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## Book Reviews

### ***Second Language Acquisition Applied to English Language Teaching***

Michael Lessard-Clouston, ELT Development Series.

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The English Language Teacher Development (ELTD) series, published by TESOL Press, casts its net wide in appealing to a broad population of teachers with a variety of topics. Other works in the series have looked at issues such as language classroom assessment, materials development, motivation, and teaching skills such as pronunciation, reading, speaking and vocabulary. Michael Lessard-Clouston's *Second Language Acquisition Applied to English Language Teaching* is a welcome addition, in that it provides some broad theoretical underpinnings which support much of the thinking and practice in the other volumes. As noted in the series preface, all these short resource books are written in a jargon-free and accessible manner, providing a theoretical base and leading to practical application.

The purpose of this book is to provide a broad understanding of second language acquisition (SLA) so that it can inform classroom practice. The field of SLA is complex and multi-faceted, with a range of theories that frequently overlap and at times conflict with each other. Yet Lessard-Clouston's premise is that a basic knowledge of SLA fundamentals will deepen our understanding of ourselves in the role of teacher, and our students as English language learners.

This in turn leads to better teaching practice and better learning. The author himself spent over a decade as a university teacher in Japan and draws on that experience in his writing.

In order to achieve its stated purpose, the book begins by defining SLA, and then goes on to present the five principles of SLA as posited by Krashen (2003). These principles had a formative influence on the emerging field and are still prominent in academic discourse today (most notably the input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis.) A knowledge of these principles undoubtedly lays the foundation of much of what is common classroom practice. Following that, three essential components of English language learning are outlined: input, output, and interaction. All three of these must necessarily be present in some degree for language learning to occur, yet the way teachers approach these will either help or hinder students' learning processes. For example, input should be aimed at, or slightly above, the learners' current ability level. Ideally, this input then becomes 'intake,' which occurs when learners appropriate that language for themselves and use it in their own language production. In other words, it then becomes output. Output, and in particular "pushed output" (Swain, 1993), not only gives learners a chance for meaningful language practice, but also helps them move from semantic to syntactic processing. Through the process of oral interaction, students provide the input and output which constitute a meaningful exchange of ideas, which is why communicative language teaching and the associated practices of pair work, group work, and peer evaluation are so effective in language teaching.

After these essentials of SLA are introduced, a number of secondary issues are addressed: age, anxiety, error correction, and material selection. Although brief, the main arguments surrounding each of these are outlined, and a number of interesting points are made. For example, an important point is made here that we often think of anxiety as negatively impacting a learner's performance in the L2. However, as Spielmann and Radnofsky (2001) suggest, a facilitative anxiety known as cognitive tension may actually help our students to be alert and focused and thus perform at a higher level. The chapter on material selection is quite helpful, but again, very brief (four pages). Those wanting more than a quick

overview would need to follow up on the research presented in this chapter.

Finally, a very helpful concluding chapter puts forward an argument for the utility of SLA in classroom teaching. It is important that teachers and students alike are aware of the complexity of learning a foreign language. This is made even more important by the fact that there are so many myths surrounding language learning, and so many products on the market that offer “quick” and “easy” ways to learn. When students themselves have a clear understanding of SLA principles, their learning strategies are able to be aligned with the teaching practices in a course, so that both students and teachers are moving in the same direction.

As the field of SLA is so diverse and branches off in many directions, it was always going to be an ambitious task to distill everything down into a reader-friendly format that would manage to be adequately informative without glossing over significant concepts. This task was made even harder by the fact that there are many myths and misunderstandings surrounding language acquisition, and much of the scholarly research often seems far removed from classroom learning and teaching. This book succeeds to a large extent in having a solid theoretical base, drawing on influential and recent research from H. D. Brown (2014), Gass and Mackey (2015), Lightbown and Spada (2013), and Tomlinson (2017). Divergent viewpoints are acknowledged when they arise, but the author makes a case for which arguments are to be preferred, based on his many years teaching experience. For instance, while VanPatten (2003) argues that it is essential for output to have a communicative purpose, Lessard-Clouston points to the fact that many of his Chinese students improved their pronunciation and oral skills by performing a speech in front of a mirror, which did not meet the communicative purpose criterion. Throughout the book, Lessard-Clouston does not shy away from commenting on theory from the standpoint of personal experience.

When it comes to applying theory to practice, a good attempt is made, but readers may disagree as to how successful the book is. For example, Lessard-Clouston draws on his experience of teaching large classes in Japan, to make some suggestions for encouraging interaction. Suggestions include group work, brainstorming, and information gap tasks. Preservice teachers without much

experience would be intrigued by such suggestions, but anyone who has taught for longer than six months in Japan would probably already be doing these. A second suggestion, with an example, is made of a teacher in Japan who has her high school students conduct surveys with foreigners in a tourist city in Japan. There may be some readers who find this a unique idea, but anyone who has attended a JALT conference or who reads academic work in Japan would probably have already come across such ideas. When giving some practical tips for encouraging students, the advice to give a “high five” may not suit all teachers’ personal style, but the advice to exclaim, “Great mistake!” is one that I have not heard before but am eager to try.

The strength of this book is how it shows clear links between good classroom practices and theory. Some of these are quite controversial, such as whether to use students’ L1 in the classroom. There is evidence that L1 use is often beneficial and should not be discouraged (Hall & Cook, 2014), even though many university teachers have a “no Japanese” policy in their classrooms. There are also questions which can be used for personal reflection or group discussion at regular intervals throughout the book. This means that it could be read by teachers as professional development or used as a text in an introductory SLA course being taught in English to Japanese university students.

However, the strength of this text as a brief and concise overview of SLA means that some important issues are not addressed (such as willingness to communicate and classroom assessment), while other issues are touched upon but not explored in any depth (noticing hypothesis, communicative practice, focus on form). Most of these issues are dealt with in other volumes in the ELTD series however, and so they would need to be consulted for a fuller treatment of the topic.

Less experienced university teachers will find much of practical value here, while more experienced teachers will appreciate revising their understanding of SLA theory in order to polish their current practice. The friendly, conversational way the book is written, and the way it touches briefly on the most important issues in SLA, would mean it is ideally suited to an introductory course on SLA, or a course with Japanese students who are learning to be English teachers.

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