

牛津应用语言学丛书



The Study of Second Language Acquisition

(Second Edition)

第二语言习得研究 (第二版)

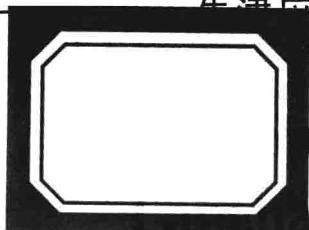
Rod Ellis

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The Study of Second Language Acquisition

Second Edition

ROD ELLIS

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出版说明

本世纪初，外教社先后引进“牛津应用语言学丛书”（19种）和“牛津应用语言学丛书（续编）”（10种）。这些图书由于内容权威、选择精当而受到了外语界的好评，在科研论文中被广泛引用，对推动我国外语教学和研究的发 展起到了重大作用。

近年来，随着研究的不断扩展和深入，国内学界对研究资料有了新的需求，像“任务型教学法”、“英语作为国际通用语”、“二语习得的跨学科研究”等逐渐成为了热门的话题。有鉴于此，我们又从牛津大学出版社出版的应用语言学图书中精选了10本，以更好地满足广大教师和科研人员的需求。希望这次出版的这10本图书，能够和以前的29本一起，反映出国际应用语言学重要领域研究的前沿，为全面、深入推动我国外语科研起到新的作用，做出新的贡献。

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Preface

Second language acquisition research over the years

In the Introduction to the first edition of *The Study of Second Language Acquisition* I attempted a brief account of the developments that had taken place in SLA since its establishment as a field of enquiry in the 1960s.¹ One development concerned the scope of the field of enquiry. Whereas much of the earlier work had focused on the linguistic, and, in particular, the grammatical properties of learner language, and was psycholinguistic in orientation, later work attended to the pragmatic aspects of learner language and, increasingly, adopted a sociolinguistic perspective. A second development concerned the increasing attention paid by SLA researchers to linguistic theory, in particular the theory of language associated with Chomsky's model of grammar: Universal Grammar (UG). I noted that the relationship between SLA research and linguistics had become increasingly symbiotic and that SLA research, therefore, was no longer a consumer of linguistics, but also a contributor to it. A third development was the marked increase in theory-led research. Whereas much of the earlier research was of the 'research-then-theory' kind, typically consisting of the collection and analysis of samples of learner language, later research was increasingly theory-led and experimental in style. I also noted the evolution of two subfields of SLA, one addressing individual learner differences and the other, classroom L2 acquisition. Individual difference research, in fact, pre-dated the onset of mainstream SLA, as a rich tradition investigating such constructs as language aptitude and motivation was already in existence well before the 1960s. However, the study of the universal properties of L2 acquisition and of individual learner differences remained disconnected areas of enquiry in SLA in 1994 when the first edition of this book was published. Classroom studies of L2 learners dated back to the inception of SLA research but had grown to constitute a distinct subfield of SLA. These studies were directed at investigating issues important to language pedagogy but were also explicitly concerned with theoretical issues related to L2 acquisition.

I concluded my brief survey of the then current state of SLA by suggesting that it had become a rather amorphous field of study with elastic boundaries. I gave the opinion that SLA stood at the crossroads in the sense that it might continue as a coherent field of enquiry with its own recognized research community, or it might splinter into a series of subfields, and perhaps become submerged into the 'mother' disciplines that informed those subfields.

These comments were written in 1993. Some fifteen years have now passed and it seems apposite to again attempt to summarize the developments that have taken place over this intervening period. Where does SLA stand now as field of study? To what extent is there continuity with the earlier period, as described in the first edition? To what extent have the intervening years seen new avenues of research open up? Has SLA survived as a coherent field of enquiry?

Many of the developments evident at the time of the first edition have continued since. SLA is clearly no longer focused on the morphosyntactic aspects of L2 acquisition, although these have continued to attract interest. The study of the pragmatic aspects of learner language has expanded. In addition, there is an increasing body of research investigating the phonological and lexical aspects of L2 acquisition. There are specialist volumes devoted to all three of these aspects—for example, Kasper and Rose's (2002) survey of pragmatic development, Leather's (1999b) collection of articles on phonological issues in L2 learning, and Nation's (2001) comprehensive account of vocabulary learning. SLA has continued to figure mainly as a psycholinguistic area of study, but interest in the more social aspects, evident at the time of the first edition, has grown stronger, with some researchers (for example, Firth and Wagner 1997; Block 2003) now challenging the legitimacy of many of the key constructs that have informed psycholinguistic SLA—for example, the notions of 'native' versus 'non-native speaker' and 'target language'—on the grounds that such notions are inadequate to account for the complexity evident in the heteroglossic urban contexts where so much of the SLA research has taken place. This increased emphasis on the social aspects of L2 learning has been matched by the ongoing interest shown in linguistic theory. UG-based enquiry has continued unabated, despite the opposition that it has aroused in a number of quarters. The central tenets of a generative account of L2 acquisition have been defended stoutly by White (2003a, 2003b) and Gregg (2003) among others. There are now numerous collections of papers examining the grammatical properties of learners' interlanguages from the perspective of both 'old' Chomskyan models of grammar (i.e. the Government/Binding model) and more recent ones (for example, the Minimalist Program)—see Chomsky (1981b, 1995).

