

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY TEACHERS AS SCHOLARS SUMMER SEMINAR 2004

Final Project: Annotated Bibliography
Suggested Readings in SLA Research and Practice

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INTRODUCTION

The field of second language acquisition can be viewed as consisting of two distinct areas that ideally inform each other while pursuing different goals. SLA research seeks to answer questions related to the “what” and “how” of language acquisition. Second language teaching, on the other hand, seeks to answer pedagogical questions related to utility and applications in the classroom. The teacher, in a sense, becomes the conduit for both the experimental and interpretive aspects of the field of SLA.

In order to facilitate an integrated understanding of both areas, we have compiled the following sources with a brief overview of each, highlighting what we found to be the most relevant features to second language teaching. Our list is, of course, by no means comprehensive but may serve as a gateway toward further reading. In choosing our sources, we aimed to find those that were current, approachable, and relevant. We hope these books and articles will be instrumental in helping language instructors to broaden their understanding of current research and its practical applications.

L2 Research:

Cook, Vivian (1993). *Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

This book is a guide to Second Language Acquisition research methodology and goes into the merits and failings of particular SLA techniques. Most of the book assumes that language is represented and acquired by the human mind in ways that are different from any other knowledge. The final chapter looks at research which makes the opposite assumption, i.e. that language can be accommodated in a broader framework of how people store and acquire knowledge in general rather than being seen as something unique and peculiar of its own. Cook believes it is oversimplistic to only see L2 learning as a relationship between the L1 and L2. The focus should be on the learner's own system as it develops closer towards L2. Interlanguage (reference to Larry Selinker) attempts to explain the fossilization in the L2 learner's system. Cook states that linguistics provides a useful perspective on L2 learning, but it is only one of the disciplines that SLA research can draw on. He points out that L2 learners are all different, few achieving the same level in the L2 as in L1. He makes the distinction that L2 learners should not be treated as two native speakers in the same mind, but seen as having the unique compound system called multi-competence. He says, "They are successful bilinguals, not failed monolinguals." He feels that SLA researchers seem to have neglected the fact that the goal of SLA is bilingualism. L2 users are not imitation monolinguals in a second language, but possessors of a unique form of competence in their own right.

**Cummins, Jim. "Immersion Education for the Millennium: What We Have Learned from 30 Years of Research on Second Language Immersion." Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.
<http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/morepapers.htm>**

In this article, Cummins summarizes research findings from evaluations of French immersion programs throughout Canada. In all of the early immersion programs (beginning in kindergarten or grade 1) students gain fluency and literacy in French without loss of their skills in English when tested in grade 5. By grade 6, their receptive skills in French are close to those of native speakers, however their productive skills lag behind natives of the same age. Cummins attempts to explain these differences and then outlines a framework for successful pedagogy in immersion programs.

Lightbrown, P.M. 2000. Anniversary Article Classroom SLA Research and Second Language Teaching." *Applied Linguistics*; 21: 431-462

Lightbown's article serves as a review of the dialogue between SLA research and instruction. She cites 10 "Generalizations From SLA Research" and discusses each in detail. Throughout the article she reviews the history of research and classroom practices while bringing the reader up to date in both areas. Lightbown stands out as being a "teacher's researcher" and is a strong advocate of classroom-based research. Her approach is well captured by the following quote, "When researchers make strong claims that are at odds with the views that teachers have developed through their experience with learners, and when those claims are made on the basis of research which has been done in contexts which do not reflect reality as the teachers know it, they are likely to alienate teachers and lead them to dismiss researchers as ivory tower oddities."

Meara, P. Review article: The Rediscovery of Vocabulary. *Second Language Research* 19, 2 (2003): pp. 95-128.

This article reviews four recent books of current research in vocabulary acquisition. The study of vocabulary acquisition has moved from being neglected to a position of some importance. This importance seems to be increasing as lexical issues become more central to theoretical linguistics. The view of I.S.P Nation in his book is that vocabulary needs to be systematically integrated into any course with very specific activities. In the book by D. Singleton, the themes that emerge are the importance of componentiality and connectivity in the lexicon, the dynamic nature of lexical processing and the idea that the lexicon is a complex, interactive network, not just a static collection of words that grows or shrinks in ways we can easily describe. Finally J. Read argues in his book that the widely accepted distinction between receptive and productive vocabulary needs to be rethought. He sees these assumptions as gross oversimplifications. He believes that the idea of vocabulary context is a crucial concept. Words do not have meanings in isolation, only in relation to other words that they appear with. Any approach to vocabulary testing that fails to appreciate this is missing out on the fact that meanings are not given, but have to be negotiated.

