
Cook's volume is a linguistics-based introduction to second language acquisition (SLA) research and provides a critical account of the methods and goals of this discipline. The volume does presuppose some background in linguistics (Cook places stress on generative research), though not extensively so. It is organized in ten chapters and provides a set of activities at the end intended to bring the reader closer to the research described. These activities can be done individually or in small groups. Boxes summarizing key pieces of research are also provided.

Cook considers that the three basic questions Chomsky (1986a: 3) defined for linguistics need to be rephrased for second language research. In chapter 1 (The Background to Current Second Language Acquisition Research) the author states that the main foundation of the book are the ‘Chomskyan goals for linguistics, in which knowledge of language is the central issue’ (p.3). The book, therefore, takes the modular view that the knowledge of a second language is an aspect of language knowledge rather than of some other type of knowledge. The scope of the book covers (i) major aspects of SLA research in relationship to linguistics, (ii) a survey of a range of SLA research methods and techniques and (iii) the crucial problem of relating SLA to linguistics. Early SLA research is also presented in this first chapter (Weinreich and language contact, Lado and contrastive analysis, the language acquisition device, interlanguage and error analysis).

Chapter 2 (Sequences in Second Language Acquisition) develops the ideas and methodology described in the first chapter by concentrating on the two areas of grammatical morphology and negation, which were most prominent in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Both rely on earlier models of syntax derived from structuralist linguistics and use data gathered from observations of learner’s speech to discover the sequence of L2 acquisition. Cook shows how the prime concern of this research was to establish a sequence of acquisition usually independent of that in L1. More attention was paid to the sequences themselves than to their explanation, though. According to the author, this research, as its best, laid a foundation of observation of learner’s speech but, as its worse, it limited the scope of SLA research.

The next three chapters look at the ways in which more general theories of second language acquisition have drawn on the type of syntactic evidence and the view of sequence of acquisition discussed in chapter 2. Chapter 3 focuses on the Input Hypothesis proposed by S. Krashen. Cook goes over Krashen’s model for SLA (the Monitor Model) and examines its five linked hypotheses. She then focuses on the Input Hypothesis and reviews the evidence presented to support it. Cook considers Krashen’s ideas both stimulating and frustrating at the same time. The theory is made up of a simple set of propositions which seem to fit together in a whole system but, little evidence is provided for any of the five hypotheses separately. Besides, Krashen’s hypotheses do not conform to the linguistics questions posited by Chomsky.

Models of second language acquisition in which the L2 learner is seen as functioning within society are dealt with in chapter 4 (Pigdins, Creoles and Variation). Cook revises models that exploit the resemblances between learner languages and pидgins and creoles, and models that emphasize the variation in the learner’s use of language. The chapter then goes on to examine research that takes the use question as central to linguistics. Basically, chapter 4 describes a more sociolinguistic perspective on SLA in which use and variation are considered more interesting than knowledge and competence. This research has not paid so much attention, both in theory and in methodology, to the issue of acquisition. Its strength is the description of L2 variations in use and its weakness the lack of testable accounts of how such variation is acquired by the individual. Cook argues that the type of knowledge implied by variationist work represents a stumbling block to I-language linguistics.

Chapter 5 (The Multidimensional Model and the Teachability Hypothesis) reviews another model whose main claim is that L2 acquisition has two sides, a developmental and a variational sequence. This model brings together the two strands seen in chapters 2 and 4. A criticism made by Cook is that not enough languages have been investigated in this model and that the linguistic model used is too thin and unconnected to relevant current theories. The author ends the chapter by pointing out the complexities researchers are forced to investigate once they step outside the language-based view of SLA. An argument in favor of linguistic-based approaches to SLA is, according to Cook, that
linguistics has provided detailed descriptions and explanations of language acquisition and use, while psychology has skimmed the surface.

The research in chapter 6 (Learning and Communicating Strategies) focuses on an alternative approach to SLA that investigates the learners’ internal strategies for learning and communication. Cook focuses on methodological issues in strategies research and points out that the main difficulty encountered is obtaining evidence for particular strategies. Learning strategies research directly answers the acquisition questions; communication strategies answers the use question. But the concept of learner’s strategies goes against the belief that language knowledge differs from other forms of knowledge and that SLA differs from the acquisition of other forms of knowledge (i.e. the idea that the mind is modular). The chief argument for the uniqueness of language acquisition is that no general language theory can explain the acquisition of specifically language knowledge, thus there is an inherent contradiction between learning strategy research and linguistics.

Compared to earlier chapters of the book, the unifying theme of chapter 7 (Relative Clauses: Beyond Phrase Structure Syntax) is not a SLA model but an area of syntax. The research surveyed in this chapter demonstrates how L2 research can take on syntax and use it to illuminate issues relevant to L2 learning, such as sequences and psychological processes. It also illustrates the wealth and types of data that are possible in investigation of SLA syntax (comprehension techniques, acceptability, sentence combining ...).

Chapter 8 (Principles and Parameters Syntax) goes on to the acquisition of syntax in the Principles and Parameters model. The three areas dealt with in this chapter - the pro-drop parameter, binding and the head-direction parameter - show the closest links to linguistics in the book. Although Cook recognizes that this framework has produced a new set of ideas about knowledge of language for investigation in SLA, she also warns of the dangers involved in utilizing the most current version of linguistics when doing SLA research. In chapter 9 (The Universal Grammar Model and Second Language Acquisition) Cook reviews the model of language acquisition most associated with SLA research in recent years, the Universal Grammar (UG) model developed by Chomsky, which uses the principles and parameters syntax described in chapter 8. She also introduces the main themes of current UG-related SLA research. Finally, and by way of a conclusion, chapter 10 contrasts the linguistic approaches of other chapters with those based on speech processes and the psychological theories of John Anderson and Brian MacWhinney.

Cook provides in this volume a factual outline of the areas examined and a critical evaluation of them within an overall argument about the contribution of theoretical linguistics to second language acquisition research. Linguistics clearly provides a useful perspective on L2 learning and has led to stimulating ideas and research, yet it must be remembered that linguistics is only one of the disciplines that SLA research can draw on.

In summary, this is a valuable book that presents a clear introduction to the topic of SLA research and, together with the activities provided, leads to an understanding of the current issues in this area. [Pilar García Mayo, Euskal-Herriko Universitatea]