



BOOK REVIEW

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| Title: | Introducing second language acquisition (third edition) |
| Series | Cambridge introductions to language and linguistics |
| Author: | Muriel Saville-Troike & Karen Barto |
| Publisher: | Cambridge University Press |
| Year: | 2017 |
| No. of pages: | xi + 233 pages |
| ISBN: | 978-1316603925 |

Introducing Second Language Acquisition is a textbook in the series, Cambridge Introductions to Language and Linguistics, and this is the third edition since its initial release in 2005. The main changes of this new edition include updated content and references with consideration of closer connections between theories and language instruction. In particular, “Teaching Tips” is added as a feature which suggests the methods of organizing classroom tasks. Another new element, “Internet Resources”, provides related websites or other media sources.

This book consists of seven chapters which include an introduction (Chapter 1), with the remaining chapters covering the foundations (Chapter 2), linguistics (Chapter 3), psychology (Chapter 4) and social context (Chapter 5) of second language acquisition (SLA), second language (L2) communicative competence (Chapter 6), and implications for L2 teaching and learning (Chapter 7). At the end of the book, the appendices consist of an answer guide to the self-study questions of each chapter, a glossary, and references, as well as both a subject and language index, providing readers a convenient means of self-checking and searching. The whole book is centered on three key questions: What exactly does the L2 learner come to know? How does the learner acquire this knowledge? And, why are some learners more successful than others? Each chapter provides a preview, exposition and summary of the basic terms and theories in SLA as well as offering self-study activities and recommending external resources for further reading.

The purposes of this book are, firstly, to introduce a fundamental knowledge of second language learning to students for general education in humanities and social sciences; secondly, to arouse interest in second language acquisition (SLA) and encourage further reading and study; and thirdly, to offer practical assistance for language learners and future

teachers. Thus, this book is aimed primarily at undergraduate students in the humanities, the social sciences, and education; however, it is also appropriate for graduate students with little prior knowledge of linguistics.

The first chapter offers brief definitions of key terms in SLA. A distinction is made between L1 and L2 based on which language is first acquired. Vivid examples are provided for readers to obtain a better understanding throughout the opening chapter and the whole book. The authors give examples of a Japanese child in the USA ‘picking up’ English based on informal L2 learning, and an English student taking French classes as a form of formal learning, and SLA is posited as being the phenomenon of “adding languages”.

Chapter 2 develops the approach of the previous chapter by reviewing the main theoretical frameworks of SLA through linguistic, psychological and social lenses, and presents a brief overview which is extended in the three chapters that follow, which address the three key questions posed in the introduction of the book. The authors illustrate the frameworks visually with tables and timelines, and compare and contrast the different approaches. For instance, a table is provided to compare the focuses of different SLA frameworks.

Chapters 3-5 constitute the main body of the book. Chapter 3 clearly addresses the first key question from a linguistic perspective by expositing components in language that the learner needs to know, from the different viewpoints of well-known scholars such as Noam Chomsky. The second key question is emphasized in Chapter 4, which comprehensively articulates the process of language learning through examining theories such as critical period hypothesis, information processing, controlled processing, automatic processing, etc. The third key question, emphasizing reasons for different degrees of language learning success, is explained in Chapter 5, which attributes learner differences and social factors to, with particular reference to Lev Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development.

With its focus on communicative competence, Chapter 6 sheds further light on the different roles which linguistic, cognitive and social aspects take in improving learners’ L2 ability. Communicative competence is said to be the combination of linguistic knowledge and L2 use. The final chapter offers answers to the three questions put forward in the introduction. In brief, L2 learners acquire a body of L2 linguistic knowledge and pragmatic and communicative competence. Learners acquire L2 knowledge through innate capability, prior knowledge, language input, interaction and automatization. The different levels of success of L2 learners arise due to social context, social experience, the relationship between the learners’ L1 and L2, aptitude, motivation, age, and instruction. The answers are in line with Ellis’s (2015) perception of SLA in his recent book. According to the discussion on the key questions, useful implications for L2 teaching and learning are offered for readers.

On the whole, this well-written textbook is suitable for undergraduate students mainly in humanities, the social sciences, and education, as well as graduate students with insufficient knowledge of SLA. Undergraduate students can benefit from the book by gaining basic knowledge of second language learning. The book also stimulates readers’ interest with both a sense of humor and appropriate metaphors. For instance, the complexity of SLA is likened



to the difficulty of blind men touching and describing an elephant; the authors make this comparison because single perspectives from different disciplines cannot provide a holistic picture of the complex SLA phenomena. Additionally, using examples of learning various languages as L2s helps language learners comprehend SLA principles. Meanwhile, it indicates the concept of multilingualism, which embraces the importance of language diversity in keeping with Franceschini's (2009) appeal for diversity in multilingualism. Practical suggestions on language instruction are useful for graduate students who may be in-service language teachers. I have benefited greatly from this book's utility as an SLA learning guide. Therefore, it is worthy of recommendation to students, teachers and other interested readers alike.

THE REVIEWER

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