

Studying Speaking to Inform Second Language Learning

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There seems to be an ever-widening gap between practitioners and researchers: a disconnect that never seems to close. This relationship—or perhaps lack of relationship—was perhaps no better evidenced than in one of the opening colloquia at TESOL 2004 Long Beach. Panelists included Diane Larsen-Freeman, Patricia Duff, and David Nunan, among others. These researchers have long been active in our field and have held leadership roles in the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) as well as in TESOL. The panelists addressed the concerns of many TESOLers on the relationship between AAAL and TESOL. Perhaps foremost in everyone's mind was the fact that AAAL did not hold its 2004 conference in Long Beach, breaking a long tradition in which one conference piggybacked the other. Nor would AAAL hold the 2005 annual conference in San Antonio where TESOL 2005 is to be held. There was some talk among the general TESOL membership that AAAL was breaking off from TESOL. This colloquium was probably intended to allay some of those fears and to forge a continuing alliance between these two professional organizations. However, in some ways the presentations by panelists served to deepen this continuing gap between research and practice, or perhaps just make it more salient. It seems that the focus of TESOL as a conference has become more pedagogical while AAAL continues to foster research in second language acquisition and other areas of applied linguistics. The colloquium was both heartening and discouraging at the same time. It was the opening of a dialogue but the researchers seemed to have more to say than the practitioners. It is clear to me that studies such as those reported on in this present volume of articles answer a crisis in our profession as evidenced at the 2004 opening colloquium.

Studying Speaking to Inform Second Language Learning, edited by Diane Boxer and Andrew D. Cohen, is a collection of articles of the study of spoken language that elaborate on the connection between oral interaction in various contexts, such as the classroom, spontaneous conversation, and the development and assessment of second language proficiency. This volume presents a current, systematic overview of the state of research at the intersection of discourse analysis and second language acquisition. The attempt is made to offer insights useful in the development of curriculum and materials, pedagogical techniques, and evaluation instruments through connections made in these studies between the sociolinguistic and the psycholinguistic, and the interactional with the cognitive. The book consists of four parts. In Part I, three theoretical perspectives on the analysis of spoken discourse, and an overview of methodological approaches are introduced to frame the articles that follow. The editors also include a chapter by Dan Douglas in which he considers the importance of discourse domains, which are the internal constructs of context activated by the speaker. As the notion of language proficiency has evolved into one of communicative competence, so has the understanding that performance, especially in spoken language, is influenced by context. No study of spoken language use or assessment of oral proficiency could ignore the interaction between context and performance. While the notion of discourse domains has been investigated in the area of assessment, especially in English for specific purposes, it could also prove helpful in teaching contexts. All studies in each of the following parts of the book share two commonalities: a similar method of data collection in studying spoken discourse, and a connection to either learning or assessment. Studies of spontaneous spoken discourse in Part II and studies using elicited spoken discourse in Part III

serve to inform second language learning. Finally, Part IV includes studies of the analysis of spoken discourse in second language assessment.

In the introductory chapter, Boxer outlines a conceptual overview of how the study of spoken discourse can inform second language learning. In response to the changing conception of first and second language acquisition in this global village we all inhabit today, Boxer offers three theoretical models from first and second language acquisition to frame the intersection of the second language acquisition (SLA) and discourse analysis (DA) research presented in these studies: *language identity*, *language socialization*, and *sociocultural theory*. While the language socialization model serves as the theoretical underpinning of most of the studies presented in this volume, the articles by Douglas, Konishi and Tarone, and Bardovi-Harling and Salsbury highlight sociocultural theory, and Lazaraton and Taylor-Hamilton work within the framework of the language identity model.

