

## **Book reviews**

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### **MIND MATTERS IN SLA**

*Edited by Clare Wright, Thorsten Pike and Martha Young-Scholten*

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The field of second language acquisition (SLA) aims to study the acquisition of a second language in children and adults. Research in SLA is guided by a variety of theoretical positions and draws from the fields of linguistics and psychology. The usage of a variety of theoretical approaches leads to ongoing debates in the field of SLA research, and the application of SLA research in pedagogy is an area of contention (Ellis, 2010). Although many researchers in the field of SLA believe that SLA theory and second language pedagogy inform each other, others are of the opinion that they are separate (Juffs, 2011).

According to its editors, the book *Mind Matters in SLA* is offered as a companion to the previous volume *Input Matters in SLA*, published in 2009. The book is divided into three parts; Part One *Language and Mind* consists of four chapters, Part Two *Properties of Interlanguage Grammars* consists of four chapters, and Part Three *Transitions in Acquisition* has three chapters. Due to the book's focus on grammar and the human mind, the editors recommend reading the chapter 'What is Grammar? A Universal Grammar Approach' by Cain in Part One along with the chapter 'Using Psycholinguistics Techniques in a Second Language Teaching Setting' by Marinis and Cunnings in Part Three, before moving on to the remaining chapters in the book.

The chapters in Part One focus on concepts that are essential to understand first and second language acquisition. The chapter by Cain presents an engaging and humorous breakdown of language structure using tree diagrams along with simple explanation, and also explains concepts such as universal grammar and the language acquisition device. The following chapter focuses on the emergentist view of how syntactic structures are built, and how these structures are acquired. Chapter Four gives

an overview of the concept of Poverty of Stimulus and its effects in first and second language acquisition. According to the editors of the book, Chapter Five is unique in that a chapter on language evolution is uncommon in books on second language acquisition; this chapter debates the idea of the presence of a specific module in the human brain that is responsible for language learning as against a learnability approach to language evolution.

The chapters in Part Two highlight work on currently debated topics such as phonetics, morphosyntax and the lexicon. Chapter Six delves into the mystery of missing inflections in the syntax of language learners; the chapter also details a study that compared learners' oral production and their results from processing tasks. The following chapter highlights the question of the possible link between the acquisition of vocabulary and the acquisition of syntactic features in language learning. Chapter Eight is a delight for practitioners and researchers who are curious about why learners' phonological competence, that is, their pronunciation skills, often differ from their level of overall linguistic competence. Details of three studies that were carried out to explore the reasons for differences in learners' accents are laid out in the chapter. Chapter Nine, which is the last chapter in Part Two, presents a case study of a bilingual migrant who displayed phonetic attrition to an unusual extent. The study's conclusion referring to code-mixing is of interest, as it raises the possibility that code-mixing may serve to assist first language maintenance in the case of bilinguals whose first language usage is minimal.

The chapters in Part Three focus on the transitional stages in language acquisition. Chapter Ten gives various examples of psycholinguistic techniques such as elicited imitation, which can be used to assess language production. The authors also call for pre-service teachers to be trained in these techniques that can be a useful addition to existing assessment tools. The following chapter presents an overview of the various types of memory associated with language acquisition, as well as the debates surrounding the actual memory systems associated with language learning. The final chapter in the book presents the exciting psycholinguistic theory of Processability Theory, which aims to explain how all second language learners follow the same stages in acquiring morphosyntactic structures regardless of their mother tongue. The chapter also refers to the recent version of the Processability Theory and suggests an alternative to

practitioners' dilemma of why learners do not always learn what is taught. The usefulness of the Processability Theory to practitioners in terms of understanding learners' stages of progress as well as its usefulness in classroom pedagogy is highlighted.

Although the chapters focusing on grammar may be heavy reading for some readers, the book *Mind Matters in SLA* is engaging and informative, and is a valuable resource for EAL teachers, preservice teachers, SLA researchers, and teacher educators. The editors' recommendation to begin the book with the Caink chapter along with the Marinis and Cunnings chapter serve to build a foundation upon which other chapters can be better understood. The debates involved in the field of SLA research are highlighted in various chapters and these enable critical reading of the information presented. For the reader who is curious about the evolution of language, Chapter Five presents an overarching view of current theories. The chapter on psycholinguistic techniques provides practical tools for practitioners, and the chapter on the Processability Theory provides procedures to diagnose learner progress, thereby connecting SLA research to practice.

### **References**

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- Juffs, A. (2011). Second language acquisition. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews*, 2(3), 277-286. doi: 10.1002/wcs.106