The two subfields of SLA noted in the introduction to the first edition are also still very much with us. Work on individual differences has figured strongly in the last fifteen years, with new instruments developed to measure established constructs such as language aptitude, motivation, and learning style and new theories advanced to account for the role that these factors play in L2 acquisition. It is pleasing to note that the separation between mainstream SLA and individual difference research, which I saw as a feature of SLA in 1994, is now beginning to disappear. Researchers are increasingly examining how key individual difference factors affect the actual mechanisms and processes through which knowledge of an L2 is acquired. Thus, there has been a coming together of the 'cognitive' and 'psychological' lines of enquiry

in SLA. The second subfield—instructed SLA—has also flourished. This in part reflects the ‘applied’ nature of SLA as a sub-discipline of Applied Linguistics and in part the sheer convenience of using classroom learners as participants in studies designed to test theoretical claims about L2 acquisition. There has been a flurry of books addressing the effect that instruction has on acquisition—for example, Doughty and Williams (1998), R. Ellis (2001a), DeKeyser (2007a).

It would be wrong, however, to characterize the last fifteen years of SLA as simply ‘more of the same’. There has been a number of new developments both in the methodological tools employed by SLA researchers and also in the theories that have informed enquiry. Indeed, it is these new lines of enquiry that most clearly demonstrate the dynamic nature of SLA today.

Two methodological advances are the use of concordancing tools for examining the properties of learner language, and of neuroimaging techniques for investigating the parts of the brain involved in L2 processing and learning. Computer-based analyses of learner corpora have made possible what Granger (1998b) has called a new research paradigm—‘contrastive interlanguage analysis’. Researchers across the world have been busy collecting and analysing both written and oral corpora from L2 learners, deepening our understanding of the commonalities and differences evident across learners and across varieties of learner language. Neuroimaging, such as functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), has been made possible by the development of machines that reveal the blood flow to different parts of the brain as learners perform different tasks in the L2. It affords the intriguing possibility of testing some of the key claims in SLA, such as the existence of a critical period for language learning. These are exciting developments that have already impacted strongly on the field and will undoubtedly continue to do so in the years ahead.

Perhaps the major theoretical development in SLA since 1994 has been the emergence of ‘sociocultural SLA’. It is of course not entirely accurate to claim that sociocultural accounts of SLA were not available pre-1994 (see, for example, Frawley and Lantolf 1985), but, they were marginal and they did not figure at all in the first edition of this book. Sociocultural SLA draws on the work of the Russian psychologists Vygotsky and Leontiev. It proposes that L2 learning, like any other form of higher learning, occurs intermentally as well as intramentally, as new forms and functions appear first in production mediated by social interaction and subsequently become internalized. It emphasizes the social and cultural nature of learning while also recognizing that language is a mental phenomenon. Sociocultural SLA provides an entirely different theoretical perspective on how an L2 is acquired to that available from the standard ‘input-interaction-output model’ (Block 2003)—the model that informed the bulk of the research reported in the first edition.

The second major theoretical development did receive a brief mention in the first edition. Connectionist (and other emergentist) accounts of L2 acquisition, driven in particular by a series of publications by N. Ellis (see, for

example, N. Ellis 1996, 2002, 2006b), have now assumed central importance in SLA. Connectionist views about language learning exist in direct opposition to UG-based accounts. That is, they view language learning as like any other type of learning, drawing on a common set of neural mechanisms. Learning is viewed as largely implicit in nature, driven by exposure to sequences of language in the input and fine-tuned through feedback. Language is represented in the mind not as a set of abstract rules but rather as a complex network of weighted connections that are constantly adjusted over time in the light of experience. Learning is slow, gradual, and emergentist. Connectionism emphasizes the importance of formulaic chunks in the learning process. Connectionist modelling of language acquisition has taken the form of computer-based studies that make use of software designed to mirror the parallel-distributed processing that characterizes the operation of the human brain. Not surprisingly, connectionist accounts of language and language learning have aroused opposition from UG-based SLA theorists (for example, Gregg 2003).

