

The Cambridge Guide to
**Teaching English
to Speakers
of Other Languages**

Edited by
Ronald Carter
David Nunan

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2001
Fourth printing 2002

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Times 9/13 pt System 3b2 [CE]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 80127 3 hardback
ISBN 0 521 80516 3 paperback

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAVE	African American Vernacular English
CALL	computer-assisted language learning
CDA	critical discourse analysis
CLT	communicative language teaching
EAL	English as an additional language
EAP	English for academic purposes
EFL	English as a foreign language
ELT	English language teaching
EMT	English as a mother tongue
EOP	English for occupational purposes
ESL	English as a second language
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
ESP	English for specific purposes
EST	English for science and technology
EWL	English as a world language
IELTS	International English Language Testing Service
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
IRF	initiation, response, follow-up (see Glossary)
L1	first language
L2	second language
NES	native English speaker
SLA	second language acquisition
TBL	task-based learning
TEFL	Teaching of English as a foreign language
TESL	Teaching of English as a second language
TESOL	Teaching of English to speakers of other languages
TOEFL	Test of English as a foreign language

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank Mickey Bonin, our commissioning editor at CUP, and Martin Mellor, our copy-editor, for their seminal help, advice and expertise in the writing and editing of this book. Mickey has been a constant source of informed and insightful comment on all the chapters. His input has gone far beyond the realms of duty, exceeding publishing responsibilities and providing academic and professional guidance and advice, which we have always greatly appreciated and learned from. In Martin we have also been fortunate to have a colleague whose informed advice and sharp editorial eye have done much to improve both the editorial design and the academic organisation of the manuscript. We remain greatly indebted to them both. We also thank Sanny Kwok for her unfailing efficiency and continuing support from the very earliest stages of the book. Last but not least, we thank our contributors for demonstrating the very highest standards of professionalism from the earliest stages of gestation – as we worked out a format – to the final stages of refinement. They have all been willing to devote large amounts of time to the project in the midst of very busy professional lives. We thank them for their patience, generosity and cooperation throughout.

The editors also wish to place on record their sincerest thanks and appreciation to four anonymous readers who worked very hard, with great perception and with much critical understanding of the field to assist us in the shaping of the book. We thank all of them, in particular for their attention to detail. Needless to say, however, any errors remain our responsibility.

Ronald Carter and David Nunan

CONTRIBUTORS

- Kathleen M. Bailey**, Professor of Applied Linguistics, Graduate School of Languages and Educational Linguistics, Monterey Institute of International Studies, Monterey, California, USA
- Michael P. Breen**, Professor of Language Education, Centre for English Language Teaching, University of Stirling, UK
- Geoff Brindley**, Senior Lecturer in Linguistics, Department of Linguistics, and Research Coordinator, National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia
- Martin Bygate**, Senior Lecturer in TESOL, School of Education, University of Leeds, UK
- Ronald Carter**, Professor of Modern English Language, School of English Studies, University of Nottingham, UK
- Beverly Derewianka**, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, Australia
- Tony Dudley-Evans**, Reader in English for Specific Purposes, English for International Students Unit, University of Birmingham, UK
- Donald Freeman**, Professor of Second Language Education and Director of Center for Teacher Education, Training and Research, Department of Language Teacher Education, School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont, USA
- Fred Genesee**, Professor, Psychology Department, McGill University, Montreal, Canada
- Jennifer Hammond**, Senior lecturer, Faculty of Education, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia
- Liz Hamp-Lyons**, Chair Professor of English, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR, China
- Elizabeth Hanson-Smith**, Educational Computing Consultant, and Professor Emeritus, TESOL Program, California State University, Sacramento, California, USA
- Claire Kramsch**, Professor of German and Foreign Language Education, German Department, University of California at Berkeley, USA
- Agnes Lam**, Associate Professor, English Centre, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China
- Diane Larsen-Freeman**, Professor of Applied Linguistics, Department of Language Teacher Education, School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont, USA
- Alan Maley**, Dean, Institute for English Language Education, Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand
- Michael McCarthy**, Professor of Applied Linguistics, School of English Studies, University of Nottingham, UK
- David Nunan**, Professor of Applied Linguistics, English Centre, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China
- Rebecca Oxford**, Director of Second Language Education, University of Maryland, College Park, USA
- Joy Reid**, Professor of English, Department of English, University of Wyoming, USA
- Jack Richards**, Adjunct Professor, South East Asian Ministers of Education Organization, Regional Language Centre (RELC), Singapore
- Michael Rost**, University of California at Berkeley, USA
- Thomas Scovel**, Professor of Applied Linguistics, College of Humanities, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California, USA

