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# Second Language Acquisition Theory and Pedagogy

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To the memory of  
Robert D. Eckman and John C. Eckman  
*Fred Eckman*

To John and Dan  
*Diane Highland*

To Karen and Ben,  
and to John Street, who let it all begin  
*Peter Lee*

To my parents and my children  
*Jean Mileham*

To Alice Rutkowski  
*Rita Rutkowski Weber*

# Acknowledgments

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—Fred R. Eckman  
—Diane Highland  
—Peter W. Lee  
—Jean Mileham  
—Rita Rutkowski Weber

# Preface

Fred R. Eckman

*University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee*

A volume such as this one on second language acquisition (SLA) theory and pedagogy is, at the same time, a mark of progress and a bit of an anomaly. The progress is shown by the fact that the two disciplines have established themselves as areas of study distinct not only from each other but also from linguistic theory. This was not always the case, at least not in the United States. The anomaly results from the fact that this book deals with the relationship between L2 theory and pedagogy, despite the conclusion that there is currently no widely accepted theory of SLA (Long, 1993).

A few decades ago, the distinctness of SLA theory, L2 pedagogy, and linguistics was not clearly recognized. In the 1940s and 1950s, the school of American Structural Linguistics subsumed linguistic theory, language acquisition (including SLA), and language pedagogy under the same set of principles. The goal of American structuralism was to devise a set of procedures, such as segmentation, comparison-contrast, and classification, that, when applied to a corpus of data, would yield a description of the patterns exhibited by those data (Gleason, 1955; Hockett, 1958). These procedures were also assumed to be the principles used by a child or adult learner in acquiring the grammar of a language. From this position, it was a small step to the *audio-lingual method* (ALM), which held that a language could best be taught by presenting the learner with corpora (i.e., dialogues) and sets of pattern-practice drills that would assist the learner in segmenting, comparing, and classifying the various elements contained in the corpus. This, it was claimed, is how the learner would acquire the target language.)

Although current research in SLA draws heavily on linguistics and uses many principles and concepts of linguistic theory to explain facts about SLA, the two disciplines are not considered to be one and the same. Constructs such as NL

interference, parameter resetting, and affective filter are postulated as part of L2 theory but not as part of linguistic theory. The type of data considered relevant also differs between the two disciplines: Whereas linguists construct their theories solely on the basis of data from primary languages, SLA theorists analyze data from secondary languages (interlanguages).

The rise of SLA theory as a discipline in its own right has contributed greatly to our understanding of the nature of L2 acquisition. Given the advances that have been made in the field over the last two decades, we may be able to answer questions that previously could not even be formulated. However, two caveats are in order. As with any young discipline, there are far more questions than answers; and, as with any volume of this nature, it is not possible to deal with all, or even most, of those questions. Thus the chapters assembled in this volume attempt to address some of the more recent issues and questions in L2 theory and pedagogy.

The chapters have been grouped into five parts. The first considers questions about L2 theory and pedagogy at the macrolevel, from the standpoint of the L2 setting. The next two parts deal with the topic of input. Part II considers input in terms of factors that are internal to the learner, and Part III takes up the question of external factors affecting the input including the issue of whether points of grammar can be explicitly taught. The last two parts discuss learner output and production. Part IV deals with questions of certain complex, linguistic behaviors and the various external and social variables that influence learners. Part V deals with issues surrounding the teaching of pronunciation.

Gass' chapter begins Part I with a consideration of whether L2 teacher-training programs should require prospective teachers to take a course in SLA theory, and, if so, what the content of such a course should be. Drawing on several examples from the recent literature, Gass argues that teacher-training programs should offer courses in SLA theory that will provide the necessary background for the teachers to understand and evaluate SLA research. In Gass' words, teachers need to know enough about SLA theory to be able to read recent SLA literature and to play the "doubting game."

The chapter by Schinke-Llano in Part I takes up the topic of student-teacher interactions. Using a number of terms and constructs developed in Vygotskian psycholinguistics, she argues that much of current classroom practice needs to change so that the major responsibility for learning is shifted from the teacher to the learner. Interestingly, Schinke-Llano points out that some classroom practices, such as those advocated in the work of Long (1980) and Krashen (1982), already are consistent with Vygotskian philosophy.

Hastings' contribution argues for configuring L2 intensive programs so that students are tested and assigned to sequenced modules designed to focus on one language macroskill at a time, beginning with listening comprehension, proceeding to reading, then to writing, and finally to speaking. The rationale for this model, which is based heavily on the theoretical work of Krashen, is that the

various skills are developmentally related and therefore constitute a natural sequence.

In the final chapter of Part I, Flynn and Martohardjono address what they see as the best way for SLA theory and L2 pedagogy to interact: Developments in each area should affect the other such that advances in SLA theory should have consequences for the L2 classroom, and the results of various pedagogical programs should impinge on the status of theoretical constructs and principles. The examples they use to illustrate their point are based on a Universal Grammar (UG) approach to SLA theory.

The chapters in the next two sections are concerned with the role of input. Those in Part II deal with “triggering” L2 learning through the manipulation of the input the learner receives. White and Bruhn-Garavito consider this question within the Principles and Parameters framework by testing the hypothesis that all of the structures related by a given parameter can be acquired through exposure to only one of those structures. The pedagogical consequences of this work are clear: The learner, *ex hypothesi*, should be able to acquire some structures without being directly exposed to them. Essentially the same topic is addressed by Hamilton and Croteau; they each test the ability of learners to generalize instruction in the acquisition of certain relative clause constructions. Both authors base their studies on the Accessibility Hierarchy (Keenan & Comrie, 1977). Croteau tested native speakers of English learning Italian; Hamilton used ESL learners but challenges the usual interpretation of the hierarchy. In Hamilton’s view, the Accessibility Hierarchy can be construed as a principle pertaining to constituency rather than to grammatical relations.

In Part III, Larsen-Freeman lists ten myths about the teaching and learning of grammar and then offers arguments to dispel them. She discusses not only the contribution that SLA theory has to make to L2 pedagogy but also ways second language teaching can benefit L2 theory. She argues that it may well be fallacious to assume that untutored acquisition provides an appropriate model for L2 pedagogy.

After Larsen-Freeman’s chapter, with its focus on the question of whether grammar should be taught, Bardovi-Harlig takes up the question of when structures should be taught. She asks whether parallels between the stages of acquisition in tutored and untutored learners are evidence for a natural acquisitional sequence. The results of her empirical study suggest that the effect of instruction is predictable on the basis of the stage of acquisition: Instruction will have no effect if the prerequisite stage has not been attained. Bardovi-Harlig also discusses the issue of whether formal accuracy improves as a result of instruction.

In the third chapter in Part III, VanPatten and Sanz take up the question of the type of grammar that should be taught and the type of learning processes the instruction should seek to affect. VanPatten and Sanz did an empirical study and found that “processing instruction,” which uses structured input, has a positive effect for instruction that holds across a wide assortment of assessment tasks.



The next chapter in Part III is by Krashen. It represents a change of pace from the three previous chapters on grammatical instruction, though his chapter also deals with the role of input. Krashen argues for the *Reading Hypothesis*, that free, voluntary reading is the major source of literacy development. He argues against two alternatives: the *Instruction Hypothesis*, that literacy can be taught directly, and the *Writing Hypothesis*, that literacy comes from writing. He suggests that reading also helps people to understand spoken language, and he makes some specific proposals about what kinds of reading help people understand what kinds of discourse.

The final paper in Part III is by Ciccone. He argues for the role of authentic video in the L2 classroom. Basing his arguments on Krashen's work on comprehensible input, Ciccone relates the use of video to the enhancement of both listening and reading skills.

The last two parts of the book deal with factors affecting the learner's output. In Part IV, Cohen discusses a number of variables that affect a learner's production, including strategies learners use and the explicit teaching of complex verbal behavior. Cohen points out that studies have shown large gaps in learners' proficiencies. He suggests that learners may have to be explicitly taught some linguistic behaviors, such as apologies, which may be too demanding and too cultural specific to be learned solely through natural input. He also raises the question of whether learners should be taught to use certain learning strategies and thus to be conscious of and responsible for their learning processes.

Parker, Heitzman, Fjerstad, Babbs, and Cohen consider the nature of learners' use patterns in Foreign Language Immersion Programs (FLIP). They conducted an empirical study using classroom observations, interviews, and verbal-report techniques to determine the extent of NL and TL usage and the circumstances under which the learners switched languages. They found that in FLIPs, the TL plays a somewhat limited role in communication, and that the NL and TL are generally used for complementary tasks.

Tarone's contribution concludes Part III. She argues for the variationist's perspective on SLA data. According to this school of thought (Ellis, 1985, 1990; Tarone, 1988, 1990), L2 theory must consider data on intraleaner variability as part of its theoretical domain. This view is counter to that of some other theorists, such as Gregg (1989, 1990), who have argued that SLA theory should abstract away from this type of variation. Tarone argues that it is necessary to consider data on variability in order to explain the mechanism by which second languages are learned. From a pedagogical standpoint, Tarone suggests that by isolating the external forces influencing intraleaner variations, teachers can use these forces to enable the learner to generalize structures to other interactional contexts.

Part V, the final one of the book, treats L2 pronunciation. Paolillo's chapter considers the production of English /r/-/l/ contrasts by speakers of several Asian languages, and postulates two patterns by which learners acquire this contrast.

Paolillo argues that these two patterns correspond to two types of markedness: *language-specific markedness*, which reflects functional load, and *crosslinguistic markedness*, which reflects inherent difficulty.

Hammond adduces empirical results and arguments from several studies supporting the position that L2 pronunciation can be taught. Contrary to what some might suppose, this is not an obvious point. As Hammond notes, most of the communication-based pedagogies do not explicitly deal with the teaching of pronunciation.


The last chapter of Part V and the book is an empirical study by Hansen on the affects of acculturation on L2 pronunciation. Using the tenets of Schumann's Acculturation Model and building on the work of Oyama (1976), Hansen's results partly confirm Oyama's findings but also suggest that certain factors of acculturation also correlate with degree of accent in L2 pronunciation.

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# FACTORS AFFECTING THE L2 SETTING



# Learning and Teaching: The Necessary Intersection

Susan M. Gass  
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## 1. THE ROLE OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION RESEARCH

In recent months there have been exchanges on SLART, the computer bulletin board devoted to issues related to second language acquisition (SLA).<sup>1</sup> The discussion started with what might seem like an innocent question concerning in part the value of an academic course in second language acquisition as part of an ESL teacher's graduate training. The mere fact that such a question was posed was, in my view, surprising, since it is difficult for me to imagine how the value of such a course could be questioned. Similar surprise was expressed by one of the respondents to the Second Language Acquisition Research and Teaching (SLART) discussion: "... the idea of an MATESOL degree without a course in second language acquisition is akin to a Medical degree without a course (or two) in anatomy!! Inconceivable" (April 28, 1993). Or another: "What a question to have to ask! I would like to think that every program does" (April 28, 1993). Or: "Would anyone seriously argue that knowledge of U.S. history is ancillary to American history teacher education?" (April 28, 1993).

This latter remark is of course akin to the comment about medical school and anatomy. In pondering these comments I began to think about other peda-

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<sup>1</sup>I use the term *second language acquisition* to refer to the general field of learning a non-primary language, including what is commonly referred to as both second language acquisition and foreign language learning.



gological issues, particularly those related to the teaching of other disciplines, such as science education or math education, both of which represent areas in which degrees are given. But what is the content of these degrees? Clearly, future teachers must know about science or math; a history teacher must know about history. However, this is not the correct analogy to the relationship between knowledge of acquisition and language teaching. For language teaching, the analogy is to a knowledge of the structure of the language being taught.

The relationship of the knowledge taught to the process of learning is, as I will argue, a crucial one, yet separate from the one that was being espoused on SLART. In this domain, the field of language pedagogy is far more sophisticated than in some of the other fields in which teaching degrees/certificates are awarded. In fact, in looking at books about math education, one finds that indeed information is imparted to prospective teachers about the phenomenon of learning. What is particularly striking is the fact that the theoretical foundation sounds very much like SLA in the 1970s. The following quote is from a 1987 anthology based on a conference that brought together cognitive scientists, math teachers, mathematicians, and math educators. The title of this particular article is “New Knowledge About Errors and New Views About Learners: What They Mean to Educators and More Educators Would Like to Know” (Maurer, 1987). It is reminiscent of Pit Corder’s 1967 article “The Significance of Learner Errors.” The article begins: “One of the insights of the cognitive science approach to learning theory is that many of the mathematics errors students make are systematic. These errors are bugs, like bugs in computer programs, not slips” (p. 165). And he goes on: “There is something new in today’s statement that students make systematic errors. . . . Researchers are now able to predict a large number of the arithmetic mistakes that individual students will make—before the students work the assigned problems!” (p. 165). And: “What is important is the general insight these studies give into how students learn. Indeed, ‘learn’ may not be the best word to describe what happens; ‘interpret’ may be better” (p. 165). “All told, the research brings Good News and Bad News. The Good News is that, basically, students are acting like creative young scientists, interpreting their lessons through their own generalizations. The Bad News is that their methods of generalizing are often faulty” (pp. 165–166).

So in less than a page there are elements of *error analysis* (this precise term is used in scare quotes later in the paper), there is Krashen’s *acquisition/learning distinction*, and there is *creative construction*. In the discussion that follows this article, arguments are presented that sound very much like arguments against pattern practice type drills. I won’t go on to talk about the role learning theory plays in other disciplines but will only point out that the need to understand the nature of learning is not unique to our own pedagogical concerns; it is now beginning to extend to other content disciplines.

Freeman (1989) suggests that there are four components to teaching: knowledge, skills, attitude, and awareness. The present discussion focuses on knowledge,