Introducing Second Language Acquisition

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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About the book

This book is a brief but comprehensive introduction to the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The intended audience is primarily undergraduate students, but it is also suitable for graduate students who have little or no prior knowledge of linguistics.

My goals in writing this book are threefold: (1) to provide a basic level of knowledge about second language learning phenomena to students as part of their general education in humanities, the social sciences, and education; (2) to stimulate interest in second language learning and provide guidance for further reading and study; and (3) to offer practical help to second language learners and future teachers.

Scope and perspective

I have included a broader range of SLA phenomena in this book than is the usual case: those involved in both adult and child second language learning, in both formal (instructed) and informal (natural) contexts of learning, and in diverse sociocultural settings. Since my own professional identity and commitment are interdisciplinary, I emphasize the importance of integrating linguistic, psychological, and social perspectives on SLA even as I recognize the differential nature of their assumptions and contributions. An effort has been made to maintain balance among them in quantity and quality of representation.

The focus of this book is on the acquisition of second language "competence," but this construct is broadly considered from different points of view: as "linguistic competence" (in the sense of underlying grammatical knowledge); as "communicative competence" (adding notions of requisite cultural knowledge and other knowledge which enables appropriate usage); and as knowledge required for participation in communicative activities involving reading, listening, writing, and speaking.

Design

Each chapter of this book considers three basic questions: *What* exactly does the L2 learner come to know? *How* does the learner acquire this knowledge? *Why* are some learners more successful than others? Chapter 1 introduces the most basic terms and concepts, beginning with "What is SLA?" Chapter 2 provides a foundational background, ranging from the nature and distribution of multilingualism in the world to generally accepted notions of contrasts between first and second language acquisition. The chapter concludes with a preview of the different theoretical frameworks of SLA which will be surveyed. Chapters 3 to 5 focus in turn on different disciplinary perspectives: linguistic, psychological, and social. Chapter 6 focuses on the competence required for academic and interpersonal functions, and on the interdependence of content, context, and linguistic knowledge. The final chapter briefly summarizes and integrates answers to the basic *what*, *how*, and *why* questions that are posed throughout the book.

Each chapter includes a preview of its content and a summary. Chapters 1 to 6 conclude with suggested activities for self-checking of understanding and for class discussion or individual exploration. Chapters 2 to 6 include annotated suggestions for further reading on each major topic in that chapter. Important technical concepts are presented sequentionally with key terms listed at the beginning of chapters and highlighted with explanations and examples in the text. A comprehensive glossary is provided for student reference, and the subject index allows for integration and reinforcement of concepts across topics and disciplinary perspectives. All terms which appear in the glossary are highlighted in the text, whether or not they are listed as key terms.

Acknowledgments

Any introductory survey of a field is indebted to many sources, and this is no exception (as the relatively long list of references suggests). I am particularly grateful to Karen Barto in the preparation of this work: she developed the suggestions for further reading and chapter activities, and she has contributed significantly to other aspects of conceptualization and development. I am also grateful to colleagues who provided input on earlier drafts (especially Rudy Troike, Peter Ecke, Renate Schulz, and Mary Wildner-Bassett), although they do not bear responsibility for my conclusions. My students at the University of Arizona have been most helpful in providing relevant examples and in indicating where clarification in my presentation was necessary. I could not begin to make an enumeration, but I thank them all.

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