Thus, in the fifteen years that have passed since the first edition of this book, there is evidence of both continuity with the earlier period of SLA and of new developments. The earlier period concluded (in 1993) with a special issue of *Applied Linguistics* that was given over to a metatheoretical discussion of SLA. Contributions from a variety of scholars evinced markedly different views about the state of the field and, in particular, what to do about the plethora of theories of L2 acquisition that were current at that time. The number of theories has not notably reduced since, despite the call for 'culling' by some of these scholars. Rather, the theoretical plenitude has continued and has even further expanded. Arguably, the boundaries of SLA are even more elastic than they were in 1993. Old theories have by and large continued to attract attention (albeit in modified form) while new theories have appeared. The field of SLA is characterized by marked controversy about both what the facts of L2 acquisition are and also how to explain the facts. As in 1993, there are those who wish to circumscribe the field of enquiry in an attempt to cope with what they see as unwanted tensions and fragmentation. Doughty and Long (2003), for example, concluded their *Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* with a call for a common focus by placing SLA firmly within the boundaries of cognitive science. To do so, however, is to ignore the work done by more socially oriented SLA researchers and by neuroscientists who seek to identify how the brain itself handles an L2. L2 acquisition is an enormously complex phenomenon and will benefit from a multiplicity of perspectives, theories, and research methodologies. Like other areas of the social sciences, it should and undoubtedly will remain open to a multiplicity of lines of enquiry and, as a result, will continue to be characterized by controversy and debate. Thus, whereas in the 1994 edition I expressed concern over whether SLA would survive as a coherent field of study, today I am more prepared to acknowledge that this may not be important and that diversity of approach

and controversy constitute signs of the field's vigour and an inevitable consequence of the attempt to understand a complex phenomenon.

The aims of the book

As with the first edition, the main aim of this book is to develop a framework for describing the field as it currently exists and to use this framework to provide an extensive account of what is currently known about L2 acquisition and L2 learners. I will attempt both to summarize the main findings of SLA research and to account for the main theories that have been advanced to explain these findings. I will also seek to evaluate the research to date by pointing out both the strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches. My goal is to be as encyclopaedic as possible so that the book can serve as a source of reference for both those beginning the study of SLA and those already members of the SLA community of scholars. As previously, I will endeavour to avoid taking up any particular position regarding what constitutes the most legitimate approach to SLA research. Instead, I shall aim to provide a balanced and objective account, while recognizing that my personal views will inevitably colour the picture I provide. I will admit, for example, a personal dissatisfaction with purely generative accounts of L2 acquisition.

I found the task of surveying SLA in 1993 a challenging one. I have found the same task for this edition of the book almost overwhelming. The sheer breadth and weight of the research is quite frightening and, arguably, it is beyond the ability of a single scholar to do justice to all of it. Thus, I have sympathy with other scholars who have opted for a 'handbook' approach to surveying the field, editing chapters written by specialists in each area of enquiry. The advantage of such an approach is a rich and informed account of each area. The danger, however, is a lack of coherence—a failure to make the necessary connections between the different areas—and also the absence of a unifying style. Thus, the justification for my second (and undoubtedly last) attempt to survey SLA is that I can show the whole picture and how the parts that compose it fit together, and I can do so with a single voice. The extent to which I am able to achieve this will hopefully compensate for the gaps and inaccuracies that will undoubtedly accompany my account of specific areas, especially those that lie at the margins of my own areas of expertise.

The book's readership

This edition has been written for two main kinds of reader. One is students of SLA research—those beginning their study of L2 acquisition and who wish to obtain an understanding of the principal issues that have been addressed, the methods used to research them, the main findings, and the theories that have been developed to explain them. It is hoped that the book will provide an accessible introduction to the field.

The second kind of reader is the SLA researcher who feels the need for a reference book that provides an overview of the main work accomplished in the different areas of SLA research. Such readers are likely to be experts in one or more areas of SLA research and, therefore, may have little need for the chapters that deal with their own areas of specialization, but may wish to benefit from a survey of the work undertaken in other areas with which they have less familiarity.

The first edition of the book was also aimed at a third kind of reader—second/foreign language teachers, many of whom may be completing a post-service programme of teacher education (for example, an MA in TESOL or Applied Linguistics) or engaging in doctoral research.² It is still my hope that the book will be of assistance to teachers and that it can be used as a textbook for an SLA course, perhaps alongside a shorter, simpler text such as my *Second Language Acquisition* (Ellis 1997a). This is how I have used the first edition of the book in my own teaching of SLA courses.

