INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a Second Language

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RATIONALE FOR THE BOOK

In modern society, the majority of the world's citizens speak one or more second languages and learning a second or third language in childhood is a normal part of the lives of many people. In many countries, such as Singapore, Indonesia, Finland, India and Nigeria, it is often an aspect of socialization typical of a multilingual and multicultural environment. The bilingual or multilingual communicative repertoire that many people make use of in such settings is an important part of their identities. For many others, learning a second language may commence later in life, either at primary or secondary school, and may be essential for education, employment or social survival, as well as many other purposes. Fluency in a second language, particularly an international language such as English, is now mandated by educational policies in many countries, and the teaching of second languages requires a considerable investment of resources at many different levels, including investment in policy and curriculum development, teaching and teacher training, textbook development, technology, and assessment.

While it is now important to be cognizant of the plurilingual nature of language learning and use, and the increasing relevance of translanguaging in multicultural education (e.g., García and Wei, 2014), a key focus is on the learning of English as a second or additional language. The learning of English has been the subject of a considerable amount of research and theorizing in applied linguistics for over half a century, particularly since the research domain of second language acquisition (SLA) emerged in the 1970s. A great deal has been researched and written since then within SLA studies, from cognitive, interactionist, and sociocultural perspectives. Much of this research has focused on the acquisition of the grammatical system of English as a second or additional language and on the role of input and output in promoting grammatical development, as well as the contribution of individual factors such as age, motivation, aptitude, affect, and personality. The benchmark for acquisition has typically been the monolingual native speaker of the target language. Missing from the SLA perspective, however, has been a broader view of the

nature of second language knowledge and use – one, for example, that considers the second language in its own terms as a component of the speaker's bilingual or multilingual competence, rather than being a defective form of the native-speaker's language. In addition, the SLA paradigm has typically excluded a focus on other dimensions of language knowledge and use apart from grammar, such as the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, pronunciation and vocabulary, as well as the acquisition of pragmatic and intercultural second features of language use. This gap in the literature prompted the present book.

The Purpose of this Book

The chapters in this collection seek to move the study of learning English as a second language beyond its typical narrow focus and to provide a more comprehensive overview of learning. To do this, we invited a number of scholars and applied linguists to contribute chapters on language learning processes as they occur across a wide range of domains of language use. The intention was to provide a variety of different perspectives, since no single learning theory can account for all aspects of the development of English as a second language.

The book is aimed at an audience of pre-service and in-service teachers and teacher educators who are seeking a comprehensive coverage of the field, as well as graduate and postgraduate students wishing to gain an authoritative and up-to-date starting point for their studies or research. To that end, the book offers tasks for further reflection and suggestions for essential reading, as well as coverage of the various topics included.

The contributors were asked to address three main areas:

1. The nature of the domain/construct/skill: a brief overview of the topic of the chapter and its key dimensions.
2. The key learning issues for this domain: the issues covered would depend on the topic, but could include:
   - factors that influence the development of proficiency in the domain;
   - how development is characterized;
   - differences between novices and experts;
   - links to proficiency frameworks.
3. The implications for teaching and assessment.

Contributors were invited to use the areas above as a framework for their chapter, or to adapt this structure according to the domain they wrote about. While, as we have mentioned, the focus of the book is primarily on the learning of English, several authors also included the learning of other languages in relation to English. This book may also be relevant, therefore, to readers whose interests lie in languages other than English.

The guide contains nine sections, which aim to organize and reflect different dimensions of the diverse and complex scope of learning English as a second or additional language.

Implications for an Understanding of Learning English as a Second Language

The chapters contained in the various sections of the book present a wide and diverse range of perspectives on the learning of English. Nevertheless, there are themes and implications that permeate the chapters as a whole, and we outline four of the major themes below.

LEARNING AND LEARNERS

One major motif that runs throughout the guide is the focus on who language learners are, as the authors reflect on:

LEARNERS AS EMERGENT BILINGUALS OR MULTILINGUALS

Discussion of L2 learners' language development and use has traditionally foregrounded the monolingual native speaker as the reference point. The target of learning has been narrowly defined and referenced to L1 norms, failing to acknowledge the distinct role that the L2 and other languages may play in shaping learners' multilingual and multicultural identities. Many of the contributors argue that a second or additional language forms part of the learner's multilingual competence (or translanguage competence). Second language learners can more appropriately be described as emergent bilinguals or multilinguals who integrate their use of an additional language with other languages they know.

THE ROLE OF AGENCY AND IDENTITY

Agency has been defined as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001: 112). Kalaja, Alanen, Palviainen, and Dufva (2011: 47) comment: "L2 learners are no longer viewed as individuals working on their own to construct the target language, but very much as social agents collaborating with other people and using the tools and resources available to them in their surrounding environment". In many of the examples in this collection, the learners are engaged actively and purposefully in their language-using experiences. The learners set goals for themselves and make use of the situation and resources available to them to achieve their goals.

Identity refers to how learners position themselves in relation to speakers of other languages, and how this positioning is shaped by their experience of self in their other language or languages. L2 learners, particularly adults, are often positioned as novices, despite the fact that they may be proficient in several other languages. In the case of learning in academic contexts, L2 learning involves entry into a community of practice and the development of a disciplinary identity as learners acquire disciplinary knowledge.

