

应用语言学习丛书

The Social Turn in Second Language Acquisition

第二语言习得的社会学转向

David Block

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出版说明

对于中国这样一个英语教学大国，和语言教学相关的话题一直受到语言学界的关注。应用语言学作为一个涵盖范围十分广泛的研究领域，尤其受到我国学者及语言学方向师生的重视。本世纪初，外教社陆续引进出版了“牛津应用语言学丛书”、“剑桥应用语言学丛书”等国际优秀学术成果，因其内容权威、选择精当而受到外语界的好评。

近年来，应用语言学研究取得了很多新的进展，如何引导我国语言学方向的研究生快速便捷地了解这一领域的发展全貌和研究热点，成为我国语言学界老师面临的一个重要问题。有鉴于此，我们又从爱丁堡大学出版社、Multilingual Matters 等国际知名出版社精选了一批图书，组成“应用语言学研习丛书”，以更好地满足广大师生和相关学者的需求。

本丛书的各分册主题均为近年来应用语言学研究领域的热点话题，其中既有对所论述主题的理论回顾和梳理，也有对较新的发展和应用所做的阐释和分析，脉络清晰，语言简洁，共同反映了这一领域过去三四十年的成果和积淀。

相信本套丛书的出版将为国内应用语言学研究带来新的启示，进一步推动我国语言学研究的进展。

The Social Turn in Second Language Acquisition

David Block

For Vicky and Adrià

Preface

This book is about the prospect of a social turn in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) and in particular that part of SLA which is devoted to the Input-Interaction-Output model. The overall aim of the book is to examine critically some of the basic notions and assumptions that underpin this model and to suggest a more interdisciplinary and socially informed approach to SLA research.

In order to achieve this aim, I subject the elements making up the acronym SLA to close scrutiny, analysing what mainstream SLA researchers understand by 'second', 'language' and 'acquisition'. Drawing on recent work in sociolinguistics, as well as SLA research influenced by sociolinguistic and sociohistorical approaches to language and language learning, I argue that there is a need for a less partial view of what SLA is about and a broadening of horizons to take on board this work.

The book begins with an introductory chapter in which I argue that SLA should follow the lead of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, where in recent years researchers have begun to work in a more socially informed and interdisciplinary manner. This chapter is followed by a short history of SLA in which I make the case that SLA has come together as a field of academic endeavour over the past forty years and that the Input-Interaction-Output model is by far the most ambitious, well developed and productive area of research in SLA today. Then, in Chapters 3–5, I discuss in detail and analyse what is generally meant by the 'S', the 'I' and the 'O' in SLA, with a specific focus on the Input-Interaction-Output model. Along the way, I make suggestions for how these concepts might be examined in a more socially informed and interdisciplinary fashion. I end the book with some speculations about the future of SLA research.

Acknowledgements

This book is the product of a decade of reading and thinking about second language acquisition (SLA). During this time I have benefited from the different contacts I have had with fellow academics and MA and PhD students. Knowingly and unknowingly, they have helped me refine my ideas and thoughts about SLA. Space does not allow me to cite each and every person who falls into this category, but I would like to mention one person in particular, my friend and colleague Debbie Cameron. Debbie not only helped me to clarify and put some shape to my thoughts, but also gave me a crucial and well timed push to write the book I had had in mind for some time.

I have been fortunate over the past year and a half to find people willing to read and comment on draft chapters. I would like to thank (in alphabetical order) Rob Batstone, Martin Bygate, Debbie Cameron, Guy Cook, Jane Davies, Amos Paran, Ben Rampton, Merrill Swain and Cathie Wallace for their perceptive feedback.

My place of work, the Institute of Education, University of London, deserves both a mention and thanks. Apart from providing a stimulating environment, the Institute also granted me a study leave for the summer term of 2002. It was during this time that I put the finishing touches to the book.