Barbara Seidlhofer, Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics, Department of English, University of Vienna, Austria

Sandra Silberstein, Professor of English, Department of English, University of Washington, Seattle, USA

Brian Tomlinson, Reader in Language Learning and Teaching, Centre for Language Study, Leeds Metropolitan University, UK

Amy B.M. Tsui, Professor, Department of Curriculum Studies, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China

Leo van Lier, Professor of Educational Linguistics, Graduate School of Language and Educational Linguistics, Monterey Institute of International Studies, Monterey, California, USA

Catherine Wallace, Senior Lecturer in Education, Languages in Education, Institute of Education, University of London, UK

Mark Warschauer, Director of Educational Technology, Integral English Language Program/AMIDEAST, Cairo, Egypt

Ron White, former Director, Centre for Applied Language Studies, University of Reading, UK

Dave Willis, Senior Lecturer, Centre for English Language Studies, Birmingham University, UK

Jane Willis, Teaching Fellow, Language Studies Unit, Aston University, Birmingham, UK

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Introduction

The aim of this introductory chapter is to lay the ground for the book as a whole. It does this by looking at what we mean when we refer to the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (**TESOL**). In the course of the discussion, we offer definitions of terms and concepts that are subsumed within the concept of **TESOL**. The chapter includes a discussion of what we mean by the terms ‘applied linguistics’ as well as differences and distinctions between widely used acronyms in the field such as **ESOL**, **ELT**, **ESL**, **EFL**, **EAL**, **EWL**, **ESP**, **EAP** and **ESL** (for details of these terms, see below). As we provide definitions, we look at ways in which second language (L2) teaching is differentiated from foreign language teaching.

In addition to providing definition, description and exemplification of key terms, we look at the impact of economic and technological globalisation on English language teaching, as well as the standardisation of English in relation to different sociocultural contexts. In the final part of the chapter, we provide a rationale for the book and an outline of the organisation and sequencing of the chapters.

What is TESOL?

TESOL is an acronym which stands for **Teaching English to speakers of other languages** and is a ‘blanket’ term covering situations in which English is taught as an L2, as well as those in which it is taught as a foreign language. **ESOL (English for speakers of other languages)** is a term widely used throughout the world, especially in the United States. The field is also sometimes referred to as **English language teaching (ELT)**, although this wrongly suggests that only teachers of English as a second or foreign language and not teachers of **English as a mother tongue (EMT)** have an interest in developing the language of their students.

Some definitions

We begin this section with the term **applied linguistics**, because it is the most general of all the terms to be discussed here. Applied linguistics is a general term covering many aspects of language acquisition and use. It is an amorphous and heterogeneous field drawing on and interfacing with a range of other academic disciplines including linguistics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, cognitive science and information technology. Along with specialists from other disciplines, applied linguists generally aim to provide practical applications of theory and research to solving

problems in sub-disciplines. Applied linguists participate to a greater or lesser degree within the following sub-disciplines: second and foreign language learning, literacy, speech pathology, deafness education, interpreting and translating, communication practices, lexicography and first language (L1) acquisition. In this book, the focus is restricted to the teaching and learning of second and foreign languages.

In our introductory statement, we suggested a distinction between **ESL (English as a second language)** and **EFL (English as a foreign language)**. The term **ESL** is used to refer to situations in which English is being taught and learned in countries, contexts and cultures in which English is the predominant language of communication. The teaching of English to immigrants in countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States typifies ESL. In these countries, individuals from non-English-speaking backgrounds may speak their L1 at home, but will be required to use English for communicating at work, in school and in the community in general. The term is also current in countries where English is widely used as a lingua franca. These include the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong (where its usage reflects the Region's recent past as a colony of the United Kingdom), Singapore (a multilingual society with English as a lingua franca) and India (where the populations speak a range of other languages, and where English – as well as Hindi – enables communication between these diverse linguistic groups).

