English Teacher Education Series

英语教师教育丛书

Second Language Acquisition: Theory and Practice

第二语言习得
——理论与实践

□ 林 立 主编

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丛 书 前 言

为了指导高等师范院校英语专业学生及具有一定基础的广大英语学习者有效地学习英语，为了向社会输送大批优秀的英语师资及英语人才，为了参与并鼓励全国更多的大中小学教师投身教师教育改革，提升自身专业素质及英语水平，首都师范大学外语学院英语教育系部分教师在多年教学科研的基础上编写了《教师教育系列丛书》。此套丛书的出版填补了高师院校学法教法类系列教材的空白，具有一定的理论意义和较强的实用价值。

此套丛书从内容到编排上有几个值得关注的特色。

1．贯穿大学四年，各有侧重

此套丛书由四本分册组成，每一分册针对某一年级学生特点，侧重一个主题。目前图书市场上这种一条龙式贯穿高校四年的学法教法教材并不多见。丛书各本侧重如下：

1) 一年级新生刚入学绝大多数学生对中学到大学的转变准备不足。为了帮助学生尽快顺利完成这一过渡，尽早步入高校自主学习、能力培养的学习轨道，我们为一年级学生撰写了《英语学习策略：成功之路》，从语音语调到听说读写，从篇章结构到考试技巧，从课堂笔记到记忆改善，以及如何使用图书馆资源等都提供了详尽的指导与范例。

2) 学生升入二年级后，面临着夯实专业基础、通过专业四级考试、拓宽视野、提高能力的一系列任务。经过一年的大学学习生活后，许多学生少了刚入学的兴奋与热情，多了一些冷静与思索。这一阶段学生的心理及情绪会因种种压力波动起伏，也有的学生会因处理不当退步落后。因此，我们有所侧重地向二年级学生推出《英语学习心理：实用教程》，从心理学起源、理论基础知识、学生学习心态实例分析及解决问题的建议和途径等各个层面折射大学生的心理特点，提供如何调控心理的策略及指导。

3) 大三意味着学生四年本科学习高级阶段的开始。教学主要应从语言技能教学转向内容教学。除专业必修课外，学生应根据自己的兴趣及能力加大专业选修课的学习力度，并在专业上向纵深发展，学习相关的理论知识，加强专业素养。针对这一阶段的学生，我们编写了《第二语言习得：理论与实践》，主要内容是第二语言习得研究的基本介绍，包括语言学习的外部因素、内部因素、学习者因素等等，并结合中国学生语言学习的实际举出实例。本册主要是从学的角度帮助学生认识语言学习规律，全面认识语言教学。

4）四年级的学生要经过教育实习、论文撰写及毕业分配等几个主要关口，其中教育实习对其他几个环节起着至关重要的作用。许多学生对教育实习这个从学到教的转变没有底，无所适从。为了帮助学生为教育实习及今后的工作提前做好理论、技能、心理等各项准备，我们推出系列丛书之四《英语教学法：课堂教学技能与技巧》，对听说读写及教案设计、课堂管理等诸项教学技能与技巧进行了深入浅出的阐述。本册主要从教的角度入手，其编写不仅渗透了先进的教学理念，而且提供了大量的范例供学生参考。学生通过本书的阅读及自身的思索实践不仅能学到教的技巧方法，而且能在了解运用这些技巧的同时大大提高自身听说读写及语言综合运用能力。

2．理论联系实际，针对性强

此套丛书的编写教师均为高校一线教师，在多年的教书育人及教学科研实践中与大学生朝夕相处，对不同年级学生的学习习惯、心理特点、年龄特征、情绪变化、专业弱项、问题症结等了解得比较透彻，因而编出的教材理论联系实际，符合大学生的年龄特点及接受能力，针对性强和指导性强，有助于学生在学习思考的基础上取得事半功倍的效果。