I would like to thank the Edinburgh Textbooks in Applied Linguistics series editors, Alan Davies and Keith Mitchell, for their continued support. Thanks also go to Commissioning Editor Sarah Edwards and other members of the editorial team at Edinburgh University Press for their editorial assistance.

Last, but certainly not least, I thank Victòria Castillo Austrich, and Adrià Block Castillo, for leaving me alone when I was in book-writing mode and for providing me with more support than they realise during the entire process. This book is for them.

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Introduction

As the title suggests, this book is about the prospect of a social turn in the field of second language acquisition (hereafter SLA), in particular that part of SLA which is devoted to the Input-Interaction-Output (IIO) model, as elaborated by researchers such as Susan Gass (1997; Gass and Selinker 1994/2001) and Michael Long (1996). The overall aim of the book is to examine critically some of the basic notions and assumptions which underpin this model and to suggest a more interdisciplinary and socially informed approach to SLA research. In subsequent chapters, I attempt to achieve this aim by first situating this model historically and then by unpacking what is meant by the 'S', the 'I' and the 'O' in SLA.

Before undertaking that ambitious task, I would like to use this introduction to provide some necessary background for this book. First, I attempt to situate discussions about basic ontological and epistemological issues in SLA in the more general context of changes taking place in sociolinguistics and debates about the future of applied linguistics. I then go on to examine briefly some of the recent discussions about SLA, in particular how some authors have challenged the more orthodox psycholinguistic bias of the field, suggesting that a more socially informed approach would be preferable. The final section of the introduction provides the reader with a brief overview of the content of Chapters 2–6, before ending with some caveats which I think are in order.

1.1 THE SOCIAL TURN IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS: FOLLOWING THE LEAD OF SOCIOLINGUISTICS

As I stated above, the chief aim of this book is to explore the extent to which SLA researchers, in particular those working according to the Input-Interaction-Output (IIO) model, might adopt a more interdisciplinary and socially informed approach to their research. Such a shift in approach would require SLA researchers to take a cue from recent debate about the present and future of applied linguistics (hereafter AL). This debate has focused on whether or not a more socially informed framework is needed by researchers exploring language-related puzzles in the real world and whether or not a more interdisciplinary AL is feasible. Perhaps the best example of such debate in recent years is the special issue of the *International Journal of Applied*

Linguistics (IJAL) published in 1997. The issue begins with a programmatic article by Ben Rampton (1997a), where he makes the point that AL is not just about language teaching in general; rather, it is, as Chris Brumfit has argued, '[t]he theoretical and empirical investigation of real-world problems in which language is the central issue' (Brumfit 1991: 46).

Rampton provides a list of several active research areas that he would qualify as AL. These are: interactional sociolinguistics and the micro ethnography of institutional settings; ethnographic studies of socialisation, education and literacy; systemic linguistics and genre theory; critical discourse analysis; the social psychology of language and speech accommodation theory; and institutionally oriented conversation analysis. To this list, I would add, as Alan Davies (1999) suggests, foreign language teaching and SLA (likely subsumed under 'education and literacy' and 'the social psychology of language' respectively in Rampton's model), as well as translation (e.g. Campbell 1998) and language play (Crystal 1998; Cook 2000). Drawing on the work of Hymes (e.g. 1971, 1974) and Bernstein (e.g. 1975), Rampton (1997a) proposes what he calls a 'socially constituted' linguistics. Here the starting point is the study of culture and social organisation, and the view is that language plays an integral part in the enactment of social action and communication. In this case, linguistics, and any study associated with language, serves social analysis.