EFL is used in contexts where English is neither widely used for communication, nor used as the medium of instruction. Brazil, Japan, Korea, Thailand and Mexico are countries where English is taught as a foreign language, either as part of the elementary and high-school curriculum, or in private schools and other educational settings.

The ESL/EFL distinction has been an important one in language pedagogy for many years because, in each case, the context in which the teaching takes place is very different, requiring different materials, syllabuses and pedagogy. In most EFL settings there is limited exposure to the language outside of the classroom, and often limited opportunity to use it. The syllabus therefore needs to be carefully structured with extensive recycling of key target-language items. In addition, the burden for providing the cultural dimension to the curriculum very much rests with the teacher. Teaching is also complicated by the fact that teachers are usually non-native speakers of English who may lack opportunities to use the language, or lack confidence in using it. In such situations it is important for the materials to provide the sort of rich and diverse linguistic input that ESL learners encounter in the world beyond the classroom.

For many years, the ESL/EFL distinction has been widely used and generally accepted and, as we have indicated above, it has provided a useful conceptual framework. (Note, however, that in some contexts the term **English as an additional language** or **EAL** is preferred.) Nonetheless, we find the distinction increasingly problematic, for a number of reasons. In the first place, the contexts in which L2s are taught and used differ considerably. Teaching English in Japan, for instance, is a very different experience from teaching it in Brazil. Also impinging on the distinction is the growth of **English as a world language (EWL)**. In fact, with globalisation and the rapid expansion of information technologies, there has been an explosion in the demand for English worldwide. This has led to greater diversification in the contexts and situations in which it is learned and used, as well as in the nature of the language itself. English no longer belongs to the United Kingdom, nor to the United States. It is an increasingly diverse and diversified resource for global communication.

In the 1970s, with the development of **communicative language teaching (CLT)**, the focus in syllabus design shifted from a focus on English as a system to be studied to a focus on English as a tool for communication. Syllabus designers, materials writers and teachers began to select content not because it was 'there' in the linguistic systems of the language, but because it matched learners' communicative needs. This shift of focus led to needs-based syllabus design and to the emergence of differentiated courses to match the differentiated needs of learners. Courses in which the goals, objectives and content are matched to the communicative needs are known as **ESP (English for**

specific purposes) courses. These are further differentiated into courses in **EAP (English for academic purposes)**, **EST (English for science and technology)** and so on.

A global language or languages

The rapid expansion in the use of English has also led to the questioning of the distinction between English as a first language (L1) and as a second language (L2). In his opening plenary at the 1999 TESOL Convention in New York, David Crystal gave an illustration of the growing uncertainty surrounding the terms 'first language' and 'second language'. Imagine a couple who meet and marry in Singapore, the male from a German first-language background and the woman from a Malaysian first-language background. The couple subsequently move to France for employment purposes. They have children and raise them through the medium of English. In which contexts and for whom is English a first, a second or a foreign language? What or who is a native speaker, and whose English do they use?

This situation is neither fanciful nor unusual. In becoming the medium for global communication, English is beginning to detach itself from its historical roots. In the course of doing so, it is also becoming increasingly diversified to the point where it is possible to question the term 'English'. The term 'world Englishes' has been used for quite a few years now, and it is conceivable that the plural form 'Englishes' will soon replace the singular 'English'.

ENGLISHES AND STANDARDS

The above descriptions and definitions of key terms and situations suggests that the uses of English in different contexts and for different purposes are neutral. However, the reality of day-to-day teaching and learning of English brings with it a series of interrelated social and political questions.

As is the case with other ex-imperial languages, such as Spanish and Arabic, native speakers of English throughout the world acquire and develop regional varieties of the language. These varieties are not especially marked in the written language but are often marked in speech. Thus, just as there are native speaker varieties of Mexican Spanish or Egyptian Arabic, so we speak of Australian English, South African English and Canadian English. Speakers of such varieties identify with their language and normally have no need to learn other Englishes. For purposes of international communication through English, their spoken variety does not normally lead to significant difficulties, and international varieties of the written language manifest in any case only minimal variations.

