

LARSEN-FREEMAN, Diane, and Michael H. LONG. **An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Research.** London: Longman, 1991. Pp. xvii, 398.

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1. Introduction

As Candlin states in the preface to this book, even in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), which already contains many valuable contributions, this study is nevertheless timely, because it provides a satisfactory and comprehensive account of the state of the art in SLA theory and sets out the parameters within which further pertinent research should be pursued. Candlin also fittingly comments on how the agenda of this research field needs to inter-relate constructs such as input, cognitive capacity, personality and output in the actual social contexts where they take place and which themselves enhance or inhibit the process of SLA. All those features are clearly tackled in this introduction. As the constructs mentioned above do not themselves have equal importance and salience in each individual nor during the lifespan of a person, he also welcomes the empirical base strongly argued for in the book. Thus, this introduction to SLA research clearly demonstrates that both theorizing and hard empirical evidence should be closely connected when SLA research is to be addressed.

In the authors' own words, the main aim of this book is to introduce readers to research on SLA. Taking into account how broad this field is, they have accordingly considered the different settings in which a second language (L2) can be learnt, i.e. both naturalistic and instructed learning in foreign and L2 settings, the age of the learner, i.e. children and adults, and whether the learner is to be taken as an individual or as a member of a group. The book is divided into 8 chapters, the first of which is an introduction that accounts for the current need to undertake SLA research, and an epilogue. Each chapter addresses relevant issues within the SLA research field. As no prior knowledge of SLA or of SLA research methodology is required, all the intricacies of this complex research area are meticulously dealt with, discussing the various methodologies that have been used, and their strengths and weaknesses so that the extensive research already carried out becomes apparent, as well as the significance of the different approaches undertaken. Ample

references illustrating the sources of the different issues addressed are provided throughout the book, and at the end of each chapter there are both suggestions for further reading and a list of two types of activities: (a) comprehension activities which should assist the reader to check whether he has understood the points tackled in the corresponding chapter, and (b) application activities to put into practice what he has gathered from the theoretical information offered to him to start to develop his own design adequately and the concomitant analytical skills to carry out his own SLA research, one of the main aims of the book. With all this, as will be illustrated in the following sections of this review, it can be said that this book serves very well its double function as a source for individual study and for a basic literature survey in SLA courses.

2. The how of research and interlanguage

From Chapter 1 to Chapter 4 the book focuses on methodology and the description of SLA, paying particular attention to the interlanguage construct that emerges from SLA research findings. Chapter 1 accounts for the reasons that make SLA worthy of investigation. It is pointed out that L2s not only have a place in school —i.e. the learning of foreign languages, bilingual education programmes or immersion programmes—, but also impinge on many other aspects of life, since in today's world, for example, English, a L2 for many people who use it, has become an international language in many areas of social life, and, from another perspective, due to political and social reasons there are also many migrant workers who reside in countries whose language they do not know when they first arrive. Hence policy formulation concerning national language is an enduring issue in multi-lingual societies. All this should make clear the urgent need to understand what is involved in acquiring a L2. Other beneficiaries of this understanding are the L2 teaching profession and the learners, educational programmes involving language acquisition, groups with specific language needs —e.g. children with learning disabilities— and, finally, the disciplines which in themselves seek to understand the complexity of SLA more fully. Here we must consider linguistics and its claims about language universals, psychology and differences in learning styles, anthropology and its cultural universals, sociology and its reflection on the relation between group membership and task achievement, psycho-linguistics and the difficulty in unravelling the interaction between cognitive development and language development, socio-linguistics and speaker preference for speech styles, neuro-linguistics and biological development in relation to issues such as a critical period in an individual's development, and many other areas.

Chapter 2 deals with the different methodologies employed by SLA researchers in carrying out their research. It is stressed that after the inconclusive results of

