EXPERTISE IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

Edited by **Keith Johnson**

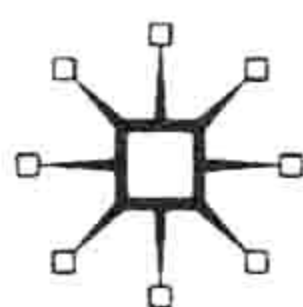# Expertise in Second Language Learning and Teaching

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To the memory of Bertie

Acknowledgements

Notes on Contributors

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Christine Goh teaches undergraduate and postgraduate courses on language acquisition, speaking and listening research, research methods and language teaching methodology at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Her reseach interests include oracy development in first and second language learning, the role of metacognition in listening and discourse intonation of L2 speakers.

Keith Johnson is Professor of Linguistics and Language Education in the Department of Linguistics and English Language, University of Lancaster. He has written a number of books on applied linguistic topics. He is currently interested in expertise studies, and runs a research group in Lancaster which focuses on Language Teaching Expertise (LATEX).

Steven McDonough was formerly Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at the University of Essex. He is now retired. He has published books on psychology, strategies, research methods (with Jo McDonough) and Applied Linguistics, and many articles, all in the area of second language learning and teaching.

Joan Rubin, Joan Rubin Associates (Wheaton, Maryland) has pioneered research on the Good Language Learner. Her research over the past thirty years has focused on learner strategies, metacognition, and intervention promoting more effective student management of their learning. Dr Rubin has given teacher training workshops and lectures

in many countries including Australia, Hong Kong, Italy, France, Spain, Sweden, Mexico and Egypt among others.

Virginia Samuda has been a language teacher, materials writer, teacher trainer and classroom reseacher in the UK, US, Latin America and SE Asia. She is currently researching task design at Lancaster University.

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Alan Waters is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and English Language, University of Lancaster. He has been involved in a number of English language teacher and trainer training projects around the world. His main research interests are in teacher learning and innovation in language education.

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Introduction

Keith Johnson

There is a sense in which almost any statement about language, language learning or language teaching may be said to hold implications for a view about language learning or teaching expertise. Thus an observation about the nature of language implies a view about what it is that an expert user of the language is able to do. Similarly, a statement about language learning is interpretable as an observation about the processes which an expert learner has successfully undertaken.

Since this is the case, it may be argued that studying expertise in these areas is no new endeavour, but has indeed been done since applied linguistics began. What justification then for a book on the topic early in the twenty-first century? Among the reasons is that in the latter half of the twentieth century, particular impetus was given to the study of expertise through attempts to create machines possessing artificial intelligence and able to undertake human skills. In order for these skills to be mastered by machines, it was necessary for them to be analysed and understood. As the impetus gained momentum over the decades, our understanding of the nature of expertise grew. So also did the armoury of research methods used for the study of expertise. One characteristic procedure involves collecting together subjects thought by whatever criteria to be 'experts' (the issue of what criteria may be used to identify experts is discussed more than once in this volume), and finding out what they share in common. Another related method involves collecting together two groups of subjects – so-called novices and experts, and ascertaining how they differ. A number of contributions to this volume discuss expertise studies which utilise such procedures.

By now, at the start of the twenty-first century, expertise studies have been undertaken in a large number of domains (and Table 1.1 of Chapter 1 lists a number of them). Applied linguistics is a relative newcomer to

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the list, and this is in itself a major reason why the time is ripe for a volume looking at what has been done in other domains, as well as what is emerging in the areas of second language learning and teaching. The preparedness to look at findings in non-linguistic domains and consider relating them to language learning and teaching is in fact a relatively new – and very welcome – phenomenon in recent applied linguistic history. This is because a paradigm which has long held sway regards language as a construct, and language learning as a process, separate (and largely incomparable with) other constructs and processes. The paradigm is associated with the notion that, as far as first language acquisition is concerned, language develops through mechanisms largely distinct from those which control cognitive growth. The effect of this set of views on second language learning and teaching has been to create a climate in which inspiration has come through seeking parallels with first language acquisition, rather than looking at the practices of (for example) the mathematics or the music teacher. But in recent decades this set of views has begun to be supplanted by ones which permit and indeed invite cross-domain comparisons. Language learning theories have been developed which utilise concepts springing from more general learning theories. Good examples, discussed in work described in Chapter 5 (and elsewhere), are the concepts of declarative and procedural knowledge and automisation, utilised by cognitive psychologists like Anderson (1982), who applies them to learning in domains such as geometry. Because of these developments, there is now a preparedness to consider work in other domains as being potentially relevant to the study of expertise in second language learning and teaching. Many of the papers in this volume reflect such preparedness.

Why is expertise in second language learning and teaching worth studying? Apart from the theoretical insights this may provide to applied linguistics, there is also the huge possible benefit to language learner and teacher training (issues considered particularly in Chapters 7 and 10). If we wish to create expert learners and teachers we require, one might imagine, information about the characteristics they need to develop. When we have that information, very many issues will doubtless arise about how we can best facilitate development of the identified characteristics. But an understanding of what constitutes expertise may be regarded as a necessary condition in that endeavour – as necessary to applied linguistics as it was earlier to the development of artificial intelligence.

In the first chapter of this volume, Keith Johnson provides a brief survey of expertise research covering a number of non-linguistic domains, and attempts to identify salient characteristics of expertise. His short his-

torical perspective begins with De Groot's work on chess expertise in the first half of the twentieth century; he then describes the computer-based AI work of the 1960s and moves to more recent times when the number of domains studied has grown considerably. During the course of his survey, various hypotheses come to light, including the claims that expertise is a matter of ability to think deeply, of superior memory power and of possessing a wide general knowledge. The research shows, he argues, that none of these is necessarily the case. In the second part of his chapter he considers some of the main research techniques used to study expertise. He pays particular attention to various forms of introspection, such as concurrent verbalisation and stimulated recall, both of which have been heavily used in expertise research.

Part II of the book (Chapters 2 to 7) focuses on the language learner and user. In Chapter 2, Joan Rubin describes and develops a comprehensive model of expertise, called LSM (for Learner Self-Management). The model is supported by a mass of research undertaken over the past few decades, and her chapter provides a valuable overview of this. Particularly interesting in the LSM model are the relationships holding between procedures, knowledge and beliefs. Having described the model, Rubin then considers the characteristics which good language learners (GLLs) possess. She provides a historical perspective of GLL studies, describing *inter alia* her own work which played such a major role in the growth of this field. She notes that early work in GLLs focuses attention on knowledge, then later on procedures. More recently there has been an emphasis on metacognitive strategies and the development of knowledge and beliefs. Her chapter also looks at strategies associated with different skills, and at individual differences. Though such differences undoubtedly exist, Rubin makes the point that there is more 'universality' in the use of metacognitive than cognitive strategies.

The following chapters look at the 'four skills' in turn. Christine Goh begins her consideration of listening by noting that one way for teachers to plan activities to develop listening competence 'is to consider the characteristics of second language (L2) listening expertise'. This points out a major justification for expertise studies, that they will provide valuable information on what should be taught in classrooms. Goh's analysis of listening shares characteristics with Rubin's analysis, and though their major analytical categories have different names, there are many features in common. In Goh these categories are *knowledge, heuristics/strategies* and *control*. She looks at these in turn, (like Rubin also) considering 'bad' as well as 'good' performers.

In Goh's discussion, the issue of how to train good performance is never far from the surface. In one section she looks at the issue of whether metacognitive strategies can be taught, and a later section is devoted to the question of developing expertise. Here she observes that there is an urgent need to investigate the usefulness of various types of training tasks.

Catherine Wallace's chapter on reading challenges some of the notions discussed elsewhere in this volume, as for example that automaticity is of central importance to expert performance. She argues that 'traditional' accounts of expertise do not do justice to the complexity and diversity of reading behaviour, and suggests that there are differences between reading and other language skills in terms of expertise. She questions the novice/expert distinction in relation to reading, because the behaviour is not describable in terms of incremental skills – expert reading involves the same principles at both early and advanced levels. At the centre of her argument is the notion that we need to regard reading as sociolinguistic behaviour, and her account also has a critical discourse perspective, giving particular importance to the Reader as Critic, a role which permits non-native readers to maximise what they bring to the reading task. In relation to this, she makes the useful point that the L2 reader may have advantages over the L1 reader, since the former brings the possibility of an outsider's eye, able to stand back from whatever stance a text takes. In terms of research methodology, her chapter provides a good example of thinking aloud – William's reading protocol shows clearly how what readers do is to 'interpret' rather than merely 'comprehend'.

In Chapter 5, Martin Bygate attempts to characterise an 'expertise approach' to L2 learning, drawing on work in other domains, and (like others in this volume) making particular use of Dreyfus and Dreyfus' (1986) framework. He notes the role of repertoires in a variety of skills and identifies those relevant to oral language production. His chapter is also concerned with the development of expertise, and here (as throughout the chapter) he shows himself willing to seek outside applied linguistics, in the general skills literature, for insights on this. Another important feature of Bygate's chapter is that his account 'provides guidelines for structuring a quite substantial programme of developing oral expertise in a second language'. This leads him into the realm of task-based teaching, and in this way he shows how an 'expertise approach' to language skill can have important implications for language teaching.

Sara Weigle's chapter deals with writing, and like Bygate, she makes liberal reference to non-linguistic expertise studies, particularly utilis-

ing Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1987) distinction between knowledge telling and transforming. Though she considers the different areas of knowledge a writer will possess, she shares with Wallace a realisation that social factors are as important as 'cognitive explanations'. At various points she mentions the contextual nature of expertise, and how expertise cannot easily be transferred from one domain to another. Her chapter deals at length with the pedagogic implications of writing expertise research, and includes discussion of strategy training (an issue taken up in detail in the following chapter). In this discussion she does not however lose sight of the importance of automising basic skills, acknowledging that learners need to have good vocabulary and syntax control as well as being able to operate purposefully and strategically. In the course of her consideration of training for expertise she looks at the interesting possibility of using reader protocols to develop a writer's awareness of audience.

Steven McDonough's chapter on *Training language learning expertise* concludes Part II. He identifies five questions to ask about learner training, and gives particular consideration to the 'chicken/egg issue'. The assumption in the early days of research in the area was that strategy use determined proficiency level; but it might (McDonough notes) be the other way round, and at the very least the relationship between the two may be non-linear, and more complex than early research suggested. His chapter contains a long section looking in some detail at the issue of how expertise may be evaluated, and how (in any field) there will be differing definitions of success which need to be questioned. His coverage of this and other issues indicate that though McDonough's chapter focuses principally on learner training, a number of the points he makes are relevant to the training of expertise in general, including in teaching, and in this sense his chapter provides a useful bridge to Part III which focuses on areas of teaching expertise.

Chapter 8, written by Amy Tsui, provides a valuable overview of expertise studies on teaching in all domains. She echoes Weigle's point about the 'contextual nature of expertise' arguing that teaching is a situated activity and in this respect is different from some other areas of expertise. She picks up various issues discussed earlier in the volume (particularly in Chapter 1). One of these is the question of what criteria can be used to identify the expert performer (the teacher in this case), and she provides a lengthy consideration of this important issue. Her conclusion expresses doubts that it will ever be possible to identify criteria which will hold across all

cultures. Tsui's chapter has big sections on studies of expertise as both state and process. In the course of her discussion she describes her own work in the development of expertise, and emphasises the expert's interactive process of 'theorising practical knowledge and practicalising theoretical knowledge'. One of the characteristics of the expert which she discusses is the tendency to 'problematising the unproblematic' (a topic which Samuda also touches on in Chapter 11). In this respect she utilises an expressive phrase of Ericsson (2002) who notes that the expert shows 'resistance to automaticity'. At both the beginning and end of her paper, Tsui draws attention to a specific motive for undertaking teacher expertise research – to show the world that teacher expertise is on a par with other areas of professional expertise (important because teachers are so often undervalued in contemporary societies).

In Chapter 9, Simon Borg focuses on an area much discussed in relation to teaching expertise – teacher cognition. While Tsui looks at teacher studies in general, Borg concentrates on language teaching, and his chapter provides a thorough survey of cognition as it relates to classroom practice. Like other contributors, he makes the point that teaching expertise is highly related to context, and in a subsection dealing with *Cognition and context*, he shows how aspects of social, psychological and environmental context shape teacher practices. His chapter also looks at decision-making, which he describes as 'the most researched aspect of language teacher cognition', and in a section entitled *Cognition and experience*, he reports on novice/expert studies which show, *inter alia*, that experienced teachers are more prepared to improvise than inexperienced ones. Echoing a research methodology point made in Chapter 1, Borg notes that longitudinal research on teacher development would provide a useful additional perspective to novice/expert studies.

In Chapter 10, Alan Waters points out that the field of teacher education is particularly lacking in expertise studies; in his words: 'there appears to be strikingly little empirical research concerning the expertise of the teacher educator'. He identifies the kinds of questions which expertise studies might pose and eventually answer. One is: 'how do skilled teacher educators set about framing and developing teacher learning opportunities?' He also makes the point (touching on one of the central rationales for this volume), that teacher education would benefit from looking at expertise studies in other domains. Like a number of other contributors, his chapter also makes use of the declarative/procedural knowledge distinction. Another welcome feature is

that Waters brings into the discussion another relevant area of study of increasing importance today – that of managing innovation.

Part III of the volume deals with expertise in language teaching but, as Waters' contribution suggests, the phrase 'language teaching' is intended in a broad sense to include teacher education. It also includes the area covered in the final chapter, Virginia Samuda's, which deals with expertise in task design. Samuda notes the considerable interest shown in tasks and task-based teaching in recent applied linguistics. Yet, she argues, most of the work in task design has been based on intuition rather than research. She describes the few research-based studies that have been undertaken, and concludes her chapter with a discussion on the applications of research to training issues – a central concern of this volume as a whole. Regarding research methodology, Samuda spends considerable time discussing what Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) call the 'constitutive problem', to find appropriate research tasks which will capture all the elements of the skill under consideration (what she calls the 'core set of domain problems'). This issue also made its appearance in Chapter 1 (in the section entitled *selecting a suitable task to capture expertise*).

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