What Rampton proposes is a change in AL similar to one that has occurred in sociolinguistics over the past twenty years. During this time an increasing number of sociolinguists have come to share an interest in relating social theory to the language and society puzzles that they set out to explore and understand. This is not to say that, as an academic field, sociolinguistics has abandoned its foundational and traditional links with linguistics and structuralist approaches to language in use (e.g. Labov 1972; Trudgill 1983), or that the act of borrowing constructs from other social science disciplines is necessarily a recent trend. Indeed, publications such as Labov (1994) and Eckert (2000) attest to the continued vitality of structuralist approaches to language use (although Eckert is more social-theoretical in her approach) and, as Nikolas Coupland (2001a) points out, sociolinguistics has always drawn on a variety of disciplines, from social psychology to anthropology, for ideas. However, what is new in recent years is a big increase in the amount of work that draws directly and explicitly on social theory. For example, recent collections edited by Justine Coupland (2000a), Sarangi and Coulthard (2000), Barron, Bruce and Nunan (2002) and, in particular, Nikolas Coupland, Sarangi and Candlin (2001) contain, for the most part, contributions based on the efforts of sociolinguists to relate social theory to traditional sociolinguistic interests. Meanwhile, the programme of the Sociolinguistics Symposium, held biannually since 1977, is dominated by contributions that either refer to or are driven by social theory.

Not surprisingly, Rampton's call for a more socially informed and interdisciplinary AL has not gone unchallenged. Henry Widdowson (1998a, 1998b) is not convinced by Rampton's arguments and he questions whether AL as an interdisciplinary academic endeavour can actually work. For Widdowson, an AL organised around a group of individuals trying to incorporate theoretical and

analytic frameworks from a variety of neighbouring disciplines would lack integrity. Quoting Yeats, he argues that '[t]hings fall apart ... [as] the centre cannot hold' (Widdowson 1998a: 151). This view is echoed by Davies and Brumfit, who fear that following Rampton's suggestions would mean that 'we have to give up on the coherence of applied linguistics' (Davies 1999: 141) and that AL would 'fragment into separate groupings' (Brumfit 1997: 91).

I do not believe that Rampton's proposals are so radical and would even maintain that his suggestions are becoming a reality. Examining applied linguistics publications over the past five years, we see greater interdisciplinarity in connections between critical theory and language teaching manifested above all in journals such as *TESOL Quarterly* and books such as Pennycook (1994, 1998) and Canagarajah (1999). In addition, as we observed above, recent publications, such as Coupland (2000a), Sarangi and Coulthard (2000), Coupland, Sarangi and Candlin (2001) and Barron, Bruce and Nunan (2002), are representative of a broad trend in sociolinguistics for researchers to base their work on social theory. But what about SLA, the part of AL which is the focus of this book? Is there any indication that, as a discipline, it too is moving in a more interdisciplinary and socially informed direction?

1.2 A SOCIAL TURN FOR SLA?

Until the mid-1990s, explicit calls for an interdisciplinary, socially informed SLA were notable by their absence. Early articles commenting on the state of SLA tended to focus on the relationship between SLA and language teaching (e.g. Hatch 1978; Lightbown 1985), normally commenting on the degree to which language teachers could or should take on board the findings of SLA researchers. More recent publications have continued to focus on the relationship between language teaching and SLA (e.g. Pica 1994, 1997; Lightbown 2000), but there has also been increasing discussion about the nature of what the field actually studies, an ontological issue, and how researchers might best go about studying it, an epistemological issue (e.g. Beretta 1991; Crookes 1992; the special issue of *Applied Linguistics* entitled 'Theory Construction in Language Acquisition' and published in 1993; van Lier 1994; Block 1996a; Lantolf 1996; Gregg et al. 1997; the special issue of *Modern Language Journal* devoted to a debate about making SLA more sociolinguistically informed, published in 1997; Gass 1998; Long 1998; Gregg 2000). In these different publications, a general division of opinion has arisen between those who see SLA primarily in psycholinguistic terms (e.g. Beretta, Gass, Gregg, Long) and those who see it as both psycholinguistic and social in nature (Block, Lantolf, van Lier). Unfortunately, discussions carried out at these extremes have, in general, been neither as productive nor as thought-provoking as those about AL. Indeed, when scholars have published critical programmatic articles in major journals – the cases of van Lier (1994), Block (1996a) and Lantolf (1996) – the responses have largely been dismissive (Beretta et al. 1994, responding to van Lier et al. 1997, responding to Block; Gregg 2000, responding to Lantolf).

