UC Riverside
Issues in Applied Linguistics

Title
Conversations with Vovo: A Case Study of Child Second Language Acquisition and Loss

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2ht0p681

Journal
Issues in Applied Linguistics, 6(2)

ISSN
1050-4273

Author
Coughlan, Peter J.

Publication Date
1995-12-31

DOI
10.5070/L462005220

Peer reviewed

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

Conversations with Vovó: A Case Study of Child Second Language Acquisition and Loss

Peter J. Coughlan
Nissan Design International

This paper examines a series of naturally-occurring phone calls between a young child and his grandmother in the child's second language. During these calls, the child's second language production first appears to increase in complexity, but is subsequently abandoned. It is argued that while the acquisition of the second language can be viewed as a product of expert-novice interaction, the subsequent abandonment of the second language can be understood only by examining its role in the larger socio-cultural activity in which the L2 is used.

INTRODUCTION

Larson-Freeman and Long (1991) distinguish among three major types of theories in second language acquisition research—so-called "nativist" theories, in which acquisition is attributed to "an innate biological endowment"; "environmentalist" theories, which attribute learning to experience; and "interactionist" theories, in which both environment and biology play a role in L2 acquisition (p. 226). In each of these three types of theories, acquisition resides within the individual, and linguistic knowledge is appropriated from, or triggered by, second language input. Causal links are made between various internal and/or external factors and an individual's linguistic performance.

One difficulty with such causal models is that they must invariably appeal to *internal mechanisms* (for instance, an "affective filter") or *processes* (e.g., "parameter setting") to which we have no direct access (since they are assumed to be situated in the head of the individual). Or, conversely, they must appeal to *externally accessible factors* (e.g., "social class") or *strategies* (e.g., "simplification") which are difficult or impossible to empirically link to the acquisition process, since we cannot possibly measure the effect of a contextual factor on actual linguistic production, or argue the effect of the use of a given strategy on an individual's acquisition of a particular form.

One way to overcome the problems inherent in causal models of this type is to consider acquisition to be an accomplishment of groups of people, rather than of single individuals. In other words, an individual's production in a second language is a collaboratively-achieved phenomenon. And, just as

Issues in Applied Linguistics
ISSN 1050-4273
© Regents of the University of California
Vol. 6 No. 2 1995 123-136

language is not a property of the individual, it is not only the language that is being acquired; for the social use of language is itself shaped by (and constitutive of) larger culturally-defined activities, of which language plays only a partial (albeit critical) role. Thus, observable changes in the (linguistic) behavior of an individual are not attributable to the individual alone, but to changes in that individual's participation in an activity, or to changes in the activity itself over time.

In what follows, I will explore a young child's use of a second language (Portuguese) while engaged in a series of naturally-occurring telephone calls between him and his grandmother (Vovó). This interaction provides the only context in which—at the time of the study—the child can regularly be observed to speak Portuguese.[1] Over time, the child's participation in the phone calls appears to promote his acquisition of the second language. Following a temporary change in the social setting, however, the child ceases to use the second language in that context. After analyzing certain types of interactional sequences that appear to facilitate the child's acquisition of Portuguese, I will then suggest that his subsequent "loss" of the L2 can be explained as reflecting changes in the community's practice of a specific activity (the phone calls) in which the second language is regularly used.

DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS AND DATA

The focal participant (David: 3;6) was born in Portugal, and moved to the United States at 5 months of age. His mother is Portuguese, and his father is American. At the time the calls were recorded, David's family predominantly used English in their daily interactions, with limited use of Portuguese in routines such as bed-time rituals, greetings and leave-takings, terms of endearment, certain household objects, etc. This pattern of English and Portuguese use in the home had been the case since shortly before his second birthday.

Outside of the home environment, David's exposure to Portuguese had been limited to contact with his Portuguese relatives. This contact included brief phone calls and letters from relatives in Portugal, a 6-week visit by his family to Portugal when he was 3 years old, and visits by his grandparents to the United States.

Beginning with his grandparents' first extended stay in the U.S., (when they took up residence in an apartment building located about a 20 minute drive from their grandchild's home), telephone contact between David and his grandparents became a regular occurrence. At this time, the telephone calls between David and his grandmother provided the only observed context in which David used Portuguese in a sustained and consistent manner.

Calls were regularly recorded for the period extending from December 1990 through March 1991, at which time the grandmother returned to Portugal for a one-month stay. Upon her return to the U.S., telephone calls between David and his grandmother were no longer conducted in Portuguese.

In all, 51 phone calls were transcribed using conversation analytic conventions.[2] The calls under investigation range from a few seconds to many minutes in length. For the majority of calls, David directly initiates and ends telephone conversations with his grandmother.[3] Other conversations come at the beginning, middle, or end of telephone calls between David's mother and his grandmother or grandfather. David's calls are initiated for a variety of reasons—for instance, to say good night, to report about the day's events (including play activity); to share news (either televised current events, or information received in letters or phone calls from others); to discuss issues (such as the Persian Gulf conflict, or the bad weather); to relay messages (from David's mother to his grandparents); or to request visits from his grandmother. Conversations between David and his grandmother are, in general, much longer and more involved when David initiates the call than when his grandmother does, since his grandmother usually calls David's house not to speak to him but to speak to his mother.

ANALYSIS

I will first examine expert-novice interactional sequences within the phone calls between David and his grandmother which may have facilitated David's production of Portuguese. The dramatic change observed in David's L2 production during later phone calls is then explained through appeal to a larger perspective—one which considers the multiple conversational dyads which constitute the phone call activity for this particular social group.

Expert-Novice Interaction and L2 Acquisition

The view that expert-novice interaction is the locus of cognitive development originates with Vygotsky (1978).[4] At the center of this view is the notion of a "zone of proximal development," in which more expert participants help novices to accomplish actions which the novices would be unable to accomplish alone. A look at the phone calls reveals many ways in which David's L2 production is indeed facilitated through interaction with more expert interlocutors (specifically, his grandmother and mother), enabling David to produce language that he would be unable to produce alone. During these calls, David gains exposure to new forms in the new language, and he gains practice in using forms with which he is already familiar. Observable changes in the use of these forms over time suggest linguistic development.

In Excerpt 1, for instance, David has called his grandmother to say good night. During the call, David produces a problematic utterance (pragmatically speaking) which is replaced by his grandmother's more contextually-appropriate one. Excerpt 1 provides an example of highly salient instance of expert intervention, in which David's inappropriate or agrammatical use of a form is "transformed" by his grandmother into a more appropriate or grammatical form.[5]

Excerpt 1

DA = David, VO = Vovó (grandmother); Portuguese utterances followed by gloss in English

01 DA; então (0.5) até já.
"so, see you soon"
02 VO; então boa noite. vai para cama?
"so good night. are you going to bed?"
03 DA; boa noite
"good night"
04 VO; durma bem
"sleep well"

We cannot know from the interactional record alone how conscious David is of the inappropriateness of his utterance "então até já." Its inappropriateness might be brought to his awareness by his grandmother's non-matching response at line 02, since the conventional response to ate já in Portuguese conversation is regularly *ate já* (as with the English *hello* or *goodbye*, where the response is lexically the same as the greeting). A second indication that his utterance may not be entirely appropriate lies in the parallel structure of the grandmother's subsequent utterance at line 02, *então boa noite*, which replaces only the problematic portion of David's utterance, *até já*. Further evidence that Vovó's utterance "corrects" David's is found in his response to that replacement utterance at line 03, which parallels only its first half, failing to provide a response to the question "vai para cama?" altogether. This parallelism suggests that David has attended to only the "corrective" portion of the utterance, his *boa noite* being either a response to Vovó's *boa noite*, or a redo of the utterance which began the sequence. The parallelisms which link their utterances together thus facilitate a step-wise transformation of David's first (problematic) utterance into a second, more appropriate one.

If interactional sequences similar to this are the vehicle through which linguistic development takes place, then it is necessary to show subsequent change in usage of the form in order to claim that acquisition has occurred. Transcripts of the phone calls reveal that David does not at first appear to develop in his understanding and use of *até já*—in fact, he inappropriately employs it four more times within the next 11 calls in the corpus, causing one

to wonder whether anything has been learned through either that verbal exchange or subsequent ones (which are similar to the first, with signalling, and correction, of the inappropriately-used form by his grandmother). Though these four infelicitous tokens of the form do not in themselves suggest linguistic development, however, there is evidence of change over time later in the corpus: after the 13th call in the corpus, David abandons the *até já* form, replacing it in the remaining calls by a more generic closing, *adeus*, (glossed in English as "goodbye"). This suggests that the focus on problematic language in the initial exchange, facilitated through interaction with his grandmother, does indeed lead to subsequent change in usage by David.

Excerpt 2 serves to illustrate how the grandmother's speech aids David's grammatical production as well. Here, David appears unable to produce the first-person past form of "saw" until his grandmother's subsequent utterance provides him with the linguistic resources to do so

Excerpt 2

01	DA;	eu **saw** o: o underground home?
		"I saw the: the underground home?"
02	VO;	pois.
		"Ah hah"
		(1.5)
03	VO;	não **vi** não meu amor.
		"No I didn't see (it), no my dear"
04	DA;	eu **vi** na teeveesão
		"I saw on television"
05	VO;	a: **viste**, ah:::::
		"ah you saw it, ah:::::"

In this passage, David's production of the English word "saw" within the Portuguese text (at line 01) suggests that he does not know (or at least does not recall at the moment of speaking) the equivalent Portuguese form. However, his grandmother's production of the form (in Portuguese) in her own utterance at line 03 provides him with access to the form, even though it appears to have been produced in order to complete her own utterance, rather than to correct David's previous utterance.

Excerpt 3 (taken from one minute later in the same phone call) provides another example of how David borrows verbal forms from his grandmother's speech:

Excerpt 3

01 VO; o avô joão é que costuma ver assim essa televisão toda.
"grandfather joão is used to seeing all that television.
02 .hh a vovó não viu.
.hh grandmother didn't see."
03 DA; eu- eu *viu.
*"I- I *saw"*
04 VO; foste tu e o avô.
"(it was) you and grandfather"

In this example, the third-person form produced by grandmother in line 02 is ungrammatical within the context of David's own utterance at 03.[6] (The correct form would have been "vi," as in line 04 of Excerpt 2.) As with Excerpt 1, we cannot make a claim (based on the limited amount of data) that the grandmother's intervention has helped David to learn a new form; his exposure to that new form, however, has been a catalyst in his production of it.

While the above excerpts illustrate the ways in which David and his grandmother collaboratively communicate, help by David's mother can also be said to facilitate David's participation in the phone calls. She does so in at least three ways: by dialing the phone when David expresses a desire to make a call to his grandmother; by contributing linguistic resources from which he can build utterances intended for his grandmother; and, less directly, by supplying the grandmother with knowledge of the day's newsworthy events before David has spoken with her, such that Vovó can anticipate the content of his conversations even before he speaks.

In Excerpt 4, for example, Vovó is preparing to visit David's house, and David (prompted by his mother) is calling to advise her to dress warmly because it is windy outside. His mother, who is standing next to him during the call, contributes linguistic resources (at line 06) from which David can build an utterance intended for his grandmother.

Excerpt 4

TE = David's mother
((TE dials phone, then passes it to DA. It rings twice before VO answers))

01 VO; si:,
"yes"
02 DA; .(XXX) então pecisa da uma jacket.
"so, you need a jacket"
03 VO; a: achas que sim,
"ah, you think so?"

04 DA; si
"yes"
05 VO; 'tá bem pronto
"very well, okay"
=
06 TE; °está a ficar vento° ((directed to David))
"it's getting windy"
07 VO; 'to obrigada.
"thanks very much"
08 DA; STá ficar vento.
"it's getting windy"
09 VO; a: 'stá bem. pronto.[7]
"ah, very well, okay"
10 DA; então adeus
"so, goodbye"
11 VO; adeus obrigada.
"goodbye, thank you"

This passage illustrates 3 ways in which David's mother facilitates his interaction with grandmother—first, by dialing the phone; second, by providing the opportunity to relay an important message; and third, by contributing the language he needs to relay this message.

Similarly, in Excerpt 5, it is information obtained through a previous conversation with David's mother that helps the grandmother to introduce the topic of the conversation.

Excerpt 5

01 DA; hi ((spoken between rings, before phone is picked up))
02 VO; sim?
"yes?"
03 DA; .ola
"hi"
04 VO; ola meu queri: [do
"hi my dear"
05 DA; ['tão
"so"
06 VO; então foi a praia,
"so you went to the beach"
07 DA; .uh sim. eu foi a praia tem (0.5) eu brincou.
"uh yes, I went to the beach .hh have (0.5) I played"

While David initiates this call (with the help of his mother, who dials for him), it is the grandmother who introduces the newsworthy topic of

conversation. At line 05 he produces a single word, the discourse particle *então* (which, when produced alone, conventionally elicits news from its recipient). This particle is conventionally employed to elicit speech from its intended recipient, much as the English "well?" spoken with rising intonation.). Its interactional effect is to place the burden of introducing the topic of the phone call on his grandmother. Her knowledge of his trip to the beach (gotten from an earlier conversation with David's mother) provides the means with which to do so.

Because his mother, like his grandmother, helps him to achieve interactionally what he would not be able to achieve alone, she must also be considered responsible for his heightened participation in (and therefore, his acquisition of) the second language activity.

Just as David's mother supports his participation in the phone calls, so too does the presence of another language, English. A closer look at the data reveals the bilingual nature of their interaction, in which English appears sporadically within the predominantly Portuguese text of the early phone calls. One instance of this occasional use has already been presented in Excerpt 2, where David inserts the English "saw" and "underground home," presumably because he does not know how to express these terms in Portuguese. The grandmother's response to David in that passage indicates that she has understood his use of English "saw," (since she produces "saw" in her subsequent response utterance) though it is unclear whether or not she has understood David's "underground home" (which is not reproduced, or directly referred to, in either English or Portuguese).

Excerpt 6 provides a further example in which David and his grandmother employ English to help them communicate. This time, it is the grandmother who employs English to help clarify a problematic vocabulary item for David.

Excerpt 6

01 VO; olha a vovó (.) estava a acabar ali um (0.5) uns **tricots**,
"listen, grandma was finishing some knitting"
02 DA; que que **sticos**
"what is "tricots""
03 VO; **tricots, knit**
04 DA; **knit**?
05 VO; **knit**. que é para começar a tua camisola
"knit. to start your sweater"
06 DA; a minha,
"mine,"
07 VO; pois, a seguir, vais tu.
"right, yours will be next"

Although the elicitation for clarification of "tricots" is made in Portuguese (line 02), David's grandmother responds to that elicitation in English (at line 03). Perhaps owing to the inappropriate form of the grandmother's response (she responds "knit" rather than the grammatically appropriate "knitting"), David's second request for clarification at line 04 receives a response in both English and Portuguese at line 05. Over the course of several utterances, the coordinated use of Portuguese and English serves to isolate the problematic item and bring it into focus for the interlocutors. Judging from David's utterance at line 06 ("mine," which can be construed to mean "my sweater"), it appears that over the course of this interaction, David has come to understand this problematic term.

As with previous excerpts, we cannot be sure of the precise effect of this particular interactional sequence on David's acquisition, since our only "proof" would be re-use of the form in a new interactional context.[8] Even in the case of such use, however, it would be difficult to separate the novice's production of the form from the social, physical, or linguistic context in which it is used.

FROM ACQUISITION TO LOSS

Interaction such as that presented in Excerpts 1-6 occurs regularly for a period of three months, during which time David (with the help of his mother, his grandmother, and English) displays growth in his use of Portuguese. This is reflected in lengthened conversations in Portuguese, and less frequent use of English during those conversations. After the grandmother's return from a one-month stay in Portugal, however (during which time their conversations stop), David and his grandmother all but abandon the use of Portuguese in their phone conversations. With the exception of greetings and leave-takings, the calls are conducted entirely in English. The extent of that change from Portuguese to English is shown in Excerpt 7.

Excerpt 7

01 VO; hello
02 DA; hi vovó
"hi grandma"
03 VO; ah meu querido como está
"ah my dear how are you"
04 DA; 'sta bom .hh
"well"
05 VO; ( )
06 DA; um you know the potions that you gave me?
07 VO; yes?
08 DA; well, I- I- um guessed everything that was inside them.

.hh I knew what was inside them.
09 VO; did you?
10 DA; yeah. I just guessed
(1.0)
11 VO; what was it?

While Excerpts 1-6 help to demonstrate the process of acquisition from a collaborative perspective, Excerpt 7 requires us to account not *for how a language is acquired*, but for *why it appears to be lost*. To do this from the perspective of expert-novice dyadic interaction, we would have to offer explanations which appeal to participants' use of, or failure to use, certain strategies; or to the unseen and unarticulated (i.e., psychological) motives which underlie the interaction. For instance, it might be argued that David's cessation of Portuguese results from the limited meaning that they can collaboratively achieve in the second language. Or we might argue that during the grandmother's one-month visit to Portugal, David develops some kind of affective block to speaking in Portuguese. An equally plausible explanation can be found by considering the larger socio-cultural discourse community of which David, and Portuguese, is a part. Rather than attribute change solely to the individual (in this case, David), perhaps we can attribute change to the larger discourse community of which David is a member—in other words, to changes in the socio-cultural context in which the second language is used.

Activities and Change in L2 Use

In order to understand the socio-cultural context in which the interaction between David and his grandmother arises, it is necessary to consider David's interaction not only with his grandmother, but also with other family members who engage in phone conversations with him. Perhaps the most important of these is David's grandfather. Conversations between David and his grandfather are almost as frequent as those with grandmother—David often speaks to one grandparent directly after speaking with the other. The content of their calls is frequently parallel. Excerpt 8, for example, provides an example of a discussion between David and his grandmother of the day's weather. This conversation is then contrasted with one between David and his grandfather on the same topic (in Excerpt 9).

Excerpt 8

01 VO; hoje o tempo 'sta mal não é verdade,
"today the weather's bad, isn't it?"
02 DA; sim 'sta (.) a chuver e tem uma storm e s- coisa
"yes, it's raining and there's a storm and s- thing
03 VO; ah tem?

"ah, you have [one]?"
04 DA; sim
"yes"
05 VO; o que é que tem querido
"what do you have/what's wrong?"
06 DA; uh- uh vento:: .hhh agua
"wind::, water"
07 VO; a: po//is:
ah, right
08 DA; coisas as-
"things like-"
09 VO; é muito // aborecido não é quer//ido
"it's very tiring, isn't it, sweetheart?"
10 DA; a: si
"a: yes"
11 DA; sim.
"yes."
12 VO; a v- a vóvó tambem não gosta
"grandmother doesn't like it either"
(1.0)

After a brief discussion on another topic, David asks to speak to his grandfather. The opening of their extended conversation (which lasts more than 15 minutes) is presented in Excerpt 9.

Excerpt 9

AV = grandfather

01 VO; então vou passar ao av^o.
"so, I'll pass [the phone] to grandfather."
(2.0)
02 AV; hi
03 DA; hi
04 AV; how are you
05 DA; (there's) .hh there's a problem here .hh ah um around our land.
(1.0)
06 DA; .hh it's a big storm and rai- lots of rain and wind is coming.
07 AV; well that is not a pro:blem my dear neto.
grandson
08 DA; why?
09 AV; because, you know. The rain is a necessary thing. We need rain
10 DA; why
11 AV; because without raining we haven't got water.

(1.0)
12 AV; and without water (.) we cannot have food we cannot have plants we cannot (have) lettuce .hh um (1.0) carrots, etcetera, potatoes, many things .hh and um ((clears throat)) .hh on the other hand, um, when you see raining, you can see that rain uhm (3.0) cleans (0.5) uh
(1.0)
13 DA; pollution
14 AV; cleans pollution cleans the air. And all the germs all that stuff

This excerpt nicely illustrates how David can be more independent, and at the same time can convey more information, when he speaks in English. From a second language acquisition perspective, however, the call is uninteresting—after all, if our aim is to understand L2 acquisition, then we should examine instances of L2 interaction.[9]

Assuming such a perspective, however, blinds us to the fact that the phone call activity consists not only of conversations between David and his grandmother (in Portuguese), but between David and his grandfather (in English) as well. In the early months of the activity, phone calls occur in both English and Portuguese. With the grandmother's departure for Portugal, however, the activity is re-defined as one occurring only in English. During the grandmother's absence, the support mechanisms built up to facilitate David's participation in the calls are no longer needed. This has a dramatic impact on the nature of the activity—David no longer requires his parents' support to participate in the activity because that activity is now conducted in English. His frequent calls to his grandfather, unassisted by his parents, reflect how he likes this independence.

When the grandmother returns from Portugal, she must adapt to the new social (linguistic) norms of the activity that have been established in her absence. From the perspective of the individual language learner, operating within the context of the grandmother-grandchild dyad, this change appears to signal a loss of the second language. From the perspective of the wider activity (phone calls conducted by this larger social group consisting of David, his parents, and grandparents), the cessation of Portuguese may instead reflect the evolution of the activity—from one in which David's participation is heavily supported (through assistance with dialing and the supply of needed vocabulary), to one in which he becomes an independent, and more equal, participant. The "loss" of Portuguese is beneficial for David—it allows him to participate more fully in conversations with his grandparents. His grandmother benefits as well—with language less of a barrier between them, they can now get down to other substantive issues upon which their relationship is built.

CONCLUSION

David's fate is the fate of many potentially bilingual children (or, for that matter, adults), whose second language use ceases, or fossilizes, before it has been fully developed. While David's case is obviously unique (due to the fact that his observed second language production is limited to a single activity) it nonetheless serves to illustrate that analysts may stand to profit by examining L2 interactions in the context of other socio-culturally relevant activities in which the second language is embedded. What we typically call "second language activities" may instead be merely second language interactions occurring within some larger bi- or multi-lingual settings or activities. Changes in learners' production over time (which we frequently label acquisition or loss) may well reflect changes in those activities or settings themselves, changes which we may not be able to notice if our focus is limited to L2 interaction alone. Only when we view language acquisition or loss (as reflected in a speaker's use of the language) as a by-product of participation in a given social group's range of activities, will we begin to understand why some people successfully acquire and use second languages, and others don't.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Russ Campbell, Jim Gee, Jim Lantolf, John Schumann, and the editorial staff of IAL for many helpful comments and suggestions on this paper.

NOTES

[1] In all other interaction involving the same participants, the child speaks English.

[2] Transcripts use a simplified version of conversation analytic conventions Atkinson and Heritage (1984). Notations used in these excerpts are as follows:

Notation	Meaning
(0.5)	Intervals between or within utterances, 10th of seconds
?	rising intonation
,	slightly rising intonation
.	falling intonation
:	sound stretch
[	onset of overlap
=	simultaneous utterances
.hh	audible inbreath
(( ))	researcher comments/clarification
(XXX)	unclear utterance
CAPS	indicate raised volume
°xxx°	indicate lowered volume

[3] At the beginning of the 3-month period in which data were collected, calls initiated by David were dialed by his mother or father. In February 1991, an auto-dial phone was installed in David's home, allowing him to call his grandparents without parental assistance. This changes both the frequency and the nature of his calls—he calls more often, and sometimes without his parents' awareness that a call is being, or has been, made.

[4] More recent incarnations of this viewpoint include, for example, Rogoff (1990) or Lave and Wenger (1991).

[5] Similar sequences have been previously discussed in the SLA literature. Excerpts 1 through 3 appear to be a blend of what Hatch (1978) calls "vertical constructions" and Werner-Gough (1975) refers to as "incorporation strategy" (both cited in Ellis, 1990).

[6] Grandmother's practice referring to herself in the third person is reminiscent of Anglo-American "caregiver speech" (as in the expression, produced by a mother to her child, "Mommy said not to do that.") Its use in these data appears to complicate David's job of learning verbal agreement, since the grandmother refers to herself in two different ways ("I" or "grandmother"), each requiring a different form of agreement.

[7] It is not entirely clear whether Vovó's utterance at line 09 is a reply to the mother's utterance at line 06 (which, because she is not on the phone at the time, is presumably directed at David), David's reiteration of it (at line 08), or both.

[8] This has led Artigal (1994) to consider the language acquisition process as one involving the "re-making" of meaning. In other words, it is not enough to use a new linguistic form—acquisition is a result of the re-use of the form in some new spatio-temporal context.

[9] This bias is reflected in the preliminary transcription of the phone calls, in which passages such as Excerpt 9 were not transcribed, since they did not involve use of the second language.

REFERENCES

Artigal, J. (1994). The collaborative construction of meaning-making indexical processes in the kindergarten classroom. Paper presented at the American Association for Applied Linguistics conference, Baltimore, MD.

Atkinson, D. & Heritage, J.(Ed.). (1984). *Structures of social action: Studies in conversational analysis*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ellis, R. (1990). *Instructed second language acquisition: Learning in the classroom*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Hatch, E. (1978). Discourse analysis and second language acquisition. In E. Hatch (Ed.), *Second language acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Larsen-Freeman, D, & Long, M. (1991). *An introduction to second language acquisition research*. New York: Longman.

Lave, J., and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wagner-Gough, J. (1975). Comparative Studies in Second Language Learning. *CAL-ERIC/CLL Series on Language and Linguistics 26*.

Peter Coughlan received his Ph.D. in 1995 from UCLA's department of TESL and Applied Linguistics. He is currently working as a consultant for Nissan Design International in San Diego, California.

Sociocultural Theory, Second Language Discourse, and Teaching: An Interview with James Lantolf

Peter J. Coughlan
Nissan Design International

INTRODUCTION

James Lantolf is a professor in the Department of Modern Languages at Cornell University, and co-editor of the journal *Applied Linguistics*. For the past 15 years or so, he and his students have conducted research on second language acquisition from a Vygotskian perspective. Informing much of this research is an empirical analysis of the discursive practices of second language learners—for instance, the scaffolded interaction that takes place between experts and novices within the zone of proximal development,[1] or the egocentric speech[2] of individuals engaged in tasks performed in second language contexts. From this perspective, the acquisition of any skill (including linguistic competency) is seen not as a static property residing in the head of an individual, but as a dynamic process which resides between or among individuals.

In this interview, Lantolf discusses how he first became interested in the application of sociocultural theory to second language acquisition, and what he sees as the appeal of such theory to studies of second language discourse. He then discusses some current research efforts (including his work in SLA theory construction), and what he sees as the future of discourse-based research—a future in which the now-prevalent distinction between pedagogical theory and practice becomes less pronounced. Finally, he describes an experimental language learning classroom where he hopes to put his beliefs in the dialectical nature of learning to the test.

THE INTERVIEW

Coughlan: *I guess a good place to start would be for you to describe your academic training and what drew you into the field of applied linguistics and SLA.*

Lantolf: My academic training is in secondary education in Spanish, and in

Issues in Applied Linguistics
ISSN 1050-4273
© Regents of the University of California
Vol. 6 No. 2 1995 137-145

Spanish linguistics. I did work in historical Spanish linguistics more than 20 years ago, but I didn't really work that long in that area. Being someone who did a lot of language teaching, it was kind of hard not to be intrigued by issues of learning. One of the things that I always used to wonder about was why my students often weren't able to learn, even though my explanations were always linguistically quite sound. Linguistic expertise didn't seem to have the impact on language learning that I was hoping for. So I began to wonder about what was going on. How could the right explanation not have the right result? And so that piqued my interest in language teaching. I think the first or second paper I ever published (Lantolf, 1977) was on the whole issue of change in foreign language teaching. So it was quite early on that I began to have an interest in applied linguistics and language acquisition. I guess my "conversion," if you will, happened when I was on the faculty at the University of Texas at San Antonio from 1977-80. There, I had contact with people like Carolyn Kessler, who was working in bilingualism. I started to talk with her, and I guess that's when I really became interested. By the time I got to Delaware in 1980, I was basically doing work in second language acquisition.

Coughlan: *When did you develop your interest in Vygotsky and sociocultural theory?*

Lantolf: I would say my interest in that began in the early 80's—1982 or 1983, I guess—through my contact with Bill Frawley at Delaware. Bill had studied with Jim Wertsch at Northwestern. I started to talk about second language acquisition and he started to talk about his experiences with sociocultural theory, and we were intrigued by what each other was saying, and wound up teaching a seminar in 1983 on Vygotskian theory. From that point on our work moved in that direction almost exclusively.

Coughlan: *What is it that makes Vygotskian theory so appealing?*

Lantolf: I guess because it asks fundamentally interesting questions, and it compels you to see fundamentally interesting configurations in the world. I know this idea has been abused quite a bit recently, but I think it has a theoretical and a pedagogical side to it, and a practical side to it as well. Although I don't see the separation between theory and practice to the extent that I think some people in the field do. I think the theory/practice dichotomy reflects the reductionist approach that has dominated modern science. At any rate, what I find appealing about Vygotskian theory is that it not only asks interesting questions, but it forces you to do something to help people change. That's what I find to be quite compelling about it. It challenges you to try to do something to help people.

Coughlan: *What specific aspects of sociocultural theory have either you or your students explored?*

Lantolf: What we've been most interested in would be the linguistics of sociocultural theory—in the sense that we've been interested in several aspects, one of which is how is mind organized and reflected by and through the linguistic properties of a language. So we've been looking at things like tense-aspect, and how that reflects people's cognitive organization during problem-solving activities, or what the language that people use on-line can tell us about what's going on in the mind. We've looked at things like modality, we've done some work on the discursive properties of texts, and how people generate texts, and what the linguistic features of that process can itself tell us about how they generate texts. Most recently we've started to get interested in metaphor. Several of my students here [at Cornell] are now working on the acquisition of metaphor—conceptual metaphors—in second languages, and whether or not it's possible to actually acquire conceptual metaphors in a second language to the extent that it leads to conceptual reorganization of your mind.

Coughlan: *And how do you research that question?*

Lantolf: Well, an interesting project is some work that one of my students, Aneta Pavlenko, is doing on the concept of privacy in Anglo-American culture and in Russian culture. (See Pavlenko, 1995). There are all kinds of formal metaphors in English for the concept of privacy—for example, personal space—which apparently do not exist in Russian. There's no way to talk about these properties in Russian. One of the things that she's been interested in is to what extent Russians learning English can acquire the concept of privacy and the associated metaphors that go with it. And then the reverse—to what extent are Americans acquiring Russian able to surrender the metaphor. So she's looking at Russians acquiring English as a foreign language in Russia, Russians acquiring English as a second language in this country, and then the same for Americans acquiring Russian. She's set up a film—it's non-verbal, of course—in which she shows what Americans would interpret to be a violation of people's privacy, and then asks subjects to talk about what they see going on in the film and the results are really quite interesting. The most interesting data so far concerns Russians who have been living in this country and have learned English here—whom she asks to talk about the film in Russian. They have a very hard time because they seem to have acquired the concepts of privacy, and yet when they have to talk about it in Russian they don't have the lexicon to do it.

Coughlan: *So do they code-switch?*

Lantolf: They code-switch or they borrow terms or they make up terms or they extend terms in Russian that would really be semantically inappropriate to try to talk about this idea of privacy. On the other hand, Russians who have learned English in Russia clearly don't see the film as about privacy—they see it as something else.

Coughlan: *What other research are you doing?*

Lantolf: The work that I'm doing right now examines second language acquisition theory and theory building (Lantolf, 1995). I'm basically looking at it from the perspective of metaphor. I'm arguing that—in point of fact—theories are really just metaphors that have become literalized or mythologized, if you will. It basically argues for a relativistic stance within the field, and of course I know that's probably unpopular among some people.

Coughlan: *Could you go into that a little more?*

Lantolf: My argument is that if theories are just metaphors, and metaphors are the ways that we use to think about the world, then in fact there's no one metaphor that's the right metaphor. There are just some metaphors that are more appealing than others, for whatever reasons. And these metaphors serve as a kind of core around which discursive spaces can be built, and scientists can then use them to organize and coordinate their activity. But it doesn't follow that there has to be a privileged metaphor—there are just some that are more appealing than others. Therefore, the more appealing they are—for whatever reason, and not because they're necessarily right—they ultimately achieve the status of theory. If this is the case, then why should we not have multiple metaphors sanctioned in the field of second language acquisition research? Why should there be some privileged theory or set of theories? The argument has been circulating that we need to cull theories because there are just too many of them: my view is that we ought not to do that because we may be culling metaphors that some people might ultimately find appealing. Why should we discard them by some algorithm or whatever principle people want to use for culling them?

Coughlan: *Why do you think it's taken so long for sociocultural theory to develop an audience in the field of second language acquisition?*

Lantolf: That's a good question. My guess is that it's kind of the new kid on the block. I think one of the reasons it's gaining in popularity now is that it's also gaining in popularity in the field of education. If you look even five years ago in the field of education there was not that much sociocultural work being done. I'm not sure if it's the dominant paradigm, but it's really quite strong. So I think that probably has some effect, because a lot of people who are working

in it are people who come into second language acquisition from education. It's not so much people who are trained in straight linguistics that are working within sociocultural theory. I think the other reason is that UG has dominated the theory-building literature to a considerable extent.

But, in general, I don't think you can actually convince someone that your theory is a better theory or the right theory. In my reading of some of the social history of science, one of the ways that a theory gains momentum is by inculcating would-be scientists while they're still students—the kind of discourse they're exposed to will probably affect the way they think and talk about the field. So I think that's one of the reasons that it's taking some time—there's just not a critical mass of people out there who are getting exposure to it during their formative years. By the way, I'm not saying that that's what should happen—I think that you shouldn't be exposed to only one kind of discourse or only one kind of metaphor or only one kind of theory. I think you should have exposure to a pretty wide variety of theories. One of the problems is that people tend to be steeped in a given discursive organization or a given theory or metaphor, and then they assume that that's the only way to view the world. Just as in the case of cultures—you assume that there's only one way to organize the world.

Coughlan: *Well, in spite of what you just said—that you can't convince someone that your theory is a better theory or the right theory—what do you think sociocultural theory has to offer discourse-based studies of language acquisition?*

Lantolf: I think one of the things that discourse-based theories, including sociocultural theory, has is that it compels us to think in different ways about what language is and about what it is that people are actually learning—or becoming—via the second language. Maybe we ought not to be talking about second language acquisition as if it were some kind of property or some kind of object that you come to possess and have; maybe second language acquisition is simply another way of organizing the world and behaving in the world. I think the problem has been that, in the orthodox view, we assume language acquisition happens inside of people's heads exclusively. And I think the lesson of the discursive research—in particular, sociocultural theory—is that acquisition happens not just exclusively inside of people's heads, but that it's situated and it's distributed. That's a point that I find appealing in the research, and I would hope that people would begin to give some serious consideration to that possibility, rather than taking a more individualistic or solipsistic view of things.

Coughlan: *Maybe you could give an example from your own work—I'm thinking of some of the work you've done with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development—where acquisition is distributed across interlocutors?*

Lantolf: What the work in the zone of proximal development has shown, and continues to show, is that acquisition is not the sole responsibility of the individual, but is in fact a kind of dialogic or distributed responsibility of the individual and other individuals. The work that we and others have been doing using the metaphor of the zone of proximal development makes a quite interesting and quite forceful case as to how that happens. A couple of years ago, Bill Frawley and I argued that not only acquisition, but *use* of language—what people have called proficiency—is in fact dialogic. We don't carry proficiency around inside of our heads, and we don't have proficiency in the language—we negotiate it. Proficiency is really a property of dialogues, and it's situated just as the learning process is situated. Even within the research concerning the zone of proximal development, I think some people have misconstrued the zone as simply another way of getting what's out there inside the individual. Once it's inside, then you have proficiency. In our view, that's not what it's about—it's always distributed, whether it's learning or whether it's use of the language. It's dialogic.

Coughlan: *Is that similar to Artigal's (1994) claim that acquisition is "the re-making of meaning"?*

Lantolf: I think what he's talking about kind of meshes with what we've been saying about language acquisition—that it's not simply a question of taking in linguistic forms; it's learning how to "mean" in a different way, and how to function in different indexical spaces, and how to define those indexical spaces in different ways. So it's really a question of how to mean, which to my mind is a question of how to organize the world. In acquiring a second language or learning how to mean in a different way, you're learning how to organize the world in different ways.

Coughlan: *What do you see as future directions for sociocultural theory and discourse-based research in SLA?*

Lantolf: To give an example, I think the work that Joan Kelly Hall is doing on the classroom as a discursive space is really quite impressive (Hall, 1995). She's trying to look at how teachers and learners interact and co-construct a discursive space for language learning to happen. She's beginning to pay attention to the "voices" of teachers and learners on-line. And I think that the work that Rick Donato and Pete Brooks are doing on collective scaffolding in the classroom, and the kind of discourse that emerges during that process, is really quite important (e.g., Brooks and Donato, 1995). This is where I see the merging of theory and practice. Some people have pondered the question of whether, when you as a researcher go into a classroom and do this kind of work, you ought to then inform the teacher of what's going on, with the idea of trying to get the teacher

to change the way he or she behaves in the classroom. Some people feel you shouldn't do that, but I think that's what sociocultural theory is about.

Coughlan: *It's a form of action research, then?*

Lantolf: That's what I think. I think it's inappropriate to come to an understanding of what's going on and not inform the teacher of what's going on. I think that's where the theory and practice come together. If you don't do that, I think in a sense you're not really doing sociocultural research.

Coughlan: *Has anyone actually gone back in and worked with teachers based on their findings?*

Lantolf: Last year, at our first sociocultural meeting in Pittsburgh,[3] we had a discussion about this. I remember Joan [Kelley Hall] saying—I'm paraphrasing—that when she was in the classroom taking notes and observing these things, it was all she could do to keep herself from intervening in the classroom at that point. Because she could see what the problem was, how the teacher was in fact deforming the discourse and actually creating a schizophrenic atmosphere. We had quite a heated debate in the group about whether she should have intervened, whether she should have informed the teacher and tried to change the situation or the circumstances.

There were some people at that meeting who were quite opposed to the idea that education is about changing people. They think it's about informing people. To my mind, informing ought to lead to change.

Coughlan: *Do you do any intervention yourself?*

Lantolf: I have tried to do that here at Cornell. It's been sensitive—it's not been easy, because people are resistant, and they see these sorts of findings reported by Joan Kelly Hall as negative. I'm going to teach an experimental course in the Spring semester, by the way. It's an undergraduate Spanish course, and my idea is for the class itself to be a zone of proximal development, rather than a separate zone for each individual in the class. So what I'm going to ask them to do is to develop a class portfolio instead of individual portfolios—they'll have to decide what gets put in the portfolio to reflect what the class is capable of doing. The class as a group will be evaluated, not individuals within the class.

Coughlan: *So everyone in the class will get the same grade?*

Lantolf: Yeah. That's probably going to be controversial at a place like Cornell because it's so competitive and because students are after the grade, but I really think that it's worth trying this kind of collective approach to learning in an environment where the classroom is itself a zone of proximal development. We

don't have a syllabus for the course: it's going to be a syllabus constructed between and among the students and the teachers.

Coughlan: *But you have the external goals of the university to try to meet, right?*

Lantolf: No. Our external goal is simply that they learn something. That they change. And that they, as a class, present evidence of what that change is. But we're not complying with whatever those external goals are—we don't have particularly clear goals, other than proficiency, whatever that means. Our approach to proficiency will be dialogic rather than monologic.

Coughlan: *But it's linguistic change, right? Ultimately you want them to be able to somehow perform better in the second language.*

Lantolf: That's one way of changing. Another way of changing is for them to ultimately think differently about what it is they're doing. Because we want them to study topics they're interested in—things about the university, about their language learning histories, their own fields of study or majors. The idea is not just to measure—or should I say to assess—changes in their abilities in the language, but to evaluate to what extent they as *people* actually change.

Coughlan: *That's radical. What do you think Cornell's reaction to it will be?*

Lantolf: Cornell is a kind of interesting place in that you do have a good deal of academic freedom to do the kinds of things that you think you want to be able to do with your students. It prides itself on that. On the other hand, it does have a conservative side to it, particularly in terms of the traditional approach to language teaching—that people have to be on the same page at the same time. What the reaction will be, I don't know. I don't know if this is going to even be successful, whatever successful means. The students might not show up the second day! Although I tend to doubt it because I think that Cornell students come expecting a different kind of experience, at least on the surface. They may not fully understand what that means. One of the things that we plan to do is to talk about it along the way with the people involved in language teaching here. We hope it will show teachers that they don't all have to be on the same page at the same time. Some teachers here react very strongly for, and others very strongly against, the idea of pedagogical uniformity in language education. Some people can't stand the fact that they are constrained by a syllabus and by a curriculum and by a language program administrator. And there are other people who think that you absolutely have to do that—that equality means doing the same thing at the same time for everybody. And of course the sociocultural view is quite different from that. Equal access does not necessarily mean treating everybody the same.

What we're hoping from this experiment is to have an impact on pedagogy—to show that this can be a good experience for the students, and that there can be development. It may not look like the currently-sanctioned form of development, but there are going to be changes in the students.

Coughlan: *And in the teachers as well, right?*

Lantolf: Yes, in the teachers as well, we hope. I think the problem has been trying to consider alternatives to their current practice—we've only been trying to convince them through argumentation, rather than through showing them what's possible. The idea here is to try to show people that it is possible to change and to develop even though you don't necessarily follow the same rigid curriculum for everybody.

NOTES

[1] The "zone of proximal development" is a term coined by Vygotsky to distinguish between a learner's actual performance, and his or her potential performance--i.e., that which was possible through assistance by someone of more expert status. Vygotsky believed that such novice-expert interaction gave rise to cognitive development.

[2] In the Vygotskian tradition, it is believed that egocentric speech (i.e., talk to oneself) performs an intrapsychological, rather than an interpsychological (or social), function by helping an individual to organize and conduct cognitive activity--activity first experienced through social interaction.

[3] In 1994, Lantolf organized a conference devoted to sociocultural approaches to second language acquisition in Pittsburgh, PA. A second conference was held in 1995 in Athens, GA.

REFERENCES

Artigal, J. (1992). Some considerations on why a new language is acquired by being used. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 2 (2), 221-240.

Brooks, F. & Donato, R. (1995). L2 discourse development and solving new problems: On the nature of 'continuous access'. *The Annual Meeting of the Association for Applied Linguistics*. Long Beach, CA, March 27.

Hall, J. K. (1995). Sociocognitive and linguistic consequences of the variable use of discourse markers in the language classroom. *The Annual Meeting of the Association for Applied Linguistics*, Long Beach, CA. March 27.

Lantolf, J. (1977). Aspects of change in foreign language study. *The Modern Language Journal*, 41, 242-250.

Lantolf, J. (1995). Second Language Acquisition Theory? Plenary address, *The British Association of Applied Linguistics*, Southampton, England, September 14.

Pavlenko, A. (1995). Bilingualism and cognition: Concepts in the bilingual mental lexicon. *The Second Language Research Forum*, Ithaca, NY.

Perspectives on Pedagogical Grammar, edited by Terence Odlin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. 340 pp.

Reviewed by Howard Williams
University of California at Los Angeles

In the early 1980s, the influence of Krashen's Monitor Theory (see, e.g., Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982) and its practical counterpart, the Natural Approach to language teaching, were strong. These authors, in reaction to one influential strand of earlier pedagogical theory which held that successful L2 learning was predicated on getting learners to master syntactic structures of a target language through conscious awareness and practice of those structures, believed such instruction largely ineffective or even detrimental to the acquisition process and therefore generally useless. What was necessary and sufficient to encourage acquisition was something which was thought to be exactly the opposite: a focus on 'comprehensible input', closely recreating the conditions under which children learn mother tongues.

The reactions to this line of argument ranged from strong objections to the theory itself (see, e.g, Gregg 1984) to objections to the ill-defined Krashenian notion of what it means to 'teach grammar' or 'call attention to form' (Rutherford and Sharwood-Smith 1985), to claims that instruction of some sort actually does seem to work (Long 1983, Yorio 1994), to evidence that 'comprehensible input' by itself is not sufficient (Harley and Swain 1984). Nowhere was it ever demonstrated conclusively that grammar instruction has no positive effects. Since that time, grammar teaching has begun to redefine itself, usually conceding the need for more contextualization. Part of this redefinition involves the search for models, part the search for methods, and part the search for validation.

Perspectives on Pedagogical Grammar is a worthwhile collection of articles pursuing these issues. The book is divided into three sections entitled "What Sort of Grammar?", "Grammar, Lexicon, and Discourse", and "Putting Grammar to Work"; in the review I depart somewhat from the actual order of presentation.

The book's first section addresses the nature of rules available for pedagogic use. Vivian Cook's contribution raises the question of the applicability of generative grammar to L2 teaching. While this question has been addressed many times before for older generative models, recent (i.e. post-1981) revisions

Issues in Applied Linguistics
ISSN 1050-4273
© Regents of the University of California
Vol. 6 No. 2 1995 146-152

in the theory call for a reassessment. The paper offers a brief overview of the principles-and-parameters model together with the L1 evidence bearing on it and then moves to the issue of the availability of UG to L2 learners, taking a generally favorable view of recent research. While Cook expresses the usual skepticism regarding the usefulness of the model for pedagogy, e.g., for the development of instructional materials, he is much more sanguine than other writers in the past about such prospects, primarily since the newer model has resulted in a radically different picture of internalized grammars, "hence any teaching program that utilizes syntax has a new and rich source of ideas to call upon" (P.29). The value lies not so much in student or teacher awareness of UG principles as in the use made of known parameters: if languages differ for the most part on matters of simple parameter setting, a whole host of learning problems might be addressed through awareness of the wide-ranging effects of these settings.

Philip Hubbard, in his paper, invites pedagogues to mine for insights three competing generative alternatives, specifically Relational Grammar (RG), Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG), and Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar (GPSG). None of these models is given more than a cursory description, but on the positive side, possible advantages and an illustrative application is provided for each. For RG the illustration is with unaccusatives (see discussion of Yip below); for LFG it is the use of thematic roles; for GPSG it is the complex but highly systematic set of verb subcategorizations.

Paul Westney, in "Rules and Pedagogical Grammar", takes a different approach to the issue of grammar teaching as it is commonly understood, and one which falls in more coherently with the critical spirit of the volume as a whole. His article is a mass of caveats to those confident that adequate and accurate rules are readily available to teachers, whether to use for their own edification or to present to their students for conscious mastery, where 'rule' is defined as "observed regularity with predictive value" (74), but where the notion 'grammar' is somewhat less well delineated. While rules of "low-level syntax" are indeed capable of explicit formulation, these rules - which might include plural and possessive marking and gross rules of word order (cf. Rutherford 1980) - are easily learned in principle (if not actually put into use) at the lower levels. When we move to the higher levels, we are faced not only with the question of whether to use 'rules of thumb' (Berman 1979) but also of what these rules of thumb might be and whether they ought to be followed up by something more precise. Yet in many key areas including article use, the some/any distinction, and modal use, it is not clear that such precision is currently available, and if it is available, whether it is amenable to teaching and consequent acquisition: an adequate linguist's rule may not be 'translatable' to a pedagogical one.

While Westney's thesis largely concerns the proper formulation of rules, Odlin claims in his paper that despite the presumed veracity of their source, some of the key data which go into the formulation of any rules are suspect. The paper starts with the uncontroversial observation that NS judgements on the possible sentences of a language are more reliable than those of NNS and that in turn, teacher and linguist judgments (in that order) are more reliable than those of laypeople. Westney then aims at refinement of our conception of this 'introspective hierarchy', illustrating that in some cases at least, disagreements on grammaticality and acceptability vary among NSs, leading to a credibility problem where NNS seek NS judgements.

David Little argues for an approach to pedagogical grammar which emphasizes the lexicon, defending it on communicative and learning principles. A grammar-based syllabus, at the lower levels at least, begins with rules which cannot emerge as psychological equipment until a critical mass of lexis is internalized; a naive lexical approach which focuses on words without reference to their syntactic and semantic associations is difficult to use. Giving a sample pedagogical application, Little shows how students can attempt reconstructions of authentic texts in which lexical properties, especially of verbs, form an integral and communicatively vital part of the lesson. Such lessons approach grammar rules in a quasi-inductive way. He briefly outlines the training which teachers might undergo to utilize such an approach.

An example of an actual lexical approach in use is given in Tim Johns' description of ongoing work at the University of Birmingham, which involves not textual reconstruction but instead the extensive use of computer concordances. Chief underlying motivations for the project are two suspicions, one similar to Westney's about the databases of traditional grammar and vocabulary teaching, which lead to inaccurate descriptions, and the other about their top-down methodology. Johns justifies formal attention to grammar and lexis on the basis of both student interest and in view of the possibilities opened up by the recent development of computer corpora. The result is the possibility of more highly inductive learning and teaching in which learners at the higher levels construct from the data the recurrent frames necessary for mastery of problem areas. The author provides illustrative examples of the utilization of concordances in the Birmingham program.

Russell Tomlin's long contribution offers as a partial solution to overly formal syntactic pedagogy not a lexical but a functional approach to grammar pedagogy. Broadly speaking, the suggestion is that discourse-pragmatic correlates of particular grammatical constructions should be made wherever they are available and well-established. The first problem, and the one which takes up most of the discussion, is the validation issue: how do we determine whether a

particular item is in fact used as part of a (presumably) conscious attempt to achieve some effect beyond the purely informational one and is so used to the same end by other speakers such as to establish a rule of use? The second problem is how, if at all, such relevant conclusions may be put to pedagogical use - whether through explicit instruction by rule, through consciousness-raising activities of some sort, or by another means. The illustrative example used throughout is the foreground-background distinction as it has been argued to be reflected in the main clause-dependent clause distinction.

The paper by Ruqaiya Hasan and Gillian Perrett, as its authors admit, will not be seen primarily as a piece on pedagogical grammar but rather mainly as one on "the social basis of linguistic theory", challenging the common assumption that "grammar is one area of study that can be discussed in convenient isolation from everything else" (P.219). In this respect it is similar to the Tomlin piece but carries with it the intellectual and terminological baggage of Halliday's systemic-functional school of linguistics, of whose assumptions a lengthy synopsis is given. Paramount in this system are the subsystems of the interpersonal, the textual, and the ideational, which are three faces of each linguistic event; it is argued that language as an object cannot be studied fruitfully apart from social context. The example discussed at length, the semantics of modality, is particularly appropriate to advancing their program, since the choice of modals is an area in which social-interpersonal roles play a large part in lexical choice; the authors argue that awareness of social context on the part of the teacher will determine in large part the best way to teach these verbs.

David Nunan's excellent paper expresses reservations about the applicability of acquisition theory to pedagogic practice. In this case the issue in question is what bearing Pienemann's (1985) claims about teachability have on the sequencing of grammatical structures introduced, at least to lower-level students. As a highly sophisticated readdressing of the issue of natural order of acquisition (see Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982 and earlier studies), Pienemann predicts the futility of trying to override natural sequences in teaching. However uniform these developmental facts may be, Nunan argues that they in no way translate into straightforward instructions for syllabus writing for a number of reasons including (a) the impracticality of omitting so-called advanced structures from input, (b) the fact that certain structures are first learned and used as unanalyzable formulas, and (c) the (not easily testable) possibility that certain structures may benefit from (or even require) a 'gestation period' during which they occur in input but not in output.

The only papers purporting to offer concrete results of any approach to grammar teaching are those by Virginia Yip and Peter Master. Yip reports on

the effect of what she calls a consciousness-raising activity (insofar as it is addressed to a specific problem area) involving the testing of student responses to a correction task on the frames of ergative vs. non-ergative verbs. Such verbs, which occasion grammatical subjects in patient roles (e.g., happen, occur, and many intransitive verbs like roll which have transitive counterparts), tend to be erroneously marked with passive morphology in interlanguage grammars apparently for semantic and/or L1 transfer reasons. The controlled pretest-posttest study shows performance improvement in an experimental group following explicit discussion of the impossibility of certain forms and the possibility of others. Master's paper reports on two more or less identical quasi-experimental studies of English article instruction in which groups of university writing students, some given explicit and systematic instruction on the use of English articles and some not, were compared on pre- and posttests. Instruction was shown to make a difference in student performance, although the qualification is added that the intensity and sequencing of this instruction may have played a key role in outcomes.

There are two major generalizations which come out of this book. The most universally expressed of these is the belief that there is a role for explicit attention to form in language instruction; there is scarcely a trace of Krashenian sentiment here, though there is also no great support for traditional grammar syllabi. The overall tone of the contributions is exploratory and tentative, and the authors are in general forthright about this inconclusiveness. This is a virtue of the book, since there are few if any claims to validation. Some of the arguments for one approach or another are based on illustrative examples which might not generalize well. Will RG, LFG, or GPSG offer us much beyond what Hubbard says they will, and is this very much to begin with? How will awareness of language in social settings help us teach relative clauses or morphology? Are disparate intuitions about acceptability/grammaticality really a pervasive and vexing problem? Certain authors such as Cook, Tomlin and Johns are careful to hedge their bets on their respective arguments. Moreover, the measures of attainment given by Yip and Master do not, unfortunately, rule out the Krashenian claim that what is being measured is the ability to monitor well on an administered posttest rather than the ability to perform with nativelike accuracy in naturalistic production.

Another feature of the book is the recurring theme of the importance of the lexicon as a focus in grammar instruction, as evidenced in around half of the papers. This is an interesting focus which derives its strength from at least two sources. One is current grammatical theory, which in Cook's terms 'minimizes the acquisition of syntax, maximizes the acquisition of vocabulary items with lexical entries for their privileges of occurrence' (P.43). The other is the recent

attention given, largely in conjunction with concordance work such as Johns', to the role of the lexicon in language learning. Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) argue that "lexical phrases" take a sort of intermediate place between word and syntax and that they are "form/function composites" (1992:11) which play a central role in L1 acquisition and ought to play a greater one in L2 pedagogy. Lewis (1993), in a highly advocatory work on lexical syllabi, argues that

> Language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar. Lexis is the core or heart of language but has always been the Cinderella...language teaching has traditionally developed an unhelpful dichotomy between the generalizable, pattern-generating quality of grammar and the apparently arbitrary nature of individual vocabulary items. The reality of language data is more adequately represented by a Spectrum of Generalizability upon which grammatical or vocabulary items may be placed... (1993:89)

He echoes much the same sentiment as Westney about the inadequacy of traditional rule-formulations and argues for pedagogical activities much like the word-based reconstructions which Little describes.

One can imagine that it will be the second strand of thinking which will be the more influential one for readers of Perspectives on Pedagogical Grammar. Whatever the Krashenians have advocated in recent years regarding attention to form, grammar still seems to form an integral part of language-teaching programs and will undoubtedly continue to do so. This volume may aid teachers in the decision of how that grammar is presented, and it will hopefully stimulate research on the relative efficacy of lexically-oriented syllabi.

REFERENCES

Berman, R. (1979). Rule of grammar or rule of thumb? *International Review of Applied Linguistics 27:* 279-302.

Dulay, H., M. Burt, and S. Krashen (1982). *Language Two.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gregg, K. (1984). Krashen's Monitor and Occam's Razor. *Applied Linguistics 5:* 79-100.

Harley, B., and M. Swain (1984). The interlanguage of immersion students and its implications for second language teaching. In A. Davies (Ed.), *Interlanguage.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Krashen, S. and T.D.Terrell (1983). *The Natural Approach.* Oxford: Pergamon.

Lewis, M. (1993). *The Lexical Approach: The State of ELT and a Way Forward.* Hove, U.K.: Language Teaching Publications.

Long, M. (1983). Does second language instruction make a difference? A review of research. *TESOL Quarterly 17:* 3:359-382.

Nattinger, J. and J. DeCarrico (1992). *Lexical Phrases and Language Teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pienemann, M. (1985). Learnability and syllabus construction. In K. Hyltenstam and M. Pienemann (Eds.), *Modelling and Assessing Language Development.* Clevedon Avon: Multilingual Matters.
Rutherford, W. (1980). Aspects of pedagogical grammar. *Applied Linguistics 1 (1):* 60-73.
Rutherford, W. and M. Sharwood-Smith (1985). Consciousness-raising and universal grammar. *Applied Linguistics 6 (3):* 274-282.
Yorio, C. (1994) The case for learning. In R.Barasch and C.V. James (Eds.), *Beyond the Monitor Model.* Boston: Heinle and Heinle.

Howard Williams is a PhD candidate in UCLA's Department of TESL and Applied Linguistics.