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Issues in Applied Linguistics

Title
The Study of Second Language Acquisition, by Rod Ellis. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994. vii + 824 pp.

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6wg540t3

Journal
Issues in Applied Linguistics, 6(1)

ISSN
1050-4273

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Publication Date
1995-06-30

DOI
10.5070/L461005209

Peer reviewed

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The field of second language acquisition (SLA) research, now more than 25 years old, is expanding rapidly and widening the scope both of its research interests and perspectives (e.g., cognitive, grammatical, neural, pragmatic, and socio-interactive aspects of language learning and use) and of its applicability to other fields (e.g., anthropology, cognitive psychology, second/foreign language teaching, sociology, theoretical linguistics). With three journals devoted primarily to SLA research (e.g., *Language Learning, Second Language Research, Studies in Second Language Acquisition*) and numerous others regularly publishing articles on the topic (e.g., *Applied Language Learning, Applied Linguistics, Issues in Applied Linguistics, TESOL Quarterly*), the task of presenting a comprehensive review of the literature on SLA has become a daunting one indeed. Ellis' *The Study of Second Language Acquisition* is an attempt to accomplish just that task.

Ellis claims that the acceptance of SLA as a discipline in its own right depends upon its status as a defined field of inquiry and the existence of a body of research and knowledge related to it (p. 3). With this volume, he sets out to satisfy these defining criteria and thereby to establish SLA as a discipline in its own right. He first delimits the range and scope of the field of SLA research and then comprehensively reviews the existing SLA literature in a logically organized fashion so as to demonstrate the conceptual coherence of this broad, multi-perspective, and somewhat diverse field.

The Study of Second Language Acquisition is aimed primarily at future second/foreign language teachers who, Ellis argues, would benefit substantially from knowledge of SLA research. This book can provide teachers with invaluable insights and help them to make their assumptions about SLA explicit and, as a consequence, to more effectively evaluate their pedagogic practices (p. 4). The text is also aimed at introductory level SLA students and SLA researchers in need of a reference text.

The text consists of 15 chapters organized into seven parts and is supplemented by an extensive glossary, a bibliography, and author and subject indices. Ellis sets out in Part One to define the field of SLA research by considering the basic questions which it seeks to answer and to

Issues in Applied Linguistics
ISSN 1050-4273
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Vol. 6 No. 1 1995 99-103

outline a conceptual framework for the remainder of the text. This framework distinguishes between "descriptions" and "explanations" of SLA phenomena and between the various subfields which have emerged over the past 25 years; these subfields include the effects of learner external factors (e.g., social, interactive, input based) and learner internal factors (e.g., L1 transfer, cognitive processes, linguistic universals) on SLA, the role of individual differences in SLA, and the influence of classroom instruction and interaction on SLA. In Parts Three through Six Ellis attempts to comprehensively and "descriptively" (i.e., in a balanced and objective manner) review the SLA research conducted thus far in the subfields described above in an effort to answer the basic questions of the field. In Part Seven, he addresses the respective contributions of both empirical and theoretical approaches to SLA research and the applicability of the findings of such research to other fields, particularly to second and/or foreign language teaching.

Considering the organization and contents of the text in more detail, Part One has one chapter which serves as an introduction and which offers a brief summary of the scope of research conducted in the field of SLA and provides the reader with necessary background information. This chapter also outlines the conceptual framework of the text and provides a rationale for its organization. Following this framework throughout the text, Ellis separates research which seeks to describe SLA phenomena (Part Two) from that which seeks to explain it (Parts Three to Six).

Part Two consists of four chapters and considers the nature and defining characteristics of the interlanguage systems of second language learners (SLLs). These four chapters address the description and analysis of learners' errors, the patterns and sequences of acquisition of various structures in SLA, the variability observed in the interlanguage systems of SLLs, and the pragmatic aspects of learner language.

Part Three, with two chapters, offers potential explanations of SLA phenomena based upon factors which are external to language learners. The first of these chapters considers the effects of social factors such as gender, social class, ethnic identity, and social context of learning on SLA. The second addresses the influence of input (e.g., modified input such as motherese or foreigner talk) and interaction (e.g., attempts to obtain comprehensible input and collaborative discourse) on SLA.

The three chapters of Part Four consider the potential of learner internal factors to explain SLA phenomena. One chapter reviews literature on the effects of language transfer from, for example, a first language on observed SLA phenomena. Another chapter considers the potential of numerous cognitive accounts such as Monitor Theory, the Multidimensional Model, and information processing, variability, and skill learning models to explain L2 acquisition and L2 competence. The third chapter addresses the

influence of linguistic universals in the form of innate linguistic rules and principles and observed typological generalizations on SLA phenomena.

