

## Introducing Second Language Acquisition: Book Review

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**Abstract:** This paper is a book review of Saville-Troike's (2006) *Introducing Second Language Acquisition*. The paper serves as a guide to second language learners who perceive Saville-Troike's book as complex material. Again, it provides a synopsis for second language teachers who need a summary of the tenets for second language acquisition for teaching and research. Descriptive design was used in reviewing the seven chapters of the book. Thus, all the contents were critically analyzed. The paper is segmented into three main sections – the introduction, the contents, and the conclusion.

**Keywords:** Book Review, ELT, Language Studies, Second Language Acquisition

### 1. Introduction

In language teaching, learning, and research, books and other materials play vital roles. Without materials or some guidelines on grammar studies, stakeholders of language studies would find it strenuous to appreciate some key concepts (Owusu, 2022). In the literature of linguistic studies, one area that has enjoyed a lot of theories and models is *Second Language Acquisition and Learning*. Such theories and frameworks provide firm underpinnings for teaching, learning, and researching of second language in SLA. While some of the theories are easy to comprehend with little or no guidelines, the complex ones need the explication and guidance of language expert for learners to grasp them. Because printed materials have proven to be useful in language teaching and learning, many authors have over the years dedicated their time to writing and publishing content that could aid language teaching and learning. However, most second language learners find it demanding to read and comprehend some published language materials.

Consequently, the goals of the author of *Introducing Second Language Acquisition* are threefold: (1) to provide a rudimentary level of information about second language learning phenomena to learners as part of their overall education in humanities, the social sciences, and education; (2) to arouse awareness in second language learning and offer direction for supplementary reading and study; and (3) to give hands-on assistance to second language students and future educators (Saville-Troike, 2006). So, the author has designed each chapter of the book to answer three basic questions: *What does the L2 learner come to know? How does the learner acquire this knowledge? Why are some learners more successful than others?* This review aims to summarize the contents of *Introducing Second Language Acquisition* in simple language for my students to grasp. Again, other stakeholders of SLA (for example, language teachers) may find this review useful in their teaching, learning, and research tasks.

### 2. The Contents of the Book

Chapter One, *Introducing Second Language Acquisition*, focuses on four thematic areas: Second Language Acquisition (SLA), second language, first language, and diversity in learning and learners. The author commences chapter one by indicating that SLA is the study of individuals and groups who are receiving education on a language after learning their first language as young children, and to the process of learning that language. The additional language is called a second language (L2), though it may be the third, fourth, fifth, or even the tenth language to be acquired. The is also usually labeled the target language. According to this chapter, SLA emerged as a field of study from within linguistics and

psychology in a quest to provide certain answers. Chapter one also discusses what a second language is. A second language is primarily an official language used for education, employment, and other basic purposes. Thus, second languages have specialized designated functions for specific purposes. The author indicates that the concepts of first language, native language, primary language, and mother tongue are roughly synonymous since they are all languages acquired during childhood. Diversity in learning and learners is the last subsection in chapter one. Here, the author indicates that the basis for some learners being more successful than others is that learners differ in so many ways.

Chapter Two, *Foundations of Second Language Acquisition*, has several main themes: the world of second languages, the nature of language learning, L1 versus L2 learning, the logical problem of language learning, and frameworks of SLA. In the first subtheme, the author explains multilingualism as the ability to use two or more languages; bilingualism as the ability to use two languages; and monolingualism as the ability to use only one language. This subtheme also echoes the difference between Cook's (1988) concept of multilingual competence (multicompetence): the compound state of a mind with two or more grammars, and monolingual competence (monocompetence): knowledge of only one language. On the nature of language learning, the author echoes the role of natural ability. Thus, though humans are born with a natural aptitude or innate capacity to learn language, not all L1 acquisition can be attributed to innate ability. Children can only exhibit this natural ability when language is used around them. This suggests that society and other factors play a massive role in L1 acquisition.

Chapter Two also reinforces the three phases of L1 and L2 learning: initial, intermediate, and final states. The initial state in the minds of children for L1 is an innate ability to learn a language. It is composed exclusively of an innate ability for language acquisition which may or may not linger to be accessible for L2, or may be available only in some restricted ways. The intermediate state comprises both L1 and L2 as they progress from their initial state to their final linguistic systems. The two grammars in the intermediate states – child and learner grammars – go through basic processes, necessary conditions, and facilitating conditions before they reach the final state. The final state is the outcome of L1 and L2 learning. This is where native linguistic competence is achieved or developed.

The penultimate subsection of chapter two discusses the logical problem of language learning. Here, the book treats whether or not children can attain the final stage of L1 development with overall effortlessness and comprehensive success, given the intricacy of the linguistic system which they acquire, and their undeveloped mental capacity at the age they do so. The last subsection of chapter two provides a table of frameworks for SLA. Key among them include Structuralism, Behaviourism, Sociocultural Theory, Transformational-Generative Grammar, Functionalism, Humanistic Modes, Connectionism, Acculturation Theory, and Social Psychology.