Non-native speaker varieties of English have also developed around the world, particularly in former colonial territories. Such varieties normally exist along a continuum which includes *standard* versions of the language which are taught and learned in school and which are recognised internationally to be of economic and political significance. Individual learners are also conscious that their own social mobility and economic power can be enhanced by access to a standard international variety of English. However, some of these varieties of the language may be deliberately spoken in ways which are markedly different from the standard native speaker versions. Speakers using such varieties may do so in order to identify themselves with a variety of the language which is perceived as theirs and not the property of others.

It may seem too that definitions of the terms **native speaker variety** and **non-native speaker varieties** of a language are also neutral and unproblematic. In some countries – e.g. the Republic of Singapore, a former British colony – English plays a major role as an L2 for the majority of the population. A continuum of varieties exists for communication through English as a lingua franca and through standard versions of English for international communication. In Singapore, however, English has furthermore been selected by the government as a medium of instruction in schools. It may even be chosen by some families as a main language spoken at home, although the

mother tongue of these speakers may be a Malay or Tamil or Chinese language. The choices may reflect recognition of the socio-economic power of the language, but such contexts and practices also raise questions about the status of a native speaker of a language. Learners of English as a foreign language often need English as a tool of communication; however, in some ESL territories differences and distinctions between standard and non-standard varieties and native and non-native speakers of a language become blurred.

Issues of personal identity come to the fore too where, for economic reasons, learners need an international standard version of English but, for more personal and social reasons, they need a variety through which they are more able to find an expression of their own identity, or even their national identity. In contexts of teaching and learning, their needs may not be entirely met either by a particular national variety because different national varieties carry with them political and ideological baggage. Some countries may, therefore, elect to teach American English because a British English variety was the language of a coloniser. Other countries may elect to teach British or Australian English for reasons ranging from geographical proximity to ideological opposition to aspects of the foreign policies of the United States. And individuals may make other decisions for purely personal reasons. There are, thus, immovable issues of cultural politics in all parts of the world from which discussions of the teaching and learning of English cannot be easily uncoupled.

MODELS OF ENGLISH AND PEDAGOGY

The teaching of standard varieties of a language cannot be divorced either from the role of the teacher or from the relationship between the teacher and the learner in this process. For example, is the language best taught by native speakers of one of the standard national varieties? Is their knowledge of their native language superior to that of non-native speaker teachers? Will they also necessarily possess an insider's understanding of the culture of the target language which renders them superior to non-native speaker teachers in helping learners towards such understanding? Alternatively, is the non-native speaker better positioned because of his or her insider's knowledge of the language of the learners and because – given the monolingual background of many native speakers of English – they (the non-native speakers) have understood first-hand the processes involved in the acquisition and uses of English? Additionally, does the native speaker bring to the classroom cultural assumptions about pedagogy which do not fit locally and which the non-native teacher may again be better positioned to mediate? And, as far as language is concerned, is an authentic native speaker version of the language preferable to one which is less 'real' but judged pedagogically to be more in the interests of learners (many of whom are likely in any case only to interact with other non-native speakers).

Again, these issues are political and impinge culturally and socially on the teaching and learning process because a government may decide to employ native speaker teachers in preference to or alongside non-native speakers; or it may have a narrow definition of what a native speaker is. Such decisions can materially affect the position of the non-native speaker economically, culturally and in the eyes of their students. This analysis suggests that there is no such thing as a neutral description of the teaching and learning of Englishes in the world.

The rationale for and organisation of this book

When we planned this book, we wanted to provide an introduction to the field of foreign and L2 teaching and learning written by top scholars in the field. We wanted to provide more background to key topics than is typically contained in dictionaries and encyclopedias yet, at the same time, to keep entries shorter than the typical book chapter. Although we wanted entries to be accessible to the non-specialist, we also wanted the topics to be dealt with in some depth. At the end of each chapter, we wanted the reader to know the history and evolution of the topic discussed, be

familiar with key issues and questions, be conversant with the research that has been carried out, and have some idea of future trends and directions. We hope these objectives have been met in each case.