Swain, M., & Lapkin, S (1995). Problems in output and the cognitive processes they generate: a step towards second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 16(3), 371-391.

This article is a reaction to Krashen's well known Input Hypothesis, which focuses on input as critical to language acquisition. Swain counters by putting forth the "Output Hypothesis", which states that output is critical to the acquisition process, as it serves a metalinguistic function. According to this view, while learners are producing output, they become cognizant of their errors or "notice the gap" between their own output and the target language. By engaging in "co-reflective metatalk" with their peers, learners receive ongoing feedback which leads to self-reflection and increased linguistic awareness. Swain's article is not without criticism, which, like the responses to Krashen's input model, state that the role of output may overemphasize what the learner can do without

external (pedagogical) help and feedback. Although it may not be sufficient as a pedagogical approach, it is worth considering, as output clearly does contribute to the development of fluency and possibly, further acquisition of target structures.

Van Patten, Bill. "Second Language Acquisition Research and Foreign Language Teaching, Part I." *ADFL Bulletin* 23, no.2 (Winter 1992): 52-55

In Part I of this article, Van Patten explains that second language researchers are not methodologists, but like first language researchers are interested in how the brain works. In this paper he summarizes the findings of researchers that should be of interest to language teachers. He hopes that these findings will help teachers evaluate particular teaching techniques. For example, he states that research has shown that learners pass through certain transitional stages and that certain grammatical morphemes tend to emerge in a fixed order. In addition, he explains that language transfer is not just a transfer of first language habits to the second language and not all learner output is governed by rules. Learners need access to meaningful input in order to acquire language.

Van Patten, Bill. "Second Language Acquisition Research and Foreign Language Teaching, Part II." *ADFL Bulletin* 23, no.23(Spring 1993): 23-27.

In Part II of his article, Van Patten reviews the findings of research dealing with the effects of explicit instruction on second language acquisition. He states that explicit grammar instruction does not alter the fact that learners pass through certain stages and must be psycholinguistically ready for the grammar instruction they receive. In general, learners in a classroom setting acquire more language than those in a non-classroom setting, but error correction has little effect on acquisition. For acquisition to be successful, learners require meaningful input. In his conclusion, Van Patten cautions teachers that many questions about second language acquisition remain.

L2 Applications:

Cook, Vivian (1993). *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*, 3rd Ed. London: Arnold; NY: Oxford University Press.

The purpose of this book is to make available the current research on second language acquisition and to give ideas as to how it might help language teaching. One chapter describes overall models of L2 learning in relationship to teaching and another chapter relates teaching methods to L2 learning by looking at six styles of language teaching. Thus, some chapters move from SLA ideas to language teaching and the later chapters move from teaching to SLA research. Excellent focus questions and discussions topics accompany every chapter. Cook states that "it is an illusion that having only the second language in the classroom forces the students to avoid their first language. It simply

makes it invisible.” He feels that teachers should make systematic use of both languages rather than try to exclude the first language which will then free the teacher from long-standing assumptions. He says that teachers should be telling students how successful they are as L2 users rather than implying they are failures for not becoming like native speakers.

Lightbrown, P.M. (2003). *How Languages are Learned*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

This very readable (and affordable) introduction to the study of language acquisition covers the main theories of both first and second language acquisition, and their practical applications to the classroom. Research on such variables such as learner characteristics, age, motivation, etc. as well as a chapter on interlanguage (Selinker (1972) are also discussed. First published in 1999, the research cited (the author’s own, among others) is contemporary and presented without jargon despite the complexity of the subject matter. Clear and concise, this book is a worthy investment as an introduction, as a source of reference, and as a basis by which one can judge new pedagogical methods and developments in second language teaching.

Long, M. 200). Focus on Form in Task-Based Language Teaching. In R. Lambert & E. Shohamy (Eds.), *Language Policy and Pedagogy: Essays in Honor of A. Ronald Walton* (pp. 179-192). Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

*Steven Krashen is well known to language instructors for his emphasis on the importance of meaning in communicative language teaching. His claim, however, that a meaning based approach is sufficient for successful language acquisition has been disputed by several researchers. In this article, Michael Long looks at 3 approaches to language teaching: (1) the traditional, “grammar out of context” approach, which he labels “focus on **forms**”; (2) the implicit, meaning-based approach: and (3) a combination of the two, which he calls “focus on **form**”. It is this last approach which, according to his research, (and that of others in the field) is most successful in classroom teaching. In addition, the article defines and discusses Task-Based Language Teaching, or TBLT, as an effective classroom teaching method. Task based syllabus design and pedagogic options for integrating a focus on form within task- based lessons are also presented.*