Chapter Three, *The Linguistics of Second Language Acquisition*, has four subthemes of the nature of language, early approaches to SLA, Universal Grammar, and Functional Approaches. Under the nature of language, the author states that languages are systematic (they consist of recurrent elements), symbolic (they consist of symbols), and social (they reflect the social requirements of the society that uses them). The author also reviews some early approaches of SLA – Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, Interlanguage, Morpheme Order Studies, and the Monitor Model. The chapter ends with a review of Chomsky's (2002) Universal Grammar theory, and four of the Functional Approaches which have been influenced by SLA (Systemic Linguistics, Functional Typology, function-to-form mapping, and information organisation).

In chapter four, *The Psychology of Second Language Acquisition*, the author focuses on language and the brain, learning processes, differences in learners, and the effects of multilingualism. *The Language and the Brain* section reviews research studies that opine that language activity is not localised, but core linguistic processes are naturally contained in the left hemisphere. Such specification of the two halves of

the brain is called lateralisation. Under *The Learning Processes* section, the author reviews two major frameworks for the focus on learning processes. These are Information Processing (IP), and Connectionism. Under *Differences in Learners*, the author has examined certain key factors that create variances in learners: age, sex, aptitude, motivation, cognitive style, personality, and learning strategies. Of course, these variables are not exhaustive as other studies have examined other factors. For example, in Owusu *et al* (2015) it was seen that the family background of the learner plays a major role in the learner's language development. In the last subsection of chapter four, the author lists some positive *effects of multilingualism*. Some of them are an advanced cognitive and metalinguistic advantage, an advantage in the use of language for verbal meditation, and a consistent advantage in verbal and nonverbal tasks.

In chapter five, *Social Contexts of Second Language Acquisition*, the author examines communicative competence and two social context factors – microsocial, and macrosocial factors. The author defines communicative competence as 'everything that a speaker needs to know to communicate appropriately within a particular community.' The author also indicates that variances in monolingual and multilingual communicative competence are due in part to the dissimilar social functions of first and second language learning. Among the microsocial factors cited are *variations in learner language*, and *input and interaction*. Macrosocial factors in SLA cited in this chapter are the *global and national status of L1 and L2*, *boundaries and identities*, *institutional forces and constraints*, *social categories*, and *circumstances of learning*.

Chapter six, *Acquiring Knowledge for L2 Use*, examines the differences in linguistics terminologies of *competence and use*, and *academic and interpersonal competence*. Other subsections in this chapter are *components of language knowledge*, *receptive activities*, and *productive activities*. For competence, the author reemphasizes the point made in chapter 5 about communicative competence – every knowledge that a speaker is expected to know about to communicate well in a particular speech community. Language use, on the other hand, has to do with the ability to use language properly. This includes pragmatic competence. In explaining the difference between academic and interpersonal competence, the author prioritizes academic L2 activities (the four skills of English) as reading, listening, writing, and speaking. However, he prioritizes interpersonal competencies such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This subsection of chapter six also classifies receptive activities as reading and listening, and the productive ones as writing and speaking. In the penultimate subsection of chapter six, the author provides her readers with a synopsis of the five traditional classifications of language components: vocabulary (lexicon), morphology (word structure), phonology (sound system), syntax (grammar), and discourse. In the last section of chapter six, a detailed explanation of receptive and productive activities has been provided.

The last chapter, chapter seven, *L2 learning, and teaching*, has three thematic areas: integrating perspectives, approaching near-native competence, and implications for L2 learning and teaching. About integrating perspective subsection, the writer provides opinions on three questions: *What exactly does the L2 learner come to know? How does the learner acquire L2 knowledge*, and *Why are some learners more successful than others?* Among other issues, the author cites some implications for L2 learning and teaching:

- Considering the goals that individuals and groups have for learning an additional language,
- Setting priorities for learning/teaching,
- Being cautious in subscribing to any instructional approach, and
- Recognizing achievement in incremental progress.

### 3. Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the seven main contents (chapters) of *Introducing Second Language Acquisition* by Saville-Troike. Each chapter of the book has a chapter preview (which provides readers with a synopsis), a chapter summary, a list of activities (that guide readers in revising the content they read), and a further reading list. Again, the *Answer guide to questions for self-study* in the supplementary section of the book provides readers with responses to questions in the various chapters of the book. Like most published books, the *Glossary* section gives readers a hands-on explanation of some of the key concepts of linguistics mentioned in the book. Although the book is an introductory piece, the author could have done better by expanding the literature on the main tenets of linguistics explained in chapter six. Since the five traditional classifications of language components – vocabulary, morphology, phonology, syntax, and discourse – is instrumental in language studies, having a chapter that vividly explains the key tenets would have been a great idea.

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