The book is aimed at teachers, teachers in preparation, and undergraduate and graduate students of language education and applied linguistics. It is intended to provide a general background as well as to provide pointers for those who want a more detailed knowledge of any of the topics introduced here. The latter is given in references to the literature throughout each chapter and also in the list of **key readings** at the end of each chapter. Each list of key readings provides abbreviated details, with full publication details in the list of **references** at the end of the book. We are conscious that some will feel that topics have been left out and, of course, omissions and absences can be identified in any book due, in part at least, to the predilections and preferences of the authors and editors. For example, we are conscious that chapters could have been provided in the rapidly developing areas of **pragmatics** and **corpus linguistics**. We could have provided a chapter on **communicative language teaching** as the most well established of methodologies of the late twentieth century. We hope that these and related topics are treated and developed in other chapters in the book and that the **index** provided will help readers to navigate topics and themes which are not necessarily signalled in individual chapter headings. We also provide a glossary at the end of the book; this is not a comprehensive **glossary** of the terms used in TESOL but refers to the terms most frequently used in the chapters in this book. Key terms in the text are highlighted in bold, and many of these appear in the glossary.

There is no immutable logic to the order in which the chapters in the book have been arranged. We have placed chapters concerned with language organisation and basic skills at the beginning since, in part at least, many of the other chapters derive progressively from this base. There is, however, no reason why the chapters cannot be read in a different sequence. Similarly, there is the following basic structure to each chapter: **introduction**, **background**, overview of **research**, consideration of the relevance to **classroom practice**, reflection on **current and future trends and directions** and a **conclusion**. Although the structure does not apply equally to all topics, authors of chapters have followed this framework as far as possible.

Conclusion

One of the debates currently taking place within the field concerns the question of whether language teaching constitutes a profession. One of the characteristics of professions such as medicine and law is that they have a body of knowledge upon which there is relative agreement, as well as agreed-upon principles of procedure for generating and applying knowledge (although, of course, such knowledge can be and is disputed within the profession). While language pedagogy is nowhere near developing an agreed-upon set of 'rules of the game', there is a rapidly growing knowledge base. What we have tried to do here is provide a snapshot of that knowledge base. We hope that, in some small way, the volume contributes towards a more developed sense of professionalism.

Key readings

There are no obvious follow-ups to the issues covered in this short introduction. However, the following titles, all published in the 1990s, discuss further points on applied linguistics, the place of English in the world, the position of the native speaker and the sociocultural nature of the teaching and learning process. Many of the same titles also provide further definitions of terms in use in the field.

Canagarajah (1999) *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*
Crystal (1997) *English as a Global Language*

- Holliday (1994) *Appropriate Methodology*
Kachru (1990) *The Alchemy of English*
Kramsch (1993) *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*
Medgyes (1994) *The Non-Native Teacher*
Pennycook (1994) *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*
Phillipson (1992) *Linguistic Imperialism*
Richards *et al.* (1992) *A Dictionary of Applied Linguistics*
Tollefson (1995) *Power and Inequality in Language Education*
Widdowson (1990) *Aspects of Language Teaching*

Ronald Carter, University of Nottingham
and David Nunan, University of Hong Kong
March 2000

CHAPTER 1

Listening

Michael Rost

Introduction

The term **listening** is used in language teaching to refer to a complex process that allows us to understand spoken language. Listening, the most widely used language skill, is often used in conjunction with the other skills of speaking, reading and writing. Listening is not only a skill area in language performance, but is also a critical means of acquiring a second language (L2). Listening is the channel in which we process language in real time – employing pacing, units of encoding and pausing that are unique to spoken language.

As a goal-oriented activity, listening involves ‘bottom-up’ processing (in which listeners attend to data in the incoming speech signals) and ‘top-down’ processing (in which listeners utilise prior knowledge and expectations to create meaning). Both bottom-up and top-down processing are assumed to take place at various levels of cognitive organisation: phonological, grammatical, lexical and propositional. This complex process is often described as a ‘parallel processing model’ of language understanding: representations at these various levels create activation at other levels. The entire network of interactions serves to produce a ‘best match’ that fits all of the levels (McClelland 1987; Cowan 1995).

