KEY TERMS

IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

BILL VanPATTEN AND ALESSANDRO G. BENATI

continuum

Key Terms in Second Language Acquisition

Bill VanPatten and Alessandro G. Benati

常州大学图书馆
藏书章

continuum

Continuum International Publishing Group

The Tower Building
11 York Road
London SE1 7NX

80 Maiden Lane
Suite 704
New York NY 10038

© Bill VanPatten and Alessandro G. Benati 2010

Bill VanPatten and Alessandro G. Benati have asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the Authors of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

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

ISBN: 978-0-8264-9914-1 (hardback)
978-0-8264-9915-8 (paperback)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by Newgen Imaging Systems Pvt Ltd, Chennai, India
Printed and bound in Great Britain by the MPG Books Group

To Janizona My Name Is Murphy, Too
—BVP

To Orazio Benati and Anna Maria Ferrari
—AB

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the many folks at Continuum for their help in the preparation of this book. Our special thanks go to Gurdeep Mattu, Colleen Coalter, and P. Muralidharan. In addition, we would like to thank our colleague, Wynne Wong, who read portions of the manuscript and offered feedback and suggestions. To be sure, we do not hold her or anyone else responsible for any omissions or errors contained in this book. Thanks are also due to Laura Bartlett, Kelly Campbell, Stephanie Eckroth, and Jake Ricafrente, who did some excellent proofing at a critical stage of the book's development. Finally, we would like to thank our families and friends who put up with our hectic work and writing schedules. In a world that doesn't always appreciate academic efforts, it is comforting to have those around us who understand why we academics do what we do.

此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.com

Contents

Introduction

What is second language acquisition?

Second language acquisition (SLA) is a research field that focuses on learners and learning rather than teachers and teaching. In their best-selling text, Gass and Selinker (2008, p. 1) define SLA as "the study of how learners create a new language system." As a research field, they add that SLA is the study of what is learned of a second language and what is not learned.

An examination of any other introductory or overview texts would reveal similar definitions and discussions of the scope of SLA research (e.g., Doughty & Long, 2003; Ellis, 1994; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; VanPatten, 2003; White, 2003). Moreover, such definitions would include a concern for both processes and products involved in how languages are learned, as the field is informed by a variety of disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, and education. These different influences are most easily seen in the edited volume by VanPatten and Williams (2007) on theories in SLA. The mainstream theories represented in that volume reflect the multifaceted nature of SLA as well as the various parent disciplines that have come to inform research on language learning.

Some make the distinction between *foreign* language learning and *second* language acquisition. The former is used to refer to language learning in contexts in which the language is not normally spoken outside the classroom, such as learning French in Newcastle, United Kingdom or Greek in Omaha, Nebraska in the United States. SLA is used by some to refer to those contexts in which the language is used outside the classroom, as in the case of learning English in the United States or learning Spanish in Spain. While such distinctions are useful from a sociological perspective, they have little linguistic or psychological validity. As has been argued repeatedly in the literature, people and the mechanisms they possess for language learning do not change from context to context. The mind/brain still has to do what it has to do

whether instruction in language is present or not, and whether there is presence or absence of opportunities to interact with speakers of the language. To be sure, context impacts rate and ultimate proficiency, but context does not impact the underlying processes involved in learning another language. Thus, it is common in SLA to place all contexts of learning under the umbrella term *second language acquisition*.

Looking at the various definitions of SLA what emerges is a concern about learners and learning. The field of SLA addresses the fundamental questions of how learners come to internalize the linguistic system of another language and how they make use of that linguistic system during comprehension and speech production. Although, we can draw some pedagogical implications from theories and research in SLA, the main objective of SLA research is learning and not teaching, although we will touch upon the relationship between SLA and language teaching later in this introduction.

A brief history of SLA

Contemporary research in SLA has its roots in two seminal publications. The first is S. Pit Corder's 1967 essay "The Significance of Learners' Errors." Concerned largely with teaching, Corder noted that advances in language instruction would not occur until we understood what language learners bring to the task of acquisition. Influenced by L1 research—which had repudiated any kind of strict behaviorist account of child language acquisition—Corder suggested that like children, perhaps L2 learners came equipped with something internal, something that guided and constrained their acquisition of the formal properties of language. He called this something "the internal syllabus" noting that it did not necessarily match the syllabus that instruction attempted to impose upon learners. Corder also made a distinction between **input** and **intake**, defining input as the language available from the environment, but intake as that language that actually makes its way into the learner's developing competence. This distinction is one still held today in the field.

