

**Theories in Second Language Acquisition. An Introduction.** VanPatten, B. & Williams, J. (Eds.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 2007, pp. viii + 261.

Irene Alonso Aparicio  
Universidad de Granada

In *Theories in Second Language Acquisition: An Introduction*, Bill VanPatten and Jessica Williams, editors of the volume and professors at the University of Illinois in Chicago, introduce the reader with the main theoretical approaches in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) field today.

Organized in 12 chapters, the book presents some very complex notions yet in a very accessible and consistent way. Thus, in every chapter leading experts in the theories provide a description of a theory along with its main constructs, evidence supporting the theory, common misunderstandings, an exemplary study, and how the theory addresses empirical findings observed in SLA research.

The volume opens up with two introductory chapters in which the editors address the nature of theories and observed findings in SLA (chapter 1), and explore dominant theories prior to 1990 with an important impact today: Behaviourism and Krashen's Monitor Theory (chapter 2).

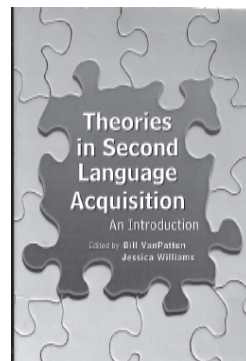
In chapter 3, White presents Universal Grammar, a model that views language learning as different from other kinds of learning and explains the logical problem of language acquisition –language knowledge goes beyond the input stimulus- by means of an innate linguistic faculty of the mind that seems to account for both first and second language acquisition.

In chapter 4, Bardovi-Harlig presents the Concept-Oriented Approach. Within this framework SLA is explained through a psychological faculty of the mind and it is viewed as the result of the acquisition and permanent reorganization of linguistic means to express semantic notions the learner already possesses from previous linguistic and cognitive experience.

The Associative-Cognitive CREED is presented by Ellis in chapter 5. This model assumes the same cognitive device for language learning as for any other kind of knowledge. This theory argues that SLA emerges from the learner's ability to induce regularities from the *constructions* –form-meaning mappings- encountered in the input according to their frequency.

In chapter 6, DeKeyser introduces Skill Acquisition Theory, which just as the previous model assumes the same cognitive processes for the learning of all skills. This theory holds that SLA results from the development of three stages. In an initial stage, bits of explicit knowledge are gained –declarative knowledge. Subsequently, explicit knowledge turns into behaviour through a smooth execution –procedural knowledge. And eventually, behaviour turns into near-native proficiency through consistent practice –automatic knowledge.

VanPatten introduces Input Processing in chapter 7, a model that accounts for linguistic data processing during comprehension rather than SLA more generally. VanPatten outlines a number of principles in making form-meaning connections during real-time comprehension.



In chapter 8, Pieneman presents Processability Theory, a model that just like VanPatten's framework does not account for the whole process of SLA but for output processing. Its basic claim is that learners can only produce linguistic forms that the language processor can handle at a given time, i.e. language development is constrained by processability. In addition, language development follows a processability hierarchy of grammatical structures.

In chapter 9, Carroll presents Autonomous Induction Theory, a theory that shares with Universal Grammar the argument of the Language Acquisition Device as driving force behind SLA. This theory holds that SLA results from changes in mental grammar through processes of *feature unification* –combination of features to create structures- and *categorical correspondence* –equation of a category of one type with a category of a different type.

In chapter 10, Gass and Mackey draw on aspects of Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Long's Interaction Hypothesis and Swain's Output Hypothesis to present the Interaction Approach. Within this framework, SLA is driven by interaction in that it supplies learners with modified input and feedback –both implicit and explicit- while showing them problematic aspects of their interlanguages and pushing them to process modified output.

In chapter 11 a vygotskian view is proposed by Lantolf and Thorne, the Sociocultural Theory. This model argues that human cognition emerges from participation in the sociocultural and historical contexts. Thus, SLA happens through the appropriation of knowledge in social and cultural interaction with the environment in which language is used as a tool of interaction.

In a concluding chapter 12, Ortega offers a magnificent review and comparison of the theories described in the volume and their account on the empirical findings observed in SLA. Finally, she proposes the need of a combined work with cognitive science, bilingual studies and social theories as a *sine qua non* in the development of SLA theories.

In conclusion, the relevance of the contents along with the expertise of the leading scholars behind them makes of *Theories in Second Language Acquisition: An Introduction* an indispensable reading for the beginning student of SLA, for those who devote themselves to the second or foreign language teaching enterprise, and for those researchers who work in related fields.