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Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course
(4th ed.). Susan M. Gass, Jennifer Behney, and Luke Plonsky. Routledge, New York (2013). xxiv + 624 pp, ISBN: 978-0-415-89495-1 (pbk).

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Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course (4th edition) is an introduction to a variety of topics, theories, studies, and models in SLA. The book is meant to be useful for ELT students of different levels (BA, MA and PhD) as well as for teachers, and aims to help them understand the complex phenomenon of learning a second language by presenting a view of acquisition that is dynamic and interactive in nature. Old and new theories of SLA are discussed to help the reader understand the history of the field. The book offers multiple perspectives on SLA within a coherent framework to enable easy comprehension of the concepts. As such, it takes a multidisciplinary approach in presenting research with origins in other well-established disciplines.

The book consists of 16 chapters as well as a glossary and a list of references at the end. Chapter 1 introduces the history of SLA, and briefly characterizes some areas of language knowledge that a native speaker has of a language. The chapter also clarifies the nature of language by defining basic linguistic concepts such as sound system, syntax, etc., as some important issues second language learners need to learn. The chapter also discusses the link between SLA and other disciplines, as well as the relationship between nonnative speaker and native-speaker knowledge.

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of analyzing second language data. The advice on data analysis offered is to always ask the question: What else do we want to find out that is not shown by the data presented?, noting that the data presented represent only a fraction of what the field of SLA is about. In the chapter that follows, data types and learner corpora (longitudinal vs. cross-sectional) are introduced. In addition, different ways of data elicitation (such as using standardized language

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tests, questionnaires, and verbal reports) and data processing and analysis methodologies are illustrated.

Behaviorism, early works on L2 learning, linguistic and psychological backgrounds, Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), and error analysis together with their criticisms and shortcomings are the concepts introduced in Chapter 4. The role of NL in SLA, as discussed in Chapter 5, is approached by placing it in its historical context, showing the transition from behaviorist CA to a consideration of the actual speech of learners in error analysis, which marked the beginning of transition period. This chapter further covers the acquisition stages along with child second language acquisition and reports some studies on child and adult L2 morpheme order as well as the period of SLA history leading to Krashen's Monitor Model.

Revised perspectives to and modern alternative conceptualizations of the role of the NL and issues surrounding this construct are discussed in chapter 6. Three interacting factors are identified as the determinants of language transfer: 1) a learner's psycho-typology, that is, how a learner organizes his/her NL, 2) his/her perception of native language-target language (TL) distance, and 3) his/her actual knowledge of TL. How L1 influences L2 processing and the order of the acquisition of morphemes are also attended to in the chapter.

The relationship between SLA and linguistics is elaborated in chapter 7, with a focus on universal grammar and the acquisition of linguistic phenomena from a formal perspective. Additionally, the chapter deals with nativist approaches to SLA and transfer, discusses the generative/UG paradigm, access to UG Hypothesis, and the levels of representation, clustering, and learnability hypothesis, which, as noted by White (1992), make current views of the phenomenon of transfer truly different from earlier conceptualizations. The chapter ends by touching the acquisition of phonology, and the related Markedness Differential Hypothesis.

Chapter 8 is about the complexities and significance of the lexicon and lexical knowledge: what does it mean to know a word? Issues such as the influences on L2 vocabulary and development, and the role of L1 in acquiring L2 vocabulary are highlighted with a call for further research in this area. Chapter 9 deals with typological and functional models of language in connection with SLA. The authors conclude that universals (both typological and UG-based) clearly have an important impact on the formation of L2 grammar. They further suggest that what is in need of more examination is the extent to which universals operate alone and in consort with NL and TL facts, and the discovery of whether or not all universals equally affect L2 grammar.

Chapter 10 looks at the psycholinguistic approaches to the study of SLA, introducing issues such as Processability Theory and information processing, both of which focus on the ways in which L2 learners organize and use L2 knowledge, and on how subsequent learning affects the restructured organization of L2 knowledge. The discussion in this chapter is followed by explaining the cross-disciplinary nature of SLA in chapter 11, where SLA is linked to other disciplines, mainly linguistics, psychology, and sociolinguistics. The chapter further clarifies the nature of variations in IL as they relate to the NL, the interlocutor, task type, and conversational topic.

The nature and function of input, foreigner talk, comprehensibility, interaction, and the effectiveness and functions of output types are among the topics elaborated on in Chapter 12. In the next chapter, the reader's attention is focused on L2 learning in a classroom context and on numerous factors influencing language learning; it also presents the teachability/learnability hypothesis and focus on forms movement. The argument proposed is that even though instruction is clearly an aid to learning, it is essential to understand how L2(s) are acquired in general if we are to understand how they are acquired in a particular context.

Chapter 14 deals with research traditions (in linguistics, psychology, and psycholinguistics), methodological considerations, and age differences, as some of the influences on L2 learning that are non-linguistic and that have an impact on the formation, restructuring, and fossilization of L2 grammar. The role of aptitude, motivation, and affect are considered, as well. The chapter that follows is a discussion on different types of non-monolingual acquisition along with some research on SLA of sign language that is also referred to as second-modality acquisitions (M2A).

The last chapter, 16, attempts to bring together into one framework the various topics and aspects of acquisition discussed in greater detail in the preceding chapters. It presents a conceptualization of the ways in which the pieces of acquisition fit together to convert input to output: apperceived input, comprehended input, intake, integration, and output where apperception and output are both affected by individual differences, and where intake and integration are largely affected by language universals and knowledge of the L1 and L2.

On an evaluative level, the book is strongly recommended for those interested in SLA, mainly the beginners, since it is written in a simple, reader-friendly style. To add to this positive feature of the book, spelling out the abbreviations on their first occurrence can be an improvement in its later editions. At times, too much is said on previous studies, which makes the book a bit bulkier. Some very rare cases of punctuation problems and typos can also be sorted out by careful editing in a new edition.

Sometimes, there seems to be little coherence among the materials covered in a chapter, e.g., chapter 3 begins with the types of research (longitudinal and cross-sectional), and ends with a discussion of the acquisition of morphemes and backsliding, a progression which does not seem to develop smoothly. In other words, some of the chapters seem not to have topic specificity; multiple and perhaps unrelated subjects are covered in a single chapter. The 'Conclusion' sections are not balanced: some terms are fully reviewed but others are just named. Some new items which are expected to be in bold in order to appear in the glossary are ignored too. Furthermore, the first two editions of the book had an accompanying workbook (Leverett, 2001); the presence of a similar workbook with this new edition could have made the book of more practical use. The authors would improve future editions should they wish to take care of the previous reviewers' (of the 2nd and the current edition) comments (Leverett, 2001; Frost, 2013).

A very positive aspect of the book is its potential for suggesting some areas for further research. The great number of examples/sample studies presented helps with understanding of the concepts. New issues and concepts dealt with add to the worthiness of the job. The addition of new sections of 'Conclusion', 'Suggestions for additional reading', 'More to do and more to think about' to this

edition, and chapter summaries under the heading 'points to remember' is conducive, encouraging and thought provoking. Among other positive features of the book is that there is a companion website (www.routledge.com/cw/gass) that can be used for additional exercises.

References:

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