Part Five addresses the literature that seeks to explain individual differences in SLA and contains two chapters. The first of these chapters discusses the potential of individual learner differences such as beliefs about language learning, age, aptitude, and motivation to explain observed individual differences in SLA. The second chapter investigates the role of differences in cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies in accounting for individual differences in SLA.

The two chapters in Part Six are devoted to research on the acquisition of a second language (L2) within a classroom context. One chapter is on the influence of interaction in the classroom on SLA and the other considers the potential of formal classroom instruction to alter the rate, sequence, or the level of ultimate attainment in SLA.

Part Seven, containing a single chapter, serves as the conclusion of the text. In this final chapter, Ellis discusses the respective roles of empirical and theoretical research in the field of SLA and offers a review of various epistemological positions regarding the construction and evaluation of a theory of SLA. This chapter also addresses the thorny question of to what extent and how the results of SLA research can ethically be applied to other disciplines, most importantly to second/foreign language pedagogy.

Ellis is, in my opinion, successful in establishing the legitimacy of the field of SLA research as an independent and valuable discipline which, notably, exists in symbiotic relationship with a number of other fields with related research interests (e.g., anthropology, linguistics, psychology, second/foreign language pedagogy, sociology). He is also generally successful in providing a coherently organized and comprehensive review of the last 25 years of research in the field of SLA. *The Study of Second Language Acquisition* reviews an enormous quantity of literature from multiple perspectives including not only the traditional psycholinguistic perspective but also from the sociolinguistic and theoretical linguistic perspectives investigating numerous aspects of learner interlanguage systems and the processes underlying L2 acquisition. Even so, Ellis almost entirely neglects a body of research which approaches SLA from a neural perspective and which is included in other much shorter general texts on SLA research (e.g., *An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Research* by Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991 and *Issues in SLA: Multiple Perspectives* edited by Beebe, 1988).

As previously mentioned, this text is aimed primarily at future second/foreign language teachers and also at introductory level SLA students and SLA researchers. Although I consider the text to be an invaluable reference tool for established SLA researchers and to serve as an appropriate introduction to the field of SLA for students from any discipline, I doubt that it could feasibly be used as a textbook for an introductory level

course due to its length; it seems unlikely that students could cover the nearly 700 pages of actual text within a single term. Although the text is logically organized into discrete chapters and sections which are largely independent of one another, I hesitate to suggest that an instructor assign only certain chapters of the text because of the risk that students would miss out on critical information or an appreciation of the breadth and scope of research in the field of SLA. A second weakness of the book as an introductory text is its lack of study questions and exercises at the end of each chapter which can serve to provoke thought and discussion of the fundamental issues and to afford students an opportunity to begin thinking of how the issues raised and the results presented in the text might be applied to language pedagogy or could be further researched in future studies. Such questions and exercises seem especially important for future language teachers who might be reading the text in an earnest attempt to gain an awareness of the field of SLA research and attempt to apply the theoretical concepts and empirical results of this research to the actual practice of language teaching. Ellis does, however, provide readers with an extensive glossary of key terms which appear throughout the text in italic type. He also offers quite helpful suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter accompanied by descriptions of the relevance and strengths of each of the references. The glossary, in particular, makes this text very approachable for students from any discipline who are just beginning their study of SLA.

The Study of Second Language Acquisition is ideally suited as a reference tool not only for established SLA researchers who, although experts in their own subfields, may benefit from an overview of the fundamental issues and research findings in other subfields, but also for students of SLA and future second/foreign language teachers who are seeking either an introduction to the field as a whole or an overview of research within a particular subfield. Despite minor shortcomings, the text provides an extensive, well organized, and largely unbiased review of the literature in SLA, including a comprehensive and balanced selection of research from a broad range of perspectives addressing diverse issues. Furthermore, the text is supplemented by a 38-page glossary containing entries identifying the researcher with whom the term originated or is closely associated, providing citations of the research in which the term first appeared or is exemplified, and offering a descriptive yet concise definition of the term. Also, Ellis provides both author and subject indices which allow the reader to conveniently locate discussions of research conducted by a particular author or related to a given topic.

Due to the ever widening scope of the field and the existence of multiple research perspectives, the task of providing a comprehensive, balanced, and coherently organized review of the literature on SLA is becoming increasingly more difficult. At the same time such a text is

becoming a virtual necessity for SLA students and researchers alike who seek to maintain a satisfactory level of familiarity with research conducted within the various subfields of SLA. In my opinion, Ellis' *The Study of Second Language Acquisition* is a solid, balanced, and reasonably comprehensive SLA reference text which provides SLA students and researchers alike with an invaluable resource tool.

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