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Language Teaching Research & Language Pedagogy (Review)

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ELLIS, ROD R. *Language Teaching Research & Language Pedagogy*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. Pp. xi, 387. \$49.95, paper. ISBN 978-1-4443-3611-5.

This book extends Chaudron's (1988) review of L2 classroom research to include the studies published in the last thirty years, with the intention of providing technical knowledge to teachers interested in conducting research or using research to inform their teaching. The scope is restricted to studies that investigate the effect of some instructional artifact or procedure on learners' knowledge of the L2, for the most part within face-to-face classroom interactions. Ellis organizes the research into broad topics of interest and further subdivides them by theoretical or methodological construct. He balances presentation of research in both the cognitive and socio-cultural traditions throughout the volume.

The first two chapters introduce the major trends in language teaching research since the early twentieth century, the important peer-reviewed journals in which language teaching research is published, and the research methods commonly used. Chapter three reviews broad comparative methods studies, e.g. comparisons of the audiolingual and communicative approaches. These early studies were followed by more narrow investigations of particular context-learner-treatment interactions.

The next three chapters focus on studies of L2 classroom discourse. Investigations of discourse frameworks and language use are reviewed and supplemented with illustrative transcripts. The main topics of interest in teacher-directed classroom discourse research include characteristics of teacher-talk, teacher questions, use of learners' L1, use of metalanguage, and corrective feedback. This section is likely to be enlightening for

teachers that are new to classroom discourse analysis, because the research advocates for some potentially unintuitive strategies. For instance, teachers are encouraged to reconsider the types of questions they ask and to re-think the initiate-respond-follow-up exchanges that are ubiquitous but not optimal in terms of providing opportunities for learning. In general, though, while there is a good amount of research about *how* teachers speak to learners, and to a lesser extent *why*, still the question remains *if* and *how* their practices actually facilitate language learning. There is also less research on learner-led discourse than teacher-directed discourse, but studies in this realm have been able to draw links between such discourse and language learning. There are longitudinal studies investigating developmental sequences in interlanguage and studies on various aspects of learner talk as well as some studies comparing group work to teacher-fronted classes.

Chapter seven reviews studies investigating task-based language teaching (TBLT). Readers unfamiliar with TBLT will benefit from the preliminary definitions of terms (e.g. task versus activity), discussion of design and implementation variables, and explanation of evaluative measures. The research reviewed investigates various facets of TBLT including the setting, input-based tasks, learner-learner interaction, task complexity, production-based tasks, planning, form-focused tasks, focus-on-form tasks, and evaluation of tasks. Though TBLT is not without its detractors, Ellis characterizes most of the criticism as misunderstanding the TBLT framework.

Chapter eight explores classroom interaction research and covers a number of topics but focuses on corrective feedback. There is a balance of studies informed by sociocultural theories of language learning, which see interaction itself as development, and studies informed by an interactionist-cognitive perspective, which see interaction as

providing opportunities for acquisition. Ellis is more critical of the former, claiming that sociocultural studies have not done enough to prove that learners have internalized the “learned” feature.

The next chapter reviews research on form-focused instruction. Here again, the definitions of terms are concise and instructive. Form-focused instruction studies are so varied in their scope, instructional targets, implementation, and measures of effects that it is difficult to make generalizations about the research. While there are vigorous theoretical debates about the efficacy of focus on forms versus focus on form and explicit versus implicit instruction, Ellis suggests teachers view them as a variety of methodological options from which to choose.

Chapter ten focuses on investigations of individual learner factors (cognitive, affective, and motivational) and how they interact with particular instructional techniques. Recognizing that teachers have a limited ability to apply the findings of such research to a heterogeneous group of students, Ellis also explores research on strategy training, which is arguably more practical.

The concluding chapter reconsiders the critiques that Chaudron made of the state of the research in 1988 and finds that while the field has matured in several ways, some studies are still lacking in terms of validity, techniques for data analysis, and to a less extent, theoretical specification. Finally, Ellis offers a set of guiding principles for teachers to apply this research to their teaching. Since the empirical evidence is rarely conclusive, he suggests that teachers make informed choices based on their own particular contexts, learners, and goals. He also suggests that teacher education programs should help teachers become critical consumers of research and use it to reflect on their own practices.

The book is not a good fit for teachers with no prior knowledge of L2 acquisition research because though Ellis defines most important terms, more than a basic understanding of the constructs is necessary to appreciate the results of the studies reviewed. Also, the volume is comprehensive but not completely exhaustive, and Ellis should have explained how he selected the studies. However, for teacher-researchers who are already somewhat familiar with L2 acquisition and want to inform their pedagogical choices with empirical data or pursue their own research agenda, this volume is a tremendous resource. It summarizes the results of studies broaching a vast range of topics in a concise and cogent manner. The topics are organized logically into themes that are relevant to teachers. The coverage is balanced between the cognitive and sociocultural traditions. The discussion of each study is critical but fair, and in explaining the methodological limitations of each study, Ellis provides readers with numerous ideas for how they could contribute to language teaching research in the future.

Chaudron, C. (1988). *Second Language Classrooms: Research on Teaching and Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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