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Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition

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Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition

Vivian Cook (1993)

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Cook's *Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition* (hereafter LASLA) is a welcome addition to the field of second language acquisition (SLA) texts which have flooded the market. It is unique in its focus on linguistic growth in SLA research within a UG framework that has occurred in recent years. To my knowledge (in the field of second language acquisition), LASLA represents the first such text.

Chapter 1 begins with a disclaimer of sorts, that is, Cook makes clear that his focus is on linguistics, sociolinguistics, or language teaching. He does, however, make specific reference to work on the strengths of this text: Cook is up-front about his domain of coverage, but by citing work on all too rare in a field obsessed with borders. Having issued this disclaimer, Cook goes on to cite work of relevance to SLA research, including reference to the work of Weinreich on up through

Chapter 2 covers sequences in SLA, and discusses both the morpheme studies and later studies. The discussion of the morpheme studies is excellent, especially the discussion of their many problems. Cook makes an important point: many of the morpheme studies were not truly cross-sectional, but rather what he calls *single-moment* studies. The format introduced in this chapter and used throughout is boxed research summaries of major articles. The format is clear and readable, with studies discussed in detail in each chapter, giving the aim, subjects, focus, type of data, methods, and conclusions in a readable form.

Chapter 3 examines in detail the theory of Stephen Krashen. While noting that Krashen's second language acquisition theory (through, for example, appeal to a LAD), Cook also points out that Krashen's use of the term "second language" is different from that intended by linguists. Nonetheless, LASLA provides a judicious overview of Krashen's theory, as well as a sound criticism of them. Overall, this is a very balanced and insightful chapter.

Despite the earlier disclaimer, Chapter 4 takes up the more prominent social/sociolinguistic theories: Pidginization, Creolization, and Variation Theory. The discussion of the latter is once again excellent, covering the work of Labov, Ellis, Tarone, Huebner, and Young. Cook concludes that variation represents "a promising area for showing promise for the future rather than concrete results in the present" (p. 89). Cook also notes the fundamental differences between work on variation and Chomsky's idealized syntax, and notes that this is an acute problem for SLA research and that "syntactic variation may have to be reconciled in a different way" (p. 91).

The work of Pienemann et al. is the focus of chapter 5. Cook presents a lucid explanation of the Monitor/Teachability Hypothesis, which attempts to account for both a similar acquisition of second language and variation among learners. According to the research of Pienemann et al., the former is not supported by the data. Cook criticizes the work of Pienemann et al. primarily on two counts: the reliance on word order as evidence for the model is to apply to languages without movement (such as Japanese), and the concept of a Monitor is based on transformational generative grammar and so does not fit well with current theory.

Chapter 6 looks at learning and communication strategies. The discussion of learner strategies is excellent, covering O'Malley et al. Cook provides a complete listing of the various strategies uncovered in this research. However, there are some serious methodological problems, such as the use of the native language (L1) for one language (L2) for another during interviews. Cook also covers the work of Faerch and Kaschuba on communication strategies, but the main focus is on the Nijmegen Project, which, among other things, looks at linguistic realizations but processes as well. In keeping with discussions of methodology and methodological problems in strategies research, including use of introspective data and a taxonomic approach to strategies.

Relative clauses are dealt with in chapter 7. Much of the important research on SLA and relative clauses is covered, including Comrie hierarchy, which also receives a brief summary. Again, there is an insightful discussion of the importance of relative clauses (clearly one of the strengths of LASLA) in relative clause research. Cook notes that while the use of relative clauses (tests, acceptability judgments, sentence combining) provides different perspectives on knowledge of relative clauses.

Particularly welcome is the frequent discussion of research methodology, an area that needs more attention in (second language/ applied linguistics) research. It is also refreshing to read a text written by someone who shows a good understanding of the field's coverage and its place in the larger scheme of things, and also evidences an awareness of developments in the field beyond that domain. While it is not a comprehensive SLA text and would not be ideal for a general audience, it cannot be faulted for not being something it was not intended to be. However, despite the narrow focus, it is a valuable ground of SLA research. Besides, Cook (1991) already covers much of what is omitted from other texts for non-graduate students in linguistics.

For that audience, it is an outstanding text.

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