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Corder's article "The significance of learners' errors" (1967) and Selinker's paper "Interlanguage" (1972) are most often considered birth indicators of the Second Language Acquisition field (henceforth SLA) as a scientific discipline. Four decades after its inception, SLA is still in its embryonic stage and thus faces problems common to any emerging discipline. In *Problems in SLA*, Michael Long addresses some of these problems and offers "a proposal concerning how the field might develop greater coherence and a clearer focus than it has now" (pp. vii).

Organized into 3 parts or sections comprising two chapters each, the volume reviews current issues in SLA Theory (Part I), Research (Part II), and Practice (Part III).

In chapter 1, "Second Language Acquisition Theories", the SLA discipline is described as a "young science" characterized by a multiplicity of theories and a lack of theoretical consensus which is argued to impede its development as a science. Contrary to views of theoretical plethora as a healthy sign of research productivity, Long believes abundance of SLA theories as a problem obstructing scientific progress specially among opposing theories when one (or some) fails to account for certain aspects of how people learn second languages. Theory evaluation is then proposed as a means to readjust or abandon faulty theories. Finally, while assuming a relationship between SLA theory and language teaching, the chapter closes with insights about the differences, usually overlooked, between both enterprises.

Following Laudan's notions of science and scientific progress, chapter 2, "Problem Solving and Theory Change in SLA", posits a way to overcome theory proliferation. If science is a problem-solving activity, then scientific progress is to be measured in terms of problem-solving effectiveness of different theories. Thus, theory proliferation can be overcome through theory evaluation (in absolute and comparative terms) to weight the problem-solving effectiveness of a theory as opposed to rival theories. Eventually, theory evaluation will lead in some cases to a theory change (decline). A detailed account of evaluation criteria and timing for evaluation is offered in the chapter.

Part II, focused on research, comprises chapter 3, "Age Differences and the Sensitive Periods Controversy in SLA", and chapter 4, "Recasts in SLA: The Story So Far". This section of the book discusses two issues that remain controversial in SLA research and have important implications for theory construction and evaluation. In the former chapter, adult failure to achieve native-like proficiency in a second language is identified and maturational constraints are argued to account for it ("sensitive periods" hypothesis). Conclusions purporting the opposite are then dismantled. Last, the author identifies adult failure as a relevant issue for both, theory construction and theory evaluation. Next, chapter 4 reviews a second issue discussed in the SLA literature, the role of recasts for language development. After a literature review on existing research, Long asserts that "although clearly not *necessary* for acquisition, recasts appear to be *facilitative*, to work better than models, and to do so incidentally, without interrupting the flow of conversation and participants' focus on message content" (pp. 94). Nonetheless, recasts effectiveness with certain classes of structures or forms is argued as a fact still in need of research. Finally, the chapter closes with methodological issues for future research and pedagogic implications for the classroom.

Motivated by SLA theory and research, chapter 5, "Texts, Tasks and the Advanced Learner", partly describes Task-Based Language Teaching (henceforth TBLT), an approach to language teaching practice best suited for the advanced adult learner and language for specific purposes instruction. Considering "tasks" as "ways in which work is commonly conceptualized in almost all walks of life" (pp.124), TBLT uses realistic tasks to meet students' communicative needs –rather than texts which are argued to disguise a traditional approach to language teaching. TBLT is claimed to be psycholinguistically tenable as shown in its methodological principles of which "focus on form" (occasional reactive attention to form coherent with the student's internal syllabus and while attention is on communication), and "elaborated input" (use of elaborated rather than simplified input to progress in acquisition) are two examples.

Last, chapter 6, "SLA: Breaking the Siege", unkindly responds to some of the critics addressed to the SLA discipline. According to Long, these accusations –referred as *sociolinguistics naiveté*, *modernism*, and *irrelevance for language teaching*- are in need of debate since they have undesirable effects on SLA's credibility as a scientific discipline. The chapter ends with a discussion on logistic problems that also weaken the field and suggestions to overcome such problems.

As stated in the back cover of the book, *Problems in SLA* comes as a valuable tool for, among others, educators, graduate students, applied linguists, and specially for SLA researchers. While chapters 3, 4, and 5 are extraordinarily informative for anyone working within the SLA discipline, chapters 1, 2, and 6 are unutterably illuminating for those devoted to SLA research.

The discussion on the sensitive period hypothesis and recasts, while occasionally arduous to follow due to the extensive literature review, provides important insights and data to disentangle controversial views and suggests future research interests. On the other hand, language teaching methodology and pedagogy can benefit much from the

presentation of TBLT. Specially interesting is the debate about theory construction and evaluation offered in chapters 1, 2, and 6. Due to the cumulative SLA agenda, we often lose sight of what SLA is about. This discussion will help clarify a point that sometimes does not seem so obvious: SLA is a scientific discipline about language acquisition. This discussion should certainly be taken into consideration in any graduate program training future SLA researchers.

In conclusion, *Problems in SLA* is undoubtedly worth reading or even an essential centrepiece in the SLA literature.

NOTE

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