An exception to the pattern of relatively unproductive debate about the nature of SLA is the special issue of *Modern Language Journal*, published in 1997. The issue opens with a thought-provoking article by Firth and Wagner (1997), in which the authors state that their overall aim is to 'examine ... critically the predominant view of discourse analysis and communication within second language acquisition (SLA) research'. They argue that 'this view is individualistic and mechanistic, and that it fails to account in a satisfactory way for interactional and sociolinguistic dimensions of language' (285). After this introduction, Firth and Wagner go on to make several important points. First, they denounce a strong tendency in SLA to conceptualise language as a cognitive phenomenon as opposed to a social one, and acquisition as an individual accomplishment as opposed to a social one. For Firth and Wagner, there has been 'the imposition of an orthodox social psychological hegemony in SLA' (285) which has led to: (1) the reduction of complex and nuanced social beings to the status of 'subjects'; (2) a priming of the transactional view of language over other possible views (e.g. interactional); (3) an interest in *etic* (relevant to the research community) constructions of events and phenomena as opposed to *emic* (relevant to the researched) constructions; (4) a search for the universal as opposed to the particular; and (5) a preference for inquiry which is quantitative, replicatory and experimental in nature as opposed to qualitative, exploratory and naturalistic. Ultimately, what Firth and Wagner propose is a rejection of a narrowly framed SLA whereby an overly technical model of interaction predominates (one with essentialised interlocutors, with essentialised identities, who speak essentialised language) in favour of a broader frame that integrates this narrow approach into a broader sociolinguistically driven model which can account for some of the less easily defined characteristics of communication.

Firth and Wagner's piece provoked three responses that were more or less sympathetic to their views (Hall 1997; Liddicoat 1997; Rampton 1997b) and three that, for the most part, were not (Kasper 1997; Long 1997; Poullisse 1997). In a later issue of the same journal, Gass (1998) was critical of Firth and Wagner's stance, and the authors replied to her (Firth and Wagner 1998). Further discussions by Long and Gass have appeared in other publications (Long 1998; Gass 2000). In this book I aim to expand on some of the ideas flowing from the debate inspired by Firth and Wagner. I make the case for a broader, socially informed and more sociolinguistically oriented SLA that does not exclude the more mainstream psycholinguistic one, but instead takes on board the complexity of context, the multi-layered nature of language and an expanded view of what acquisition entails.

1.3 THIS BOOK

In addition to this introduction, this book consists of five substantial chapters. In Chapter 2, I provide the reader with what I call the 'official history' of SLA. This official history covers the past forty years, during which time SLA has become a major field of research in applied linguistics. At the end of the chapter, I make clear to the reader that in my discussion and analysis of SLA, I focus primarily on work

done around the theoretical framework that sees input, interaction and output at the heart of SLA, a framework which I refer to as the IIO model. I have chosen to focus on this model and not others because I think that it is linked to the most ambitious, well developed and productive area of research in SLA.

What is actually meant by 'focus on' will become clear in Chapters 3–5 of the book where I elaborate detailed critiques of how 'second', 'language' and 'acquisition' are conceptualised in SLA in general and the IIO model in particular. In Chapter 3, I problematise two uses of 'second' in SLA. First, I examine the monolingual bias which dominates so much research, before going on to suggest that 'second' cannot adequately capture the experiences of multilinguals who have had contact with three or more languages in their lifetimes. This done, I make the point that while it is right to distinguish between classroom and naturalistic contexts, and foreign and second contexts, it should also be recognised that none of these contexts provides learning opportunities in a predictable manner. Thus, 'second' does not represent very well the language acquisition contexts and experiences of many individuals, and perhaps terms like 'other' or 'additional' would be more appropriate.