A second seminal publication was the 1972 publication of Larry Selinker's "Interlanguage." In this article, Selinker argued that L2 learners possessed an internal linguistic system worthy of study in its own right, a language system that had to be taken on its own terms and not as some corrupted version of the L2. He called this system an "**interlanguage**" because the system was neither the L1 nor the L2, but something in-between that the learner was

building from environmental data. Selinker also posited a number of constructs still central today in L2 research, notably L1 **transfer** and **fossilization**—each of which is described elsewhere in this book.

Thus, these two critical thinkers laid the foundation upon which the next decades of work on SLA was forged.

The 1970s

The 1970s was marked largely by descriptive studies that sought to refute behaviorism and to apply the basic ideas of Corder and Selinker. During this time frame we saw the emergence of research on **acquisition orders** (the famous "**morpheme studies**") that replicated both the methodology and the findings of L1 acquisition research in the L2 context. We also saw the emergence of research on **transitional stages** of competence, which again replicated important findings from L1 research. The picture that began to take shape was that indeed L2 learners possessed built-in syllabi that directed their course of development just as Corder had previously suggested. This time period also gave birth to **error analysis**, the careful examination of learner output with particular attention to "errors" (deviations from L2 normative language). From error analysis scholars began to minimalize L1 influence on SLA; that is, researchers revealed that L1 transfer was not as widespread as once thought. To be sure, this period was heavily marked by research on English as a second language, especially by nonclassroom learners, leaving some professionals in other languages to dismiss the findings as inapplicable to classroom learners and to learners of other languages. However, research in the 1980s and 1990s would subsequently demonstrate that the general tenets of SLA were applicable to all languages in all contexts.

The 1980s

By the early 1980s, Krashen's ideas on acquisition (see **Monitor Theory** and **acquisition versus learning**, and **Input Hypothesis**, for example) were mainstream. He had posited that learners acquire language through interaction with language, most notably through comprehension of the input they are exposed to. While fundamentally true, Krashen's ideas left a good amount of acquisition unexplained and the 1980s overall is marked by a critical review of his ideas and the quest for more explanatory models about the specifics of acquisition. For example, if L1 influence is limited, why was it limited? If learners had a built-in syllabus, what was this built-in syllabus and where did

it come from? And if all learners needed was exposure to input, why were so many L2 learners non-native-like after so many years of interaction with the language?

It is in this time frame, then, that we see the application of theories from other domains. For example, Lydia White led the charge to use linguistic theory to describe learner competence and to speculate why that competence looked the way it did. Manfred Pienemann began to explore the use of Lexical Functional Grammar and speech processing models to explain the developmental nature of learner output. We also see the beginnings of the application of cognitive theory and other psychological approaches (e.g., connectionism) to SLA, applications that would not reach any real impact until the 1990s. The point here is that SLA researchers began looking seriously at the nature of theories and what theories needed to do in order to explain SLA.

The 1990s

The 1990s witnessed a bourgeoning of competing theoretical ideas and approaches regarding SLA, with an additional plethora of isolated hypotheses that took hold in the general literature (e.g., **noticing**, the **Output Hypothesis**, the **Interaction Hypothesis**—all of which had roots in the 1980s). Nonetheless, two major approaches dominated the field: the application of linguistic theory and the application of certain psychological approaches, namely, skill theory and the modern version of associationism (see **connectionism**). The linguistic theoretical approach continued to be concerned with an adequate description of interlanguage as well as its explanation. That is, scholars in this camp focused on the nature of the learner's internal mental representation and what constrained it. A central tenet of this approach is that language is special. By special these scholars meant that language is uniquely human, is encapsulated in its own module in the mind/brain, and comes equipped from birth with a set of language-specific constraints called **Universal Grammar**. Thus, acquisition was a particular kind of experience for humans that involved the interaction of Universal Grammar with data from the outside world.

Scholars in the psychological camp tended to eschew any linguistic description of an interlanguage and indeed some went so far as to say that there was no mental representation at all. Interested largely in behavior, this camp did not concern itself with underlying knowledge per se but more with

what learners did with language. Because they saw language as just another instance of human behavior, the belief was that theories of behavior should be sufficient to account for SLA and thus there was no need to posit unique faculties of the mind that dealt exclusively with language. As such, there was nothing special about language—and if indeed the learner had any mental representation that could be called language, it was an artefact of learning, a latent structure that emerged based on data the learner encountered in the environment. Language acquisition was the interaction of general human learning mechanisms with data from the outside world.

Again, other approaches emerged such as Processability Theory (see **processability**), **input processing**, and others, but in many ways these theories could be seen as compatible with either linguistic theory or cognitive theory, depending on the particulars of each theory. One theory that emerged in the 1990s largely due to concerns with educational practice was **Sociocultural Theory**. As an account of SLA, it dismissed both linguistic theory and cognitive theory as being too "mind/brain" oriented and instead situated the learner as an active agent in learning within particular social contexts.

