BOOK REVIEW

Second Language Acquisition: A Theoretical Introduction to Real World Applications
Alessandro G. Benati and Tanja Angelovska
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Second Language Acquisition: A Theoretical Introduction to Real World Applications by Alessandro G. Benati and Tanja Angelovska (2016) is without doubt a help for undergraduate students and trainee teachers who need to deal with the issue of second language acquisition (SLA). The content is very precise but, at the same time, very clear and easy to understand and follow, even for those students who are dealing with this topic for the first time. It can be applied in the classroom, as a resource book or even a course book, to introduce SLA. It is true that the field has become very complex in the past years, as the studies include many different fields of knowledge: linguistics, psychology, sociology and education. However, the authors of this book have been able to highlight the most important theories in such a way that it can be an excellent resource for use in undergraduate classes. They have also incorporated some activities for students to reflect on the topic and to develop their critical thinking about it. Most of the activities are good and although some are unpretentious, they are effective for students to think about this issue. In short, all of the activities give an insight into the theory. The structure of the book is also very well organized. It is divided into six chapters, which summarize the main theories of SLA:

1.   Introduction to second language acquisition.

2.   Similarities and differences between first and second language acquisition.

3.   How learners process information in second language acquisition.

4.   How the internal system develops in a second language.

5.   How learners learn to communicate in a second language.

6.   What we know about SLA.

The organization of each chapter follows the same order, which is very effective:

- A short summary of the chapter.

- The theoretical part with all the main authors on SLA analyzed and contrasted.

- Some activities to check understanding and to achieve a critical opinion on the topics, fields of knowledge, theories and issues.

- The application of the theory to the "real-world", that is, a guide for learners and language instructors to use these theories in an effective way when learning or teaching a second language.

The first chapter, "Introduction to second language acquisition", starts with a clear definition of SLA after examining different contexts and assuming three research methods: experimental (more pedagogical research), observational (in the classroom) and case studies (in the classroom). The starting point answers two questions, bearing in mind that L1 has already been acquired: first, how learners internalize the linguistic system of L2, and, second, how learners make use of the linguistic system. In this chapter there is a practical and straightforward summary of the main theories of SLA from the different fields of knowledge involved in the process of L2 learning: firstly, from a rationalist perspective, which proposes that the learning of an L2 is innate and, as such, in opposition to behaviorism, which was in fashion in the past; secondly, from a linguistic perspective (competences and skills); thirdly, from a cognitive perspective; fourthly, from a psychological approach, and finally, from a sociological perspective. The chapter continues by analyzing the nature of language: lexicon, phonology, morphology, syntax, pragmatics, sociolinguistics and discourse. It later continues by summarizing the main theories in second language acquisition: Behaviorism, Universal Grammar Theory, Monitor Theory, Interaction Hypothesis, Processability Theory, Input Processing Theory, Skill Acquisition Theory, Emergentism, the Declarative and Procedural Model, Complexity Theory and Sociocultural Theory. It is a reality that SLA is an active growing field in which researchers have not yet accepted just one

single theory, but all the main studies have been summarized in this book. After analyzing the key elements of SLA, the authors move on to the learning process, from declarative to procedural working memory, and to all those factors responsible for the acquisition of linguistic features.

The second chapter, "Similarities and differences between first and second language acquisition", shows the differences and similarities in the acquisition of L1 and L2 in a clear and down-to-earth manner. This chapter is significant as it clarifies the basis of SLA from the point of view of the learner: Chomsky's Universal Grammar (1965 and 1981), the linguistic constraints of transfer and markedness, the role of the brain and the matter of age. The matter of age has been a controversial question, and Lenneberg's (1967) "Critical period hypothesis" is still an issue of research in this subject. The question is whether there is an optimal age for acquiring a second language or if cognitive maturity and experience can be assets in learning a second language. The authors analyze the misconceptions about age from different areas of language skills: pronunciation, morphology and syntax. The authors extend their theory to a multilingual environment, which is nowadays becoming the reality of most learners, as most of them are living in multilingual societies.

The third chapter, "How learners process information in second language acquisition", studies the way in which learners process information. Learners do not always process all the input they are exposed to when learning another language. Moreover, the authors indicate the limited role of instruction in a second language due to external and internal factors. The importance of individual differences for SLA (age, language aptitude, working memory, learning strategies, motivation and learning styles) are reviewed in this chapter.

The fourth chapter, "How the internal system develops in a second language", is a key issue within SLA. It deals with the rules applied when learning a second language, the learner language or interlanguage (Selinker, 1972), that is, language transfer, over-generalization of target language rules, transfer of training, L2 communication strategies and L2 learning strategies. The cognitive theories of SLA are also examined in this chapter, in spite of the difficulties this issue entails.

The fifth chapter, "How learners learn to communicate in a second language", helps to understand the ability a second language learner has when using his or her communicative skills. This sociolinguistic aspect of SLA studies the different tools, skills, and competences that a learner must master for successful communication (Canale and Swain, 1980), which are linguistic (grammar and phonology, phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics, etc.), sociolinguistic (sociocultural), discourse and strategic. First, the social aspect of language, and what this entails, is emphasized in this chapter, and thus, it studies different approaches from a functionalist perspective, for example, the concept-oriented approach. Second, SLA is influenced by cultural practices and here Vygotsky's (1978) Social-Cultural Theory, Giles' (1978) Accommodation Theory, and Schumann's (1978) Acculturation Model are summarized. Considering that our society is becoming multilingual rather than just bilingual, the authors state the differences in meaning in relation to the concepts of bilingualism, heritage language and multilingualism. A final thought is given to "multilingualism competence" and the Dynamic System Theory (Larsen-Freeman, 1997 & 2002).

The sixth, and last, chapter, "What we know about SLA", evaluates what is known in the field of SLA: the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 in both children and adults. It also deals with the role of implicit and explicit knowledge, input, interaction and output, and well as the impact of instruction in SLA. The remark the authors make is that, in spite of an increase in research since the basis of SLA was established, it is still a matter of continuous debate and controversy. The reason for this is that this topic is very complex and it involves many different fields of knowledge, as stated at the beginning of this review.

All these chapters end with a guide for learners and language instructors on how to apply these theories in the "real world". These sections are highly significant due to their practicality and they give language instructors valuable as well as useful information on how to apply the theoretical part in the learning and teaching of a second language. Chapter six should be highlighted, as it includes some approaches and concerns relating the teaching of a second language. The book also offers other helpful information, for example, the figures and tables included, as well as the final glossary, which is very useful in order to check terminology, theories,

hypotheses and models concerning SLA. The authors have researched the literature well and have included a wide range of references. Moreover, after each chapter they provide a list of references allowing the reader to go deeper still into the topic. All of the references are relevant, well-chosen and well cited.

I therefore think this book is a very good resource to introduce students and trainees to the topic of SLA in such a way that it can be easily understood. This knowledge is reinforced by the activities included and the references for further research on the topic. Moreover, the authors cover and review all the main areas of knowledge of this topic in an engaging, practical way for anyone dealing with this complex matter for the first time. In short, the main strength of this book is to help learners and teachers to tackle the numerous studies and theories on this issue. Its only slight weakness may be the simplicity of some of the activities provided by the authors.

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