In Chapter 4, I focus on 'language' in SLA. During the period 1966–80, SLA researchers moved from viewing language as linguistic competence to viewing language as communicative competence, as suggested by Dell Hymes (1971, 1974). However, SLA researchers fell short of taking on Hymes's social view of language, the socially realistic study of language and a socially constituted applied linguistics. The result has been a relatively partial view of language, and this partial view has become foundational to the IIO model where two concepts, 'task' and 'negotiation for meaning', are fundamental. In the main body of this chapter, I critique these two concepts and propose a more socially sensitive view of language, one which can take on concepts such as negotiation of face and identity. In order to make this point, I analyse a recent IIO-based article (Mackey et al. 2000), with suggestions for how it might be made more socially sensitive.

In Chapter 5, I focus on 'acquisition' in SLA. I first examine how, after a period of hegemonic bliss in SLA in the 1970s, Stephen Krashen's dominant acquisition/learning dichotomy gave way to a conceptualisation of acquisition grounded in the information processing model of human cognition. This information processing-influenced conceptualisation of cognition has become dominant among researchers following different versions of the IIO model. However, within cognitive psychology not everyone accepts the information processing paradigm as the definitive model of cognition. Many researchers, such as Ulrich Neisser (1967, 1976, 1997), would like to see more socially sensitive (or 'ecological') models of cognition. The views expressed by these critics need at least to be acknowledged by SLA researchers. I then move on to Firth and Wagner's suggestion that SLA needs a more socially sensitive conceptual framework. This leads to a discussion of what, in recent years, has become the biggest rival to an information processing approach to acquisition in SLA, namely that which is embodied in various proposals revolving around Sociocultural Theory and Activity Theory. Proponents of such proposals believe that mental processes are as social as they are individual and as external as they are

internal, a view quite different from that traditionally envisaged by IIO researchers. After devoting considerable space to the many constructs associated with Socio-cultural/Activity Theory, I explore how one might integrate information processing and sociocultural approaches to mental processes to form a new model of acquisition in SLA.

Following the discussion of the 'second', 'language' and 'acquisition' of SLA in Chapters 3–5, Chapter 6 considers the future of the IIO and SLA. I begin by noting how most authors of SLA surveys have avoided making predictions and only a few have laid out detailed calls for research of a particular kind. An example of the latter is Michael Breen's (2001a) learner contributions to language learning framework, and Chapter 6 examines this framework, as well as Breen's call for greater attention to the role of culture and identity in language learning. I also examine two areas of SLA where researchers are doing work consistent with his suggestions, namely interlanguage pragmatics and narrative accounts of language learning experiences. A discussion of these two areas of SLA leads me to a detailed examination of two examples of research (Tarone and Liu 1995; Teutsch-Dwyer 2002), which I think have the virtue of socially situating learning while not losing sight of language as a formal system. The chapter (and the book) ends with some speculative comments about the future.

1.4 SOME CAVEATS

Before proceeding to these chapters, several caveats are necessary. First, this book is part of a series of 'advanced introductions' to applied linguistics. I have taken the term 'advanced' seriously in writing it, and I assume that readers have some background in SLA and have read at least one of the many general texts published over the past twenty years. The book is therefore for the informed student of SLA, from language education practitioners to applied linguists who focus specifically on SLA in their work. I have made this assumption because I did not want to write a text book (there are already plenty of good ones around) and because I knew that it would be impossible to introduce readers to SLA and still have enough space to set up and sustain the arguments I present here.

The second caveat has to do with the organisation of content. As I stated above, I began writing this book with the desire to discuss particular issues revolving around the general idea of making the IIO model more interdisciplinary and socially informed. I decided that the best way to organise my discussions was to use the acronym of SLA as a guide. I am aware that adopting the acronym as a guide has led me to a rather unconventional presentation of what constitutes 'second', 'language' and 'acquisition' in the IIO model. However, I hope that the flow of argument in each chapter will convince the reader of my decision to deal with particular concepts and issues in particular chapters. In any case, one of my aims in writing this book is to stretch the boundaries of SLA, persuading the reader to look beyond more traditional views of what is, and what is not, second, language and acquisition.