the research carried out in the sixties on comparative studies on language teaching methods and the debate on psychological theories of language learning, it became patently obvious that there existed a need to undertake direct and empirical study of L2 learning without extrapolating from other related disciplines such as first language (L1) acquisition or general learning theory (Stern 1983, 329; Ellis 1990, 3ff.; Allwright and Bailey 1991, xvii). As the field with which SLA researchers were concerned was new and therefore had not been investigated before, it was imperative to gradually devise the methodological approach that would yield the data from which to draw the answers sorely sought. The appropriate research design with its complementary methodology, setting, instrumentation and measurement has thus unfolded, permitting the construction of the present complex picture of L2 development. It has been possible to become acquainted with the process of SLA by drawing both on longitudinal —process-oriented— and cross-sectional —outcome-oriented— approaches, since the research design can profitably benefit from qualitative and quantitative paradigms and conveniently use the required method: introspection, participant/non-participant observation, focused description, or a pre-/quasi-/experimental design. As this new stage of SLA research coincided with the shift in perspective from focusing research on the teaching process to focusing it on the learning process (Corder 1967, 6), it was also necessary to consider the process of SLA in a natural context. It was thought that it is the learner's internal mental mechanisms which make the major contribution to acquisition (Corder 1967, 8ff.; 1976, 72; Dulay and Burt 1977, 109, 118ff.). Instruction has not been able to interfere with the natural processes of SLA (Lightbown 1983, 239f.; Long 1988, 125) in any essential way. Also the type of data collected by researchers has been an important issue in developing research methodology in SLA since it demands different kinds of instrumentation, i.e. the collection of spontaneous speech or natural data pursued by researchers in favour of qualitative methodologies whilst eschewing the use of instruments. Researchers inclined to quantitative methods would use different kinds of elicitation procedures according to the degree of control they wanted to exercise on the subjects' end product or whether they wanted to elicit intuitional data, the other major data type in SLA. Attitudes and motivations have also been investigated through different instrumentation procedures. Finally, to measure learner performance it has been necessary to define what is meant by language/language proficiency and to determine the way in which it will become known when it has been acquired. However, although various attempts have been made to tackle these controversial issues, no final agreement has yet been reached. Nevertheless it seems worth underlining that as a result of present efforts made to solve them, (1) other aspects of language apart from syntax have unavoidably to be taken into account, i.e. the modular view of communicative competence versus a single linguistic competence (Canale and Swain 1980, 28ff.; Canale 1983, 6ff.), and, (2) in relation to defining an acquisition point, the notion of obligatory context

—i.e. the percentage score for formative display in obligatory occasions in correct native speaker speech— has been supplemented by also reporting the percentage of correct usage of this form and, at the same time, trying not to be normative, focusing on the emergence of structures, instead of on the attainment of native-like control over them.

Chapter 3 addresses the differing ways in which data analysis has been undertaken during the period that the field of SLA was itself developing, while an increasing awareness of the complex process of acquiring a L2 was simultaneously taking place. Thus, an account is made of error analysis, performance analysis and discourse analysis. The first served as one of the main devices for examining the processes of interlanguage (IL) or the learners' construct of the mental grammar when they are learning a L2, and tried to identify the sources of error. The second, performance analysis, tried to find a common order of development for learners and looked at all the language that learners produced. Cross-sectional studies, among which are several studies known as the morpheme studies because they investigated the order of acquisition of a range of grammatical functors or morphemes, and developmental or longitudinal studies, which studied the development of grammatical sub-systems such as negation and interrogation, are addressed within this second group of studies. As for discourse analysis, it is argued that although the two previous kinds of analyses provided advancement in the field of SLA research and theorizing, they were nevertheless limiting because neither of them took into account the input preceding the utterances under scrutiny. It is then posited that it is not enough only to consider the learner's performance but the input addressed to the learner must also be taken into account if we are really to understand the performance. It seems that only if language is viewed from a discourse perspective, i.e. from longer units of language than a sentence, such as conversations or even monologues or written texts, is it possible to come to an understanding of how syntactic structures are developed and how the learner discovers the L2 code (Hatch 1978, 409; 1983, 109, 187; Slobin 1982, 159, 163, 168f.; Sato 1986, 44). Applying discourse analysis to SLA has illuminated the construction of the IL theory by showing that learners not only develop accuracy in the way in which they use the L2 code but also become proficient in the appropriate use of specific forms for particular functions.

Chapter 4 encompasses the substantive findings supplied by interlanguage studies in terms of the three principles that are considered to govern the development of IL: the systematic variation found in the different ILs of which the IL continuum is composed; the uniformity manifest in ILs both for orders of accuracy and for developmental sequences; and the influence that the learner's L1 has on ILs. We are also reminded that each of these areas impinges on the development of the others so that IL development should be seen as a process in which there are inter-related influences between them. In relation to the systematic way in which