The 2000s and beyond

It is fair to say that as of the writing of this book, SLA looks pretty much like it did in the second half of the 1990s in terms of foci. As a discipline, it is splintered, with certain camps not in dialogue with others. Both linguistic and cognitive approaches continue to dominate the field and we do not envision this changing in the near future, largely because of the sheer number of people working within these fields and also because of the healthy research agenda both camps enjoy outside the field of SLA; that is, linguistic theory is alive and well and is applied to a range of endeavors from child first language acquisition to natural language processing, and psychology as a discipline is very well situated within academia and has been for over a century. Thus, we see the field of SLA staying largely focused on the mind/brain. After all, that's where language resides, either as a special mental representation as the linguists would have it or as some manifestation of behavioral imprints as the psychologists would have it. In the end, even those who take a strong social context approach to acquisition would have to admit that language is a property of the mind and although learning may happen through interaction and through "dialogic discourse," language ends up in the mind/brain of the learner.

此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.com

Second language acquisition and second language teaching

Because the contemporary field of SLA research has its roots in concerns for language instruction, it is natural for many language teaching professionals to look to SLA research for insights into teaching. In the early days of SLA research, for example, people wondered how information on acquisition orders could be applied to language teaching. Should we teach language structures in the order in which they are acquired? Because these structural elements are acquired in a fixed order anyway, should we forget about teaching them altogether and just let them emerge on their own? These and similar questions have "stalked" the field since the mid-1970s and by the 1980s there seemed to be some pressure on SLA specialists to "produce applicable results" for language teachers. To this end, Patsy Lightbown published a widely cited piece titled "Great Expectations: Second Language Acquisition Research and Classroom Teaching" in 1985. In that paper she described the tension between teacher expectations about research and what researchers were interested in and what they researched. It was clear from her discussion that there was a gap, and that SLA had emerged as a vibrant field of research that may or may not have immediate implications for instruction.

Nonetheless, a subfield within SLA research emerged to address the role of formal instruction on second language development: instructed SLA. Unlike general SLA research, which focuses on the learner and the development of language over time, instructed SLA focuses on the degree to which external manipulation (e.g., instruction, learner self-directed learning, input manipulation) can affect development in some way. Since the mid-1980s, a good deal has been learned about the effects of formal instruction, some of which are described elsewhere in this book. The point here is that the picture that now exists is the following: any focus on instruction must consider what we already know about SLA more generally. That is, both instruction and instructed SLA cannot ignore the findings of SLA research and must be informed by it. Here is one example: if we know that particular linguistic structures are acquired in a particular order over time, what is the purpose of instruction on those same structures? If an instructor believes he or she can get learners to learn something early that is normally acquired later in acquisition, is that instructor making the best use of his or her time? When researchers in instructed SLA choose to examine the effects of formal instruction, how do they select

the linguistic features and why do they select the ones they do? These are important questions and it is SLA research that can help to inform instructors and researchers about the choices they make.

Our perspective, then, is that even though a significant gap exists between research on SLA and teacher expectations, there is enough of SLA research in existence that is useful for general teacher edification. The more one understands the nature of the object of one's profession, the better one is situated to make choices, answer questions, and to best utilize one's time and efforts. Unfortunately, from our perspective, language teachers are often woefully undereducated in the general findings of SLA. While a general course on SLA often forms the background of those prepared at the graduate level in TESOL, this is not the case for those who teach other languages and is certainly not the case for those who enter the language teaching profession with a baccalaureate degree or equivalent. Even though the present book is not about instructed SLA or language teaching, hopefully it will inspire language teachers to learn more about acquisition and to reflect on language teaching more generally.

About this book

Key Terms in Second Language Acquisition is divided into three major parts: Key Issues, Key Terms, and Key Readings. In Key Issues, we present nine of the major questions that confront SLA research today. Our presentations are necessarily brief as our goal is not to be exhaustive but rather to sketch the basics for the novice reader. Citations provided within this section will lead the reader to original and more thorough treatments. In Key Terms, we provide encyclopedia-like descriptions of a good number of terms used in the SLA literature. To be sure, this list is not exhaustive and we apologize in advance for any terms we may have left out. In preparing a book like this, one has to make the cut somewhere in order not to have a multitome collection of all terms used in SLA research.

Finally, in Key Readings, we provide information not only on the references cited elsewhere in this book, but also additional references that may be of use to the novice reader. Again, we apologize if we are not all inclusive. Our hope is, though, that we have provided enough for the beginning person to bootstrap him- or herself into a complicated field of inquiry.