According to the language identity model, individuals who are learning another language have to struggle with changing identities at the individual and social relational levels, as well as with relational identities and all the power relations inherent in these identities. In one of the studies in the first section, Anne Lazaraton focuses on teacher identity when the teacher's L1 is different from the language taught. The second model of language acquisition, or perhaps language use, is the language socialization model, which views language as the "symbolic means by which humans appropriate knowledge of norms and rules of verbal and nonverbal behavior in particular speech communities" (p. 9). This model of language acquisition through socialization recognizes that learning a second language often means learning the rules and norms of language use in a given community of practice, such as the classroom or the workplace. Language acquisition thus occurs through the fluid and changing socialization process encountered in these various contexts as the second language learner adapts to meet the challenges he/she faces to gain acceptance. As an example, Joan Kelly Hall looks at the practicing of speaking in a Spanish as a foreign language classroom through the analysis of transcriptions of classroom interactions over a nine-month period. She identifies the significant communicative routines in the classroom, but found that the level of intellectual, social, and linguistic content remained low, and students became less actively involved as the semester continued. Hall's study brings the first two models together, looking at language acquisition from the perspective of identity in a foreign language classroom and the dynamics set into play through the process of language socialization. The third model, that is, sociocultural theory, also figures into her analysis when we consider the impact of the classroom interactions on the performance of participants in the foreign language classroom. This third model derives from the theoretical perspectives of Lev Vygotsky as applied to second language acquisition, and views the acquisition of language "as a sociocultural phenomenon linking the social/interactional with the cognitive" (p. 11). According to this model, language is a mediating tool between social interaction and the development of higher order mental processes. Sociocultural theory is a way to look at the language learning process as a connection between sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic contexts and outcomes, and appears to be gaining increasing attention in both teaching and learning contexts, as well as in assessment, as evidenced by the role of context in spoken language performance discussed by Dan Douglas. Heidi Hamilton also incorporates aspects of each of these three models in her study in which she looks at repair of teenagers' spoken German in a summer immersion program. Hamilton looks at the influence of activity type and language ability on the

interconnected repair practices of both teacher and learners. She suggests that it is through examination of naturally occurring, situated learner and teacher practices that we can begin to learn about the complexities of teacher-student interactions in the classroom.

Boxer and Cohen also present a number of methodological perspectives for collection of data on language use. As noted before, the first part of the book looks at studies based on the collection of spontaneous data, the next part including those based on elicited data, and the final part comprising studies that incorporate various methods in data collection and analysis in the assessment of spoken discourse in language learning. These include approaches to spontaneous spoken data collection and analysis, such as the ethnography of speaking (ES) and conversation analysis (CA), which have played significant roles in research in language use, and should prove to be important tools in language learning contexts as well. ES is an important way of discovering language as it is used in a variety of contexts. Both holistic and emic, it takes into account a variety of contexts as well as native-speaker knowledge. CA is a distinct methodological approach to the collection and analysis of discourse data that can offer a great deal to the teaching of spoken language to L2 learner. As a third methodological approach, the editors include interactional sociolinguistics, which focuses on developmental bilingualism and cross-cultural miscommunication between and among different linguistic/ethnic groups. With the use of English as the lingua franca in the global village this approach serves the accompanying shift from second language acquisition as we know it to studies of competencies in second language use in various contexts. The studies based on spontaneous data use CA and also interactional analyses to examine turn-taking and codeswitching in different contexts. As for studies that look at elicited data, Taylor-Hamilton uses a combination of ethnographic methods and interview data. She looks at speaking as it occurs in an EFL setting in Arabic-speaking Abu Dhabi, and focuses on problems in giving directions. Another methodology for eliciting data, that of interviews, is used by Bardovi-Harlig and Salsbury, who look at conversational interviews between adult students in intensive ESL study and graduate students of SLA. Konishi and Tarone analyze speaking through role-plays, and focus on communication strategies based on L1 syntactic patterns. Beebe and Waring employ discourse completion tasks (DCTs) in which ESL students are asked to respond to rude remarks to study the connection between grammatical and pragmatic proficiency. Through the studies in this volume, it becomes clear how methodological considerations play an important role in the types of data that researchers are able to collect, and we see the kinds of analyses that each enable. More importantly, the results of these studies serve to inform practices in teaching and learning.

Just as Boxer's introductory chapter frames the theoretical intersection between SLA and discourse analysis for purposes of research, Douglas's chapter on discourse domains provides a backdrop for the cognitive and interactional aspects of language use important in understanding how DA can inform not only SLA but also second language assessment. Through a sociocultural theoretical lens, Douglas looks at communicative performance as the speaker's construct, or his/her internal view of context as interpreted for the purposes of interlanguage development and use. Contextualization cues provide the information necessary for the speaker to create the discourse domain suitable to a particular context, and teachers, materials writers, and testers must provide sufficient information to learners and test-takers about contextual variables to ensure the activation of the appropriate discourse domain in spoken discourse.

The final part of the volume indeed looks at how studies of spoken discourse can inform second language assessment. One of the biggest issues facing test developers in the assessment of oral proficiency is the question of what is to be judged and how it is to be judged. There is the elusive issue of the nature of oral proficiency, the difficulty of ascertaining the norm in today's world in which English is the lingua franca, and the near impossibility of achieving agreement on these issues. Annie Brown uses conversation analysis techniques to analyze assessment in oral interviews. She demonstrates how oral assessment instruments can be dramatically different from ordinary conversation, and how the manner in which individual interviewers conduct the session can impact the ratings made by outside raters. Carsten Roever examines ways of assessing pragmatic ability in spoken interaction, and makes recommendations for the design and implementation of instruments for assessing pragmatic L2 ability. Andrew Cohen emphasizes Dan Douglas' perspective that contextual parameters are the cornerstone in designing speech act assessment instruments, and he revisits the use of verbal report data as a means for validating performance in speech act assessment.

Of what value is this collection of works to the language teacher or to the test developer? This volume of studies makes the timely contribution of bridging the ever-widening gap between research and practice. Through conversational and interactional analysis of spoken discourse within the classroom, we can gain insights into teaching practices and collaborative dialogues among learners that can inform our teaching and learning. We can begin to look at how output serves the acquisition of second language, and we can begin to understand how the teacher's input may or may not serve as the comprehensible input some have regarded as necessary for language acquisition. We can also begin to look more closely at the influence of context in the production of language, and begin to understand the contributing factors to perceived fluency in some situations and lack of proficiency in others. Such research is, of course, essential in assessment, as institutions increasingly turn to high stakes standardized assessments of oral proficiency for admissions to universities, or for applications to multinational corporations. Test developers and test users need to be able to rely on samples of oral proficiency as valid measurements of test takers' oral proficiency in order to ensure that a prospective employee or a prospective graduate will have the oral proficiency needed to meet the requirements of the program.

Continued analysis of spoken discourse can indeed continue to inform assessment of oral proficiency in the second language, but perhaps more importantly at a time when TESOL and AAAL seem to be parting ways, methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives that frame research in SLA and DA can serve to inform pedagogical approaches, and provide methodologies that can be utilized in classroom environments. Classroom teachers have always used role-plays and interviews but perhaps rarely analyzed the language elicited. Teachers are even using blackboard online discussion boards to record real time and asynchronous virtual dialogues and role-plays, and conversation analysis methodologies could be used in class to improve communication strategies.

Perhaps even more important than methodological approaches is this new perspective of second language acquisition as second language use framed by the three models in this volume. The English used as a second language in one part of the world may not be the same variety as the English spoken as a second language in another part of the world or in different contexts, yet

communication is effective. There is no longer just the need to acquire the language but there is more of a need to learn to use English as a second language in a particular context. We have evolved beyond the notion of cultural assimilation and even beyond the concept of cultural adaptation, and we must acknowledge the complexities of changing language identities as we learn a new language. Language identity, language socialization, and sociocultural theory are three theoretical models that can serve to frame this political dialogue that we as practitioners, test developers, learners, and language users are engaged in today.

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