Second language acquisition research and language pedagogy

Whether or not the book is used as a course book, I have no doubt that it will be read by teachers in some capacity or another. It is pertinent, therefore, to consider why teachers should make the effort to read about L2 acquisition. The position I advanced in the earlier edition of this book seems equally tenable today. I argued that the study of SLA provides a body of knowledge that teachers can use to evaluate their own pedagogic practices. It affords a learning- and learner-centred view of language pedagogy, enabling teachers to examine critically the principles upon which the selection and organization of teaching have been based and also the methodological procedures they have chosen to employ. Every time teachers make a pedagogic decision about content or methodology, they are, in fact, making assumptions about how learners learn. The study of SLA may help teachers in two ways. First, it will enable them to make their assumptions about learning explicit, so that they can examine them critically. In this way, it will help them to develop their own explicit ideas of how the learners they are teaching acquire an L2. Second, it will provide them with information that they can use when they make future pedagogic decisions. Of course, SLA research is not the only source of information of relevance to language teachers.

SLA research, as we have seen, is, like language pedagogy itself, a hybrid discipline, drawing on a range of other disciplines. However, it would be a mistake to treat SLA research as a mediating discipline that takes concepts from other disciplines and moulds them into a form applicable to language pedagogy. SLA research has its own agenda and is best treated as another source discipline. The information provided by SLA research, then, needs to be 'applied' in the same way as that from other sources. SLA research is not capable of providing teachers with recipes for successful practice. It should be treated as providing teachers with 'insights' which they can use to build their

own explicit theory. It is on the basis of this theory—not on the basis of SLA research itself or any theory it has proposed—that teaching practice should proceed.

The structure and contents of the book

The contents of this book have been organized in accordance with a general conceptual framework that takes account of (1) a general distinction between the ‘description’ and ‘explanation’ of L2 acquisition, and (2) the various subfields that have developed over the years. The following are the main sections with a brief summary of their contents:

Part one: Background

This section contains one chapter that introduces some of the key issues in SLA and outlines the conceptual framework of the whole book.

Part two: The description of learner language

This section reports some of the main findings regarding the nature of learner language. It considers learner errors, developmental patterns, variability, and pragmatic features.

Part three: Explaining second language acquisition: external factors

This section begins the task of explaining L2 acquisition by considering external influences—the role of input/interaction and social factors.

Part four: Explaining second language acquisition: internal factors

This section continues the work of explaining L2 acquisition by examining various theories of the mental processing that learners engage in.

Four perspectives on these processes are offered—language transfer, cognitive accounts of L2 acquisition, cognitive accounts of L2 performance, and linguistic universals. In addition, this section includes a new chapter on sociocultural SLA.

Part five: Explaining individual differences in second language acquisition

In this section the focus of attention switches from ‘learning’ to ‘the learner’. Individual differences are considered from the point of view of general psychological factors (for example, motivation) and learner strategies. In the previous edition there were separate chapters on Individual Differences and Learning Strategies but in this edition I have included both areas of enquiry in the same chapter. This has meant somewhat less space devoted to learning strategies, which, to my mind, constitute a somewhat amorphous and messy area of study.

Part six: The brain and L2 acquisition

This constitutes an entirely new section for the second edition. It provides an account of the recent research that has investigated the neurological correlates of the mental mechanisms and processes involved in L2 acquisition.

Part seven: Classroom second language acquisition

This examines classroom-based and classroom-orientated research, from the point of view of both interaction and formal instruction.

Part eight: Conclusion

The book concludes with a critical look at a number of key epistemological issues in SLA—the nature of the data used to make claims about L2 acquisition, theory construction, and the applications of SLA (in particular to language pedagogy). This section affords a reflective, ‘state of the art’ account of what SLA has achieved and where it has reached.

There is no separate chapter on research methodology in SLA, mainly because the methods used vary considerably according to the particular aspect of SLA being studied. However, where appropriate, information about the methods used to investigate specific areas is provided in the individual chapters.

A note on terminology

The term ‘second language acquisition research’ (SLA research) is used to refer to the general field of enquiry. It labels the discipline that is the focus of this book. The term ‘L2 acquisition’ serves as an abbreviation for ‘the acquisition of a second language’. This is what learners try to do and is the object of study in SLA research. For reasons explained later, no distinction is made between ‘acquisition’ and ‘learning’, the two terms being used interchangeably.

Throughout the book, words explained in the Glossary are in SMALL CAPITALS.

Notes

- 1 Thomas (1988) pointed out that it is ahistorical to insist that SLA began in the 1960s as this ignores the substantial amount of work undertaken before this. This is correct. However, the 1960s did constitute a start of a kind as it was in this decade that the impact of the recent work on L1 acquisition was first felt in SLA with regard to both the methodologies used and the kinds of questions asked.
- 2 I am aware that some teacher educators will feel that *The Study of Second Language Acquisition* is too detailed and too long to be used as a course book of SLA for teachers. Ortega (2001), for example, declined to include it in her review of survey books of SLA for teachers on these grounds.

However, I know of many teacher educators who have elected to use the first edition as a course book and, naturally, hope that this will also be the case with this edition.

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