practice. However, Chomsky who was deeply influenced by the rationalist position of philosophy and their supporters like Descartes objected to the empiricist position claiming that language learning is an internal event occurring in the human mind free from the effects of experience. These new views towards language acquisition led to many theories and approaches in methodology to emerge over time. The most prominent of them are summarised below.

5.1. Theories based on Rationalist view

Many theories to language learning and acquisition have been subjected to the influence of the rationalism. The most striking influence is that the innate characteristics of language learning became the basis of these theories. Some of the theories are just listed below for the reader's information.

- Universal Grammar Theory
- Generative Grammar
- Transformational grammar
- Minimalist Approach
- Mentalist Theory
- Innatist/Nativist Theory
- Cognitive theory
- Monitor theory*   (MT)

All of the aforementioned theories have contributed to the field of English Language teaching and highlighted many points of grammar like syntax. They all have many common assumptions related to the human mind or brain. Some of them like MT and LAD were developed with the influence of the main principles of rationalist position towards knowledge, although they were not founded by Chomsky himself. To sum up, the biggest contribution of Rationalism is its emphasis on the internal accounts of language learning that helped the theories stated above to appear within the area of ELT. For example, courses in the ELT programs such as Linguistics, Second Langauge Acquisition and Approaches and Methods in Language teaching often refer to theories drawn out of rationalist view. The study of these mentalist theories may help prospective teachers better understand the language acquisition process and further provides them a scientific foundation for rendering foreign language teaching process to be as similar as to the first language acquisition process.

6. Conclusion

Rationalism, in its essence, emerged as a philosophical term regarding the source of knowledge in epistemology. Empiricism (philosophy), the principle that knowledge derives from experience, emerged as a counter opponent to the Rationalist view. Such a distinction, later, was seen in the language teaching and acquisition theories. These theories of language acquisition, by and by, have come to be labelled as Rationalist or Empiricist according to the principles and assumptions adopted by them.

The most significant contribution of Linguistic Rationalism to English language teaching is recognition of the value of the internal events, primarily of the human mind in language learning and acquisition. The attention paid to the innate characteristics of human beings inspired linguists to consider alternatives to the empiricist views of language acquisition. One of the prominent of these linguists is Noam Chomsky whose linguistic theory is claimed to be rationalist. He had many supporters and critics for his theory. Although he differs from the traditional rationalists, he was under the influence of them while developing his theory. With this influence, he thought that language learning cannot be explained only through experience but there must be an innate structure for language learning – biological rationalism- available to all humans. Many theories, such as UG, LAD, Mentalism, Nativism and Cognitivism, got into the field of language learning and acquisition as a result of this understanding, and they were severely criticized by the other linguists especially by the empiricists (e.g. Evans, 2014; Green & Vervaeke, 1997). Evans (2014) even goes as to maintain that the idea that human beings are hard-wired with language capacity is merely a myth.

The dispute between Rationalism and Empiricism were already mentioned above. They both shed light on the acquisition of the second language from different angles. In simple terms, the source of the debate was internalist vs. externalist view of language learning. Instead of viewing them as two opposite sides, they should be taken as complementary to each other. As known clearly, the learner goes through both internal and environmental processes during language acquisition, since s/he is both an individual and a member of a community in which s/he lives. In such a case, language learning cannot be explained in a sheer aspect. Therefore, it is more sensible to find a middle way between these theories rather than disregarding their contributions to language acquisition since they are like the two sides of a mirror. Anyway, in spite of the gaps in the rationalist understanding of language acquisition, the contributions cannot be deniable.

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