The third and final caveat concerns the nature of criticism and possible responses

to it. Throughout the book I am critical of much current work in SLA. However, my criticism is intended to be constructive, as opposed to destructive, and supportive rather than dismissive. I say this because, as we observed above, some authors have tended to take criticism about SLA far too personally, seeing it as 'attacks' and even arguing that SLA is 'under siege' (Long 1998). The two most common responses to criticisms have been, on the one hand, that critics should put up or shut up and, on the other hand, that they are talking about a different research paradigm. An example of the former type of response is provided by Long (1998):

Instead of dismissing all past work as 'narrow' and 'flawed', and simply asserting that SLA researchers should therefore change their data base and analyses to take new elements into account, [critics] should offer at least some evidence that, e.g., a richer understanding of alternate social identities of people currently treated as 'learners', or a broader view of social context, makes a difference, and a difference not just to the way this or that tiny stretch of discourse is interpretable, but to our understanding of acquisition.

(Long 1998: 92)

An example of the view that those who critique are talking about a different research paradigm is Gass's reference (2000) to the same piece by Firth and Wagner, in particular where these authors suggest that language learners have other identities besides 'learner' that might be significant in the SLA process:

in trying to capture the more complete picture of an individual's persona, they have failed to understand the nature of an empirical paradigm; they do not understand that these categories are not included because they are not deemed to be relevant to the question at hand, which is: How are second languages acquired and what is the nature of learner systems?

(Gass 2000: 61)

In this book I aim to follow Long's suggestion that critics of current mainstream SLA should provide some support for the claim that a more socially sensitive approach to research would enrich our understanding of the language learning process. In doing so, I aim to convince the reader that a more interdisciplinary and socially informed SLA is both possible and desirable.

I believe that challenges to established or self-proclaimed authorities/gatekeepers of SLA should not be dismissed as being outside the remit of SLA, and that they can be nothing but positive for SLA. This being the case, I aim to circumvent exclusionary stances, where the boundaries of SLA are clearly drawn both by and for scholars who are not easily impressed by attempts to broaden horizons (e.g. Gass 1998, 2000) and who seem, in Firth and Wagner's (1998) words, to be erecting a 'No Trespassing' sign. This book is about recognising no such boundaries.

A short history of second language acquisition

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The term 'second-language acquisition research' refers to studies which are designed to investigate questions about learners' use of their second language and the processes which underlie second-language acquisition and use.

(Lightbown 1985: 173)

[SLA] is concerned with what is acquired of a second language, what is not acquired of a second language, what the mechanisms are which bring that knowledge (or lack thereof) about and ultimately, an explanation of the process of acquisition in terms of both successes and failures.

(Gass 1993: 103)

SLA is thought of as a discipline devoted to discovering and characterizing how it is that a human being is able to learn a second language: what preknowledge does he or she bring to the task, what set of learning procedures does he or she use, what strategies are appropriate for certain phenomena and not others, etc.

(Schachter 1993: 173)

By SLA we mean the acquisition of a language after the native language has already become established in the individual.

(Ritchie and Bhatia 1996: 1)

These definitions of SLA have been taken somewhat randomly from four publications devoted to taking stock of the field. They have a dual purpose. First, they show a certain consensus about what the field of SLA is about: there seems to be agreement that the goals of SLA are to study, discover and characterise the what and how of any language acquired to any degree after the putative first language. More importantly, these quotes act as a way into this chapter, which aims to provide the reader with a brief history of SLA. Such an historical survey is necessary because it will allow me to show how over a period of some thirty years, a loose collection of researchers interested in language teaching developed into a considerably larger group of researchers interested in language learning, not only in formal contexts but in naturalistic contexts as well. In other words, it allows me to show how SLA