

Essentials of SLA for L2 Teachers: A Transdisciplinary Framework

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A field of study that is at once vibrant and interdisciplinary such as second language acquisition (SLA) tends to rely on myriad theories, hypotheses, and frameworks. *Essentials of SLA for L2 Teachers*, a booklet containing a proper balance between theory and practice, has come at an opportune moment. For it presents arguments pertaining to the multifaceted nature of second language acquisition and also suggests practical instructional solutions. Specifically, the book discusses elements of a transdisciplinary framework characterizing SLA as situated in social and cultural milieu—a clear departure from the traditional, cognitive SLA.

Divided into eight fundamental themes, namely theme 1: L2 knowledge is complex and dynamic, the booklet emphasizes, in Chapter 1, the importance of critical perspectives toward SLA through “...the multifaceted nature of language learning and teaching” (p. 6). In so doing, the author discusses the macro, meso, and micro levels of pedagogical acts, which reminds the informed reader of the Bakhtinian perspective on language use, broadly defined. In this respect, the act of learning and teaching a second language is neither mundane nor mechanistic.

Chapter 2 revisits the time-honored concept of communicative competence which is augmented by the author’s discussion of the following terms: repertoires, languaging, and translanguaging. These terms are then explained through a reader-friendly style of writing and pivot on the “...view of languages as autonomous systems...” (p. 36). This view segues neatly into the concept of “... communicative repertoires and super-diverse communicative repertoires” (pp. 52-53). Repertoires, the author argues, result from the greater diversity of experiences we have, thereby necessitating that language lessons be taught with the objective of learning not merely language but learning to become a critical being in an increasingly complex world.

The complex world we live in calls for semiotic resources, the gist of Chapter 3. In this chapter, the author delineates key considerations in second language acquisition e.g., multimodality, and meaning potentials. These two aspects, coupled with communicative repertoires and super-diverse communicative repertoires, are springboards from which to consider L2 learning as “...situated and attentionally and socially gated,” an overarching theme of Chapter 4.

In Chapter 4, the author reintroduces the role of input, but adds an important dimension to it; that is, “...individual [learners] are active agents of [second language learning] process [involving]

emotion.” (p. 66). In addition to input, L2 learners are supposed to pay attention to situated linguistic elements or what the author refers to as “...situational cues in the linguistic input that make salient and call individuals’ attention to particular components and their form-meaning relationships” (p. 66). In this regard, input is not perceived as simply linguistic features to be regurgitated following the Krashenian tradition.

Chapter 5 begins with the assertion that L2 learning takes place among adolescents and adults with the understanding that they have already acquired their L1, making the L2 acquisition/learning process even more complex. This situation requires a better understanding of the links between the meanings of semiotic resources and their contexts of use, which means such concepts as indexicality, mediation and mediational means are important. The practical aspect of this argument is that “...L2 classrooms are significant socializing contexts, [and] L2 teachers are significant agents of socialization” (p. 87). Simply put, both the teacher and learner are empowered.

Chapter 6 follows up on the roles of socialization in L2 learning by focusing on learners’ social identity. The chapter begins with the operational definition of the term social identity in general, followed by a section discussing social identity and L2 learning. Added to this is another section focusing on digital communication and changing identities, which are quite relevant given that our world, including an L2 world, is becoming more and more digitalized. The chapter ends with an eminently quotable remark as follows: “L2 learners inhabit multiple, intersecting social identities, both real and imagined, which are significant to the development of their semiotic repertoires...” (p. 101).

Identities aside, Chapter 7 goes on to discuss the roles of motivation, investment and agency in L2 learning. This is most appropriate because many L2 instructional contexts have witnessed a number of cases where motivation alone is insufficient; the kind of investment made by the L2 learner as an agent of change makes a big difference in terms of acquisition/learning development. The author ends the chapter by inviting researchers and practitioners to ponder over how L2 classrooms provide practical instructional opportunities.

Chapter 8 brings the whole SLA scenario to new heights, focusing on literacy and instructional practices. It is an emphasis on the role of literacy that makes this booklet worthwhile, for if long-lasting SLA outcomes are to be realized, one cannot be complacent with “learning” a second language. Rather, L2 learning has to be embedded in the literacy scheme. In fact, SLA with a focus on literacy implies that the language acquisition device (LAD) does not simply reside in the L2 learner’s brain but in the nature of interaction such learner is engaged in.

All the chapters converge to provide a transdisciplinary framework for a better nuanced and more informed SLA. The author manages to weave all these strands of knowledge into a seamless piece of (instructed) second language acquisition—bridging the divide between theory and practice. Certainly, this booklet is a must-read for those keenly interested in SLA.

About the reviewer:

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