ILs characteristically vary, it is acknowledged that ILs, as all natural languages, are variable, though synchronic variability is prominent in them. There is a very apt reflection on the different interpretations researchers have made of the role of IL variability in the development of L2s and on their accounts for IL variability —i.e. Tarone's (1983: 152) continuum of speech styles and amount of attention to language form vs. Sato's (op. cit.) claims for a more complex connection between task and variation—, positing that powerful analytic models such as a multi-variate VARBRUL analysis have revealed that much of the synchronic variability of ILs is rule-governed, and that taking into account the linguistic and situational contexts of the different ways a learner uses a given form, its future development in the learner's IL may be predicted. It is also recognized that even the troublesome free variability secures IL growth as it allows new forms to enter IL. Concerning the research evidence relating to the common accuracy/acquisition orders for morphemes and developmental sequences for syntactic structures —e.g. negatives and interrogatives in English and German word order rules— that ILs exhibit, it is posited that although more experimental studies will always be welcome, the consistency of these findings should already be acknowledged, seeming to call for an explanation in terms of psycho-linguistic constraints in the processing of these linguistic features (Meisel et al. 1981, 110, 122ff.; Pienemann and Johnston 1987, 89ff., 115ff.) and a view of IL development as a process of increasing complexity or recreation continuum (Corder, 1978: 76; Dulay and Burt, op. cit.). Finally, work examining the incidence and effect of the influence of the learner's L1 on ILs is also reviewed. After a number of studies on L1 transfer (Gass and Selinker 1983, 1992; Kellerman and Sharwood Smith 1986), we now know that the complexity of the role of the L1 is far greater than was considered previously. For instance, it has been found that discourse function can cause language transfer, i.e. L1 discourse can have an effect on L2 morphosyntax (Jordens 1983, 327ff., 353f.). And the L1 can also induce overproduction of particular L2 forms or constrain the hypotheses on which L2 learners develop (Schachter 1983, 98f.). Although universal developmental processes seem to be immune to transfer, L1 influence may result in some modifications in them. Linguistic markedness in its various kinds poses constraints to which the effects of language transfer have to be subjected.

3. Input, variables in acquisition accomplishment and theoretical explanations

From Chapters 5 to 8 current explanations of the learning process are given and their weaknesses or flaws examined, as well as the direction in which the leading research seems to be moving. Environments for the input are examined in Chapter 5. When L2 researchers set out to examine the nature of the internal

processes which constitute learning and that are not amenable to direct observation, they have to infer them. To give consistency to these inferences they have addressed the nature of the linguistic input for SLA. In doing so they wanted to ascertain whether there are differences between the language addressed to non-native speakers and that used in adult native speaker interaction and whether these differences are helpful in message comprehension and SLA or even indispensable for acquisition to occur. Out of these studies it has been found that: (1) the speech addressed to foreigners undergoes some linguistic adjustments, hence it is modified, but nevertheless it is grammatical, and (2) at the discourse level it shows considerable differences, i.e. the topics chosen for conversation, the way in which these topics are treated, the topic-negotiation process, etc. It appears that both comprehension and L2 development are enhanced when elaborate or interactional adjustments —i.e. repetitions, topic-fronting, paraphrase, decomposition, rhetorical signalling, etc.— rather than linguistic adjustments are used, since in this way the most native-like L2 input is preserved and at the same time some facilitating modifications are made. It is also argued that in the relationship between input and SLA —i.e. between comprehension and acquisition— what is in fact at issue is the interactional adjustments, i.e. the input that results from a negotiated process, and not mere input adjustments.

Chapter 6 deals with learner differences and differing outcomes of the SLA process. A number of variables associated with the learner such as age, language aptitude, social-psychological factors, personality, cognitive style, hemisphere specialization, learning strategies, etc., that affect the results obtained in the process of learning a L2 are considered. It is noted that the research findings in this area of learner variables are not definitive, advising caution when drawing implications from them. Chapter 7 focuses on the value of theory construction in relation to SLA, reviewing some prominent theories proposed for this research area, e.g. nativist, environmentalist and interactionist theories, and probing the relevancy of the suggested distinction between learning and acquisition. Chapter 8 concentrates on the differential effects of the two settings in which SLA can occur, i.e. a L2 environment where the language is spoken natively or a foreign language environment where this does not happen and where instruction is usually provided. Whereas in the former, acquisition takes place naturally, in the latter the possible effects of instruction on the development of IL are studied. Scrutinizing the research evidence attained in this area, it seems that formal instruction cannot subvert the natural acquisition series found in some L2 structures, i.e. developmental features. The learner needs to be psycho-linguistically ready to process —‘learn’— the structures taught if these are developmental, i.e. Pienemann’s (1984, 198ff.; 1985, 36ff.) learnability/teachability hypothesis. Only if the learner is ready can instruction enhance his rate of acquisition through the sequence. However, variational features, which are not subject to processing constraints —i.e. copula—, are in fact

acquired variably at different stages of the learner's development. From studies that have addressed the effect of instruction on the rate of SLA, it can be concluded that instruction does lead to more rapid language learning. In relation to the long-term effects of instruction on the L2 proficiency ultimately achieved, it seems that conscious awareness of what is present in the input is causal for learning to take place (Schmidt and Frota 1986, 281). And one of the roles that instruction can perform is raising awareness in the learner about L2 features.

Finally, the epilogue reflects upon what has been achieved in the twenty years of research into SLA and looks forward to what remains to be done. It acknowledges the demands placed on pursuing the research agenda that encompasses language systems other than morphology and syntax, namely the acquisition of L2 phonology, lexis and pragmatics. As it is argued that "more rigorous theorizing would speed up progress in SLA research." (220), I am convinced that this book will undoubtedly become a stepping stone towards this achievement since it is one of the most comprehensive analyses to date of research methodology in SLA and the theoretical background in which such a methodology is set.

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