The reader will note that throughout the book, certain words and phrases appear in bold as in the following one taken from an earlier paragraph in this introduction:

> "The 1990s witnessed a bourgeoning of competing theoretical ideas and approaches regarding SLA, with an additional plethora of isolated hypotheses that took hold in the general literature (e.g., **noticing**, the **Output Hypothesis**, the **Interaction Hypothesis**—all of which had roots in the 1980s)."

The boldface signals a key term that can be found in this book. Thus, when reading the above, the reader can turn to the Key Terms section and find descriptions of noticing, the Output Hypothesis, and the Interaction Hypothesis. At other times, the reader may see a key issue referenced within the text as in the following example: "How far learners get in terms of acquisition is open to debate (see **Can L2 learners become native-like?**)" Again, in such cases the reader can turn to the Key Issues section and find the relevant information.

Key Issues in Second Language Acquisition

Like any field of inquiry, SLA research is driven by a number of major issues or questions. These include the following:

1. What is the initial state? That is, what do learners bring to the task of acquisition in terms of underlying knowledge related to language?
2. Can L2 learners become native-like?
3. Is there a critical period?
4. What does development look like?
5. What are the roles of explicit and implicit learning in SLA?
6. What are the roles of input and output in SLA?
7. What are individual differences and how do they affect acquisition?
8. Does instruction make a difference?
9. What constraints are there on acquisition?

To be sure, there are other questions that scholars address, but many of these are related to the above questions. For example, some scholars are deeply interested in the role of interaction (e.g., conversation) in language acquisition. We see this topic related to the role of output more generally and will treat it in that section.

We would also like to state here that all of the questions listed above are themselves related to an overarching question that lurks in the background of SLA: To what extent are first and second language acquisition the same thing (i.e., involve the same learner-internal processing and acquisition mechanisms)? Everyone knows that first and second language acquisition must differ due to contextual differences: quality and quantity of input and interaction; topic and focus of interactions; exposure to formal rules; differences between children and adults; and so on. But ultimately, acquisition is something that happens in the brain/mind as it processes and stores language. Is SLA like first language acquisition in this regard, or is SLA guided by fundamentally different internal mechanisms? And if there are processes and

mechanisms common to L1 acquisition and SLA, then why do SLA learners vary so much in terms of outcome while L1 learners all seem to converge on the same linguistic system and same general abilities (metalinguistic and educational knowledge regarding language not withstanding)?

So, in a sense, all of the questions listed above (as well as related questions) are various manifestations of the issue of L1 versus L2 acquisition in one way or another. Because of their interrelatedness, the reader may see some overlap in discussion of each question and for sure will see the interconnectedness of the issues presented. We hope that this brief overview of key issues in SLA inspires the novice reader to pursue SLA research to a greater degree. There are some excellent overview texts as well as handbooks that provide much more detailed information and evaluative comments that we cannot provide here (e.g., Doughty & Long, 2003; Ellis, 1994; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Kroll & de Groot, 2005; VanPatten & Williams, 2007). The reader ought to consider our short descriptions here as "advanced organizers" for reading more detailed and sometimes more technical material on SLA.

Issue 1: What is the initial state?

The concept of initial state refers to the starting point for L2 learners; namely, what they bring to the task of acquiring another language. There are two basic positions on the initial state of SLA: (1) the learner transfers all properties of the first language at the outset (the L1 = initial state hypothesis); (2) the learner begins with "universals of language" and does not transfer L1 properties at the outset. All other positions are some variation of these two (e.g., there might be partial transfer). Under no scenario does any theory or framework believe that the learner comes to the task of acquisition as a "blank slate." Everyone believes something is there at the beginning of SLA; the question is what.

L1 = Initial state

A number of scholars believe that from the very beginning, all the properties of the L1 are transferred into SLA (e.g., Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996). Under this scenario, the learner assumes (unconsciously) that the L2 is just like the L1. This is commonly referred to as *full transfer*. The job of the learner subsequently is to replace L1 properties with appropriate L2 properties. Within one theory (**Universal Grammar**) this is often called "parameter resetting" (see, for example, White, 2003). We will illustrate with a simple example from English and Spanish.

Spanish is what linguists call a null subject language. Null subject languages allow free omission of subject pronouns in finite sentences or clauses (sentences that have tense). Thus, *Habla mucho* 'He talks a lot' is a perfectly fine sentence as is *Él habla mucho* (*él* = the overt subject pronoun 'he'). English is a non-null-subject language, and thus 'Talks a lot' is not normally permitted; the subject pronoun 'he' is required as in 'He talks a lot.' Compare (an asterisk indicates a sentence is not well formed):

SPANISH
María: ¿Conoces a Juan? 'Do you know John?'
Julieta: Sí. Habla mucho. 'Yes. He talks a lot.'

ENGLISH
Mary: Do you know John?
Juliet: Yes. *Talks a lot.

此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.com