LEARNING AND LANGUAGE

Language is viewed by contributors to this book as a complex and dynamic phenomenon. Language learning thus involves taking account of:

THE SITUATED NATURE OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Second language learning takes place in a diversity of both formal and informal contexts, each of which reflects a different configuration of elements that shape the nature of interactions learners are engaged in. Contexts include the home, classrooms, workplaces, social situations, heritage learner environments and technology-enhanced learning contexts, each of which involve different roles, participants and power structures, as well as different purposes and means for using a second language.

A DYNAMIC RATHER THAN A STATIC UNDERSTANDING OF LANGUAGE

As summarized by Pennington (2015: 149), this view of language involves a shift in perspective "from monocompetence, defined as knowledge of an autonomous, unvarying, and uniform system acquired in a homogeneous speech community, to multicompetence, defined here as use of an interactive, variable, and non-uniform system acquired in a heterogeneous world of intersecting groups and individuals".

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AS MORE THAN THE ACQUISITION OF GRAMMAR

Contributors demonstrate the need to broaden the focus of research well beyond the acquisition of the grammatical system of language. In contrast to the traditional SLA approach to learning, which focuses on the acquisition of grammatical rules that develop in a linear fashion, language learning is no longer viewed simply as a cognitive issue involving mastery of the linguistic system. Instead, it is seen to involve a multidimensional change in both the resources learners use to fulfill socio-communicative goals and the affordances beyond the traditional classroom space they make use of in acquiring them (Jenks, 2010).

MULTIMODAL INTERACTIONS IN DIVERSE SITUATIONS THAT MERGE TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF LANGUAGE AS SEPARATE SKILLS

The spoken and written texts learners encounter and use are increasingly integrated and multimodal. Pedagogical approaches for developing literacy and communication skills described by many of the contributors are based on a view of language as social practice, i.e. one in which the different skills are often 'merged' through learners' participation in real-world activities that involve multimodal forms of communication.

LEARNING AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

As many of the contributions reflect, there is a need to broaden current concepts of language learning to expand understanding of:

THE NATURE OF 'DEVELOPMENT' IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

No single theory of development or acquisition can account for how learners progress in their language learning trajectories. Perspectives in this guide view development in a number of ways: as incremental improvement in proficiency as determined by greater fluency, accuracy and pragmatic effectiveness, as well as growing confidence and risk-taking; as a movement from novice to expert language user; as a transition from outsider to insider within a community of practice; as acquiring an expanding range of learning resources and affordances; as developing membership of different kinds of communities through social media; as developing a metalanguage for talking about language and texts; making a transition from collaborative and independent practice; as reconstructing one's understanding and view of the world and one's place in it; and as the ability to transfer learning from one context (e.g., the classroom) to the workplace.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Contributors emphasize the need to recognize the multifaceted nature of language learning and of language use. Atkinson (2011) emphasizes that second language acquisition is a very complex phenomenon with many different dimensions. It requires multiple theories of second language acquisition to provide a complete understanding of it. Contributors to this book refer to different views of learning to explain dimensions of L2 language learning: incidental learning; scaffolded learning; learning as socialization; learning through participation and apprenticeship within social groups; learning through observation and participation in social practices; autonomous and self-directed learning; learning through modeling and guidance from experts; and language learning as the negotiation and development of identities.

LEARNING AND LEARNING CONTEXTS

The role of context is highly significant in language learning. New perspectives offered in these chapters highlight the need to consider language learning contexts in terms of:

THE NEGOTIATION OF CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

A second or additional language is a resource for participation in cross-cultural encounters and experiences and for the development of intercultural communicative competence. This involves the ability to mediate and translate between languages and cultures in diverse settings involving speakers with multiple linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

CHANGING LEARNING AFFORDANCES

The new opportunities or 'affordances' for language learning that are available through technology, the internet and the media, and the resulting shift from classroom-based learning to out-of-class learning as a primary source of both input and output for many second language users, has prompted the need to reconceptualize the nature of second language learning. New learning affordances provide opportunities for different kinds of interaction and language use, as well as access to different learning processes that are available in classroom-based teaching.

RECONFIGURATIONS OF THE NATURE OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

While from a cognitive perspective it was often suggested that a language was not teachable but could be 'acquired' through experientially based learning, drawing on implicit rather than explicit instruction, contributors to this guide offer different perspectives on instructional contexts. Contributors describe a variety of roles for explicit classroom-based instruction, including strategy training, modeling expert language use, comparing pragmatic features of languages, and translation activities, as well as activities that involve implicit learning. Explicit and implicit teaching are seen to tap into different learning processes.

CONCLUSION

This introductory chapter foregrounds our aim in editing this book – to expand the range of current perspectives on what it means to learn English as a second or additional language. Our intention in the following pages is to provide readers with a broad and composite set of accounts of language learning, written by authors well-versed in the topics that are covered, that can be used as a starting point for further reflection, reading and investigation. In compiling this collection, we stressed to the contributors that they did not need to take any particular theoretical stance on language learning, but to offer their own theoretical frameworks and perspectives. In this respect, we hope that the book opens up many avenues for further discussion, exploration and research in an area that is of the utmost importance for the field of English language teaching.

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