Background

Listening in language teaching has undergone several important influences, as the result of developments in anthropology, education, linguistics, sociology, and even global politics. From the time foreign languages were formally taught until the late nineteenth century, language learning was presented primarily in a written mode, with the role of descriptive grammars, bilingual dictionaries and ‘problem sentences’ for correct translation occupying the central role. Listening began to assume an important role in language teaching during the late-nineteenth-century Reform Movement, when linguists sought to elaborate a psychological theory of child language acquisition and apply it to the teaching of foreign languages. Resulting from this movement, the spoken language became the definitive source for and means of foreign language learning. Accuracy of perception and clarity of auditory memory became focal language learning skills.

This focus on speech was given a boost in the 1930s and 1940s when anthropologists began to study and describe the world’s spoken languages. Influenced by this anthropological movement, Bloomfield declared that ‘one learns to understand and speak a language primarily by hearing and imitating native speakers’ (Bloomfield 1942). In the 1940s American applied linguists formalised this

'oral approach' into the audiolingual method with an emphasis on intensive oral–aural drills and extensive use of the language laboratory. The underlying assumption of the method was that learners could be 'trained' through intensive, structured and graded input to change their hearing 'habits'.

In contrast to this behaviourist approach, there was a growing interest in the United Kingdom in situational approaches. Firth and his contemporaries (see, e.g., Firth 1957; Chomsky 1957) believed that 'the context of situation' – rather than linguistic units themselves – determined the meaning of utterances. This implied that meaning is a function of the situational and cultural context in which it occurs, and that language understanding involved an integration of linguistic comprehension and non-linguistic interpretation.

Other key background influences are associated with the work of Chomsky and Hymes. A gradual acceptance of Chomsky's innatist views (see Chomsky 1965) led to the notion of the meaning-seeking mind and the concept of a 'natural approach' to language learning. In a natural approach, the learner works from an internal syllabus and requires input data (not necessarily in a graded order) to construct the target language system. In response to Chomsky's notion of language competence, Hymes (1971 [1972, 1979]) proposed the notion of 'communicative competence', stating that what is crucial is not so much a better understanding of how language is structured internally, but a better understanding of how language is used.

This sociological approach – eventually formalised as the discipline of 'conversation analysis' (CA) – had an eventual influence on language teaching syllabus design. The Council of Europe proposed defining a 'common core' of communicative language which all learners would be expected to acquire at the early stages of language learning (Council of Europe 1971). The communicative language teaching (CLT) movement, which had its roots in the 'threshold syllabus' of van Ek (1973), began to view listening as an integral part of communicative competence. Listening for meaning became the primary focus and finding relevant input for the learner assumed greater importance.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, applied linguists recognised that listening was the primary channel by which the learner gains access to L2 'data', and that it therefore serves as the trigger for acquisition. Subsequent work in applied linguistics (see especially Long 1985b; Chaudron 1988; Pica 1994) has helped to define the role of listening input and interaction in second language acquisition. Since 1980, listening has been viewed as a primary vehicle for language learning (Richards 1985; Richards and Rodgers 1986; Rost 1990).

Research

Four areas affecting how listening is integrated into L2 pedagogy are reviewed here; these are: listening in SLA, speech processing, listening in interactive settings and strategy use.

LISTENING IN SLA

In second language acquisition (SLA) research, it is the 'linguistic environment' that serves as the stage for SLA. This environment – the speakers of the target language and their speech to the L2 learners – provides linguistic input in the form of listening opportunities embedded in social and academic situations. In order to acquire the language, learners must come to understand the language in these situations. This accessibility is made possible in part through accommodations made by native speakers to make language comprehension possible and in part through strategies the learner enacts to make the speech comprehensible.

Building on the research that showed a relationship between input adjustments and message comprehension, Krashen (1982) claimed that 'comprehensible input' was a necessary condition for language learning. In his 'input hypothesis', Krashen says further development from the learner's current stage of language knowledge can only be achieved by the learner 'comprehending' language that contains linguistic items (lexis, syntax, morphology) at a level slightly above the