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BOOK REVIEWS

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Jenefer Philp, Rhonda Oliver & Alison Mackey (eds), *Second language acquisition and the younger learner. Child's play?* Amsterdam & Philadelphia: Benjamins, 2008, Pp. 334. ISBN 978 90 272 1984 8 (Hb), 978 90 272 1985 5 (Pb).

Despite the fact that most people in the world acquire at least some aspects of another language besides their native one before they reach adulthood, until recently child second language acquisition (henceforth child SLA) has received little attention. There may be two reasons for this neglect. First, while language acquisition data in general have often been used as external linguistic evidence for linguistic theory, they have rarely had an influence on the development of linguistic theory itself. Yet, understanding how language is and can be acquired is one of the central goals of linguistics (Chomsky & Halle, 1968; see also Fikkert, 2007). Second, first language acquisition data have often been considered particularly interesting because they can serve as a window on the innate processes and constraints on language. In contrast, the study of late second language acquisition has been considered important because it can shed light on the role of the first language in the acquisition of a second language. In comparison to these processes, early second language acquisition is essentially hybrid in nature: while children have already acquired a language and are thus no longer the naïve learners they were at birth, their first language may not be as entrenched as with late adult learners. Moreover, children's cognitive and social knowledge and behavior are different from those of adults. The hybrid nature of early second language acquisition as well as the specific cognitive and social factors which need to be taken into account make the study of child second language acquisition a particularly challenging field of research. Recently, the challenge has been taken up, as evidenced by the publication in 2008 of two edited volumes on the topic, viz. Philp, Oliver & Mackey's *Second Language Acquisition and the Younger Learner*, and Haznedar & Gavruseva's volume on *Current Trends in Child Second Language Acquisition*. The present review deals with the former book.

In *Second Language Acquisition and the Younger Learner*, Philp, Oliver & Mackey present a collection of studies which deal with various aspects of child SLA and use a variety of different methodologies. The book contains an excellent Introduction in which the editors present the volume and identify three main themes in the collection of papers, viz. (i) the social

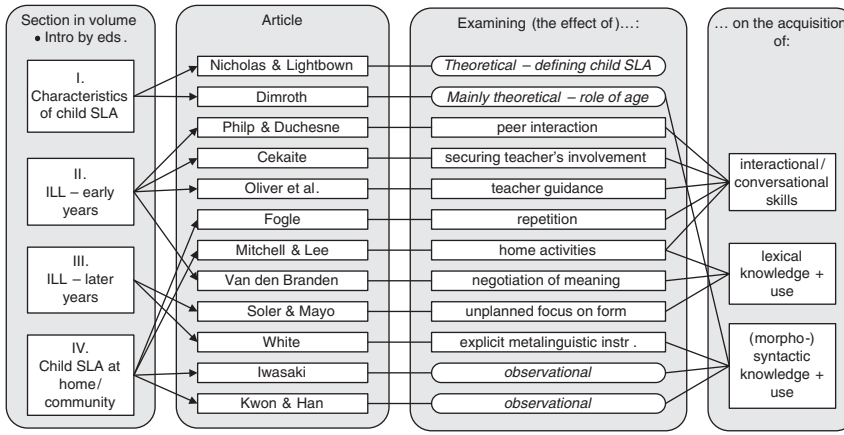

Fig. 1. Overview of papers in Philp, Oliver & Mackey (2008) (ILL = Instructed Language Learning).

context of L2 learning, (ii) pedagogy and child L2 learning and (iii) detailed pictures of L2 development. In Figure 1 I present an overview of the papers in the volume and the topics they discuss.

The book is divided into four main sections: I – Characteristics of child SLA; II – Instructed language learning in the early years of education; III – Instructed language learning in the later years of education; and IV – Child SLA at home and in the community. The division between section II on younger learners (aged 2–7 years) and section III on older child learners is based on the observation that there are some significant differences between these two age groups, as summarized and discussed in the contribution by Nicholas & Lightbown. For example, if the acquisition process starts when the child is 2–7 years, it is more likely that native-like proficiency will eventually be reached. Moreover, one important event which typically occurs around the age of 7 and is generally seen as a milestone in the child's linguistic development is the emergence of literