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

### Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6921v6hm

### Journal
Issues in Applied Linguistics, 6(2)

### ISSN
1050-4273

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### Publication Date
1995-12-31

### DOI
10.5070/L462005221

Peer reviewed

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

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*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
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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.

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

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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
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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.

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