3．语言简明精练，通俗易懂

由于本套丛书的编写对象主要定位在师范大学英语专业本科生及具有相应能力和基础的广大读者，因此语言应该通俗易懂、简明精练。在编写中，尤其是涉及理论基础知识、专业术语的阐述时我们都力争做到深入浅出，多举实例、图文并茂、适于学生理解吸纳，并在实践中演练运用。

4．体例设计新颖，特色鲜明

作为贯穿高校四年的系列丛书，四册教材的体例设计既有共性又有个性。共性在于每一分册的体例都有共同的形式，比如每本的各个章节都会有综述或背景介绍，理解、思考或讨论等练习题以及本章总结等。个性体现在各册均有不同于其他的内容和特色，比如名句名言、重点词汇、自测列表、强化练习、提示建议、推荐书目等。

总之，此套丛书的出版是集体智慧的结晶，是教师们多年来理论研究及教学成果的总结与升华。但由于编写教师教学科研任务繁重，时间精力受到制约，加之理论水平、专业素质的提高永无止境，编写中难免有疏漏。不当之处恳请广大读者批评指正。

杨 阳

2007 年 1 月

Preface

Second language acquisition (SLA), a still young research field, has gone through its early days of growth, toward more maturity, harvested many fruitful research results: clear framework for a research agenda; plethora of theories, models, and discoveries, insights and understanding. Over the past 40 years or so of development, how a second language is acquired is much better understood.

To encapsulate fully this exciting and fast-developing field is not an easy job. Try to render it to the Chinese graduate and undergraduate students of linguistics and applied linguistics in a span of a semester is even more daunting. But as yet, there are many efforts have already been made to introduce the field, particularly in the form of introductory books, which serve as references for the present course book. The purpose of this text does not mean to duplicate in full many of similar works, nor does it try to be thorough in coverage. It is highly selective with the Chinese context and Chinese students in mind.

The language used in this text conforms to simple, clear, academic readings with questions after the major text, including *review questions, critical thinking questions*, and *discussion questions* for both classroom use and individual reflection. The text contains nine parts, each part two chapters.

Part I is an overview of second language acquisition as a whole. The field is defined and described, and the purpose and the structure of the field are presented.

Part II is an overview of second language learner language. Learner language is both data for SLA research itself and pedagogical concerns.

Part III is about the development of the concept of learner language becoming known as Interlanguage, a language system in its own right. Its features and its nature are shown.

Part IV concerns social aspects of interlanguage, showing when, where and why learner language varies.

Part V deals with psycholinguistic aspect of interlanguage. Two major approaches to the study of second language are discussed, namely, behaviorist and cognitive. In the latter approach, some unobservable facts are studied, such as strategies and processes.

Part VI discusses discourse aspects of language acquisition, the highest level of language component. This area of study focuses on the pragmatics of second language use and its effect on SLA. Input and output factors in SLA will be

presented.

Part VII is on learner differences in the learning of a second language. SLA studies commonalities of L2 learning processes, and yet it does not ignore the individual differences in the processes. The differences are obvious and the explanations are needed.

Part VIII introduces theories of SLA. The Monitor Model is introduced for its comprehensiveness and other theories are presented for their influence.

Part IX sums up the research methods use for investigating SLA. This part aims to convey how the findings of SLA are achieved in terms of their research methods, the way they approach the SLA questions and issues.

For an introductory course book, these topics seem to be quite comprehensive in treatment. For detailed information on these topics, one needs more careful reading of original texts. Therefore, references and easily available titles are suggested for further reading. Hopefully, this book is not the only book on SLA that our readers read, but a stepping-stone to other great research work in the field. The emphasis on learner language or Interlanguage is obvious throughout the text, because it is a window through which L2 learning process will be unfolded, and it is also an important approach to providing data for understanding SLA as well. Through teaching and reading in the field of SLA, the authors believe that this area of study will benefit the second language-teaching endeavor in China.

CONTENTS

Part I

An Overview of Second Language Learning

As we teach language, we can also educate learners to live more satisfying lives and to be responsible members of society.

Arnold, J. and Brown, H.D.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA, 第二语言习得), as a field of study, began to develop from the 1970's in Western countries. It aims at studying how a second language is learned and it has flourished in the recent years both in the West and in China. Yet, what has been found out about second language learning is still relatively new to many teachers and learners of English in China. This course, on the basis of what you already know about language teaching methodology, will introduce you to this new and exciting field of research.

SLA research serves to provide a new and systematic perspective to look at language teaching, from **a learning perspective** (学习视角). It is a study with focus on the learner and learning. It is therefore supplementary to your knowledge of language teaching methodology. SLA research also offers you a view of language learning that guides the language learning toward more informed, efficient and effective efforts.

Second language learning in China flourishes and at the same time poses many problems. So large a population learns a second language, yet so few achieve final success. People, from education authority to common people, are puzzled and disturbed by the fact that second language learning is so ineffective, and so inefficient. As a result, the purpose of second language learning itself blurs; whether it's for examination or for real use becomes a question. The instructional methods, and learning strategies suffer from lack of authentic aim. Understanding the nature of second language learning is crucial to second language policy making, to the choice of second language methodology and to the offering of high quality second language education.

How a second language is learned will be answered through presentation of SLA research findings and discussion in relation to individual cases. These will help you to understand the process of second language learning, aid teachers in making relevant teaching decisions and supply learners with effective learning strategies.

In the following pages, the field will be introduced briefly in two chapters to supply an overview of it before a detailed discussion of some of its subfields is presented. The structure of the book and suggestions for the use of the book will also be described.

1

Second Language Acquisition

> I would like to see the field of SLA anchored in education.
>
> **Van Lier**

Chapter Objectives

In this opening chapter, we are going to look at the field of Second Language Acquisition to understand what kind of research area it is and how it relates to other fields of study. First, we will see the definition of the field, and then discuss the nature and goal of the field. We will also see a framework of second language acquisition research proposed by some researchers. And finally, we will answer the question of why we need to learn about such a research field as Second Language Acquisition. The structure of the book and suggestions for the use of the book will also be offered.

(1.1) A DEFINITION OF SLA

Learning and using another language is a common activity. With the emergence of globalization and the Internet, the interpersonal exchange has expanded far beyond the local community and as never before a second language is becoming an indispensable tool for efficient, cross-cultural communication. The reason to learn a second language can be multifarious, either for obtaining and securing employment, or for pursuit of education, or just for pleasure. It can take place in a formal school setting or in naturalistic environment. Second language is learned in different places and in different ways.

1.1.1 The kind of questions SLA seeks to answer

Some learn to use a second language, some fail to learn to use one. Some learn efficiently, some not so well. Why are there such huge gaps between learners? What's the difference between L1 and L2 learning? What cognitive processes are used in second language learning? What kinds of strategies and styles do the learners use? What is the difference between child and adult second language learning? How is a second language learned in the classroom? And how exactly is a second language learned? People are interested in questions like these. To study these, a field of research (now commonly referred to as Second Language Acquisition) develops itself into an independent academic field of study.

SLA studies how a second language is learned and used. It is a scientific discipline that tries to describe how people learn and use another language. People learn another language in different places, i.e. in a naturalistic setting or in a classroom. In the former, a language is said to be ***acquired*** (习得); in the latter, ***learned*** (学得). People learn another language in a place where the target language is spoken, and in a place where the target language is not used in every day life. In the former case, it is referred to as ***a second language learning*** (第二语言学习); for the second case, ***a foreign language learning*** (外语学习). SLA is a cover term, which includes both second and foreign language learning, i.e. L2 learned in a naturalistic and a classroom setting.

1.1.2 A definition

Therefore, L2 acquisition, then, can be defined as the way in which

people learn a language other than their mother tongue, inside or outside of a classroom. Gass and Selinker (1994) describes SLA in a more specific way. "It is the study of how second languages are learned. It is the study of how learners create a new language system with only limited exposure to a second language. It is the study of what is learned of a second language and what is not learned; it is the study of why most second language learners do not achieve the same degree of proficiency in a second language as they do in their native language; it is also the study of why only some learners appear to achieve native-like proficiency in more than one language."

To recap, Second Language Acquisition is a study of second and foreign language learning, in naturalistic and classroom settings, with a focus on the underlying competence of second language knowledge through their performance that shows their knowledge of L2 rules. The major job of SLA is to *describe* and *explain* second language competence in **the second language learner language** （第二语言学习者语言）.

⟨1.2⟩ THE NATURE AND GOAL OF SLA

1.2.1 The nature of SLA

SLA is a **multidisciplinary field** (多学科领域) of study. Second language learning process is cognitive, social, psychological as well as linguistic. As Brown (1987: 1) put it, "Second language learning is not a set of easy steps that can be programmed in a quick do-it-yourself kit". The complexity of second language learning is partially due to the multidisciplinary nature of second language acquisition. It draws theories and ideas from related disciplines for its own construct, such as linguistics, psychology, sociology and even neurolinguistics. These multi-perspectives make SLA fascinating as well as extremely complicated. Second language learning, therefore, can be studied from linguistic, psychological, sociological, and educational perspectives.

1.2.2 The goals of SLA

Second Language Acquisition aims to *describe* and *explain* what happens

when someone learns and uses a second language. It constitutes the *how* and *why* about second language learning. The goal of SLA can be simply and clearly stated as the description and explanation of L2 learning. It describes what L2 learner language looks like. Also, it explains how the language development is brought about, and how the internal and external factors contribute to the mastery of a second language.

1.3 A FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF SLA

Several areas of SLA can be distinguished:

*1) learner language; that is, the features of language learner language in contrast with the target language; 2) **learner-external factors** (学习者外部因素) influence language learning; which include social context, language input learners receive, and interaction between speakers; 3) **learner-internal factors** (学习者内部因素), psychological factors, influence first language learning; 4) how the language learner factors; their age, aptitude, motivation, learning styles, influence second language learning. These can be shown with a table* (Ellis, 1994).

Table 1.1 A framework for studying second language acquisition

LEARNING			LEARNER
DESCRIPTION	EXPLANATION		
Area 1	*Area 2*	*Area 3*	*Area 4*
Characteristics of learner language	Learner-external factors	Learner-internal mechanisms	The language learner
Errors Orders Stages Variability Language use	Social context Input Interaction	Role of L1 Processes Strategies Language universals	General factors Learner strategies

(Based on Ellis, 1994)

Based on the above table, we can deduce some general questions about second language learning. For Areas 1, 2 and 3 we want to describe and explain second language learner language; what second language learner language looks like and why. Initially their language is not quite correct. What role do some external factors play in second language acquisition? What are the processes in which learners acquire a second language? That is, what are the roles of internal factors in second language learning? What effects does instruction have on second language acquisition? For Area 4, we want to know what differences there are in the way in which individual learners acquire a second language. How do individual factors contribute to second language learning?

Task 1

Learning and a second language learning
Learning can be broken down into pieces for research and inquiry:

1. Learning is acquisition or "getting."
2. Learning is retention of information or skill.
3. Retention implies storage systems, memory, and cognitive organization.
4. Learning involves active, conscious focus on and acting upon events outside or inside the organism.
5. Learning is relatively permanent, but subject to forgetting.
6. Learning involves some form of practice, perhaps reinforced practice.
7. Learning is a change in behavior.

(Brown, 1987)

Consider a second language learning in all these variables and other variables involved.

(1.4) WHY THE STUDY OF SLA

In the past, large numbers of language teaching methods studies focus on the teaching of a second language. From *situational language teaching* to *the audiolingual method*, from *the communicative method* to *the total physical response*, just to name a few. Recently, the focus of attention has changed; people have attempted to find how to learn a second language instead of how to teach a second language, trying to explain the learners' active contribution to the learning process.

1.4.1 The teaching-learning match

SLA is a fascinating field. It helps us understand how we learn second languages. SLA provides us with insight into how to teach second languages. It can be argued that before we teach second languages we should be equipped with knowledge of SLA. It would be illogical to decide how to teach second languages before we know how second languages are learned. It is like putting the cart before a horse; however, traditionally, teachers decide the content, structure and methodology of teaching. The success of their teaching can only be, and will remain to be, a matter of practical experience, of individual pedagogical talents or of pure luck, until we know more about the principles of SLA — of how learners go about language learning, what they do about available linguistic data, what strategies they use, and so on. In a word, this is to focus on the learning or to "look at the teaching process as the facilitation of learning."

Teachers traditionally decide what to teach and how to teach with the belief that the teaching must necessarily conform to the way of learners' learning. However, the methodological principles themselves do not necessarily match the ways learners learn. Therefore, to better understand how to teach we need to learn more about how a person learns a language. There are several ways that second language learning research can influence language teaching.

Ways SLA research can influence language teaching:

- Inform the students about SLA research so that they can use it in their learning

- Base language examinations and tests on SLA research
- Devise syllabuses and curriculums using SLA research
- Write course materials based on SLA research
- Inform the teachers

(Cook, 2001)

Learning will be greatly facilitated if textbook sequence matches learning sequence, methodology matches learning process, and a theory of second language learning matches learning and teaching.

The relationship between teaching and learning is interdependence. Teaching methods usually incorporate a view of L2 learning, whether implicitly or explicitly. All successful teaching depends upon learning; there is no point in providing entertaining, lively, well-constructed language lessons if students do not learn from them, according to Cook (2001). As a student of second language and second, language teaching, to know this new area of research benefits both second language learning and teaching.

1.4.2 A theory of language learning

In the 1960s and 1970s, L2 teaching drew largely on linguistics for information on what it is we teach and what is easy or difficult to teach. Since 1970s, linguistics, as a source discipline for L2 learning, has been replaced by SLA. The questions teachers think about also changed from "What is it we have to teach?" to "What are the conditions that facilitate and promote SLA in a classroom?" and "How can we bring about those conditions in our classrooms?".

It is true that all teachers have a theory of language teaching, explicit or implicit, which is based on either experience or intuition. The problem of such a theory, or rather ideas, about language teaching is how well they can match the process learners actually go through in language learning.

Millions of Chinese learn a second language; yet hundreds of thousands of them fail. What is the cause? The teacher? The textbook? Neither seems to be the cause. The method? Classroom research show that whatever methods a teacher uses, students learn, and they learn not necessarily what the teacher has taught in class. "... Ultimately, what is learned is controlled

by the learner and not the teacher, not the textbooks, not the syllabus" (Ellis, 1993), this revelation makes it more urgent to shift our attention from the teaching aspect to the learning aspect. SLA is such an endeavor — focus on learners and learning.

Task 2

Do you know ...

1 L1 learning is learnt so easily and effortlessly. Why not L2 learning?

2 L1 learning does not involve explicit teaching of grammar rules. Why L2 learning seems to have to do so?

3 As an adult learner, one learns L2 in a classroom environment. Why it takes such a long time to learn, from primary schools days to graduate years?

4 Why there are so many people who fail to successfully use L2, and so few who succeed?

5 Why L2 learners seem to go through similar routes in learning and their errors so similar?

6 Why some learners learn under the instruction of one instructor and do not learn under the instruction of another?

(1.5) BRIEF HISTORY OF SLA

The systematic study of second language acquisition is a phenomenon of the last three decades or so. Though no precise date can be agreed upon, it is generally agreed that SLA established itself as a discipline in its own right during the 1970s. However, the interest in it can be traced back a long time.

In the early 1950s, Weinreich (1953) discussed the relationship between mother tongue and second language in his book *Languages in Contact*. One important concept he proposed was "interference" which was defined as "those instances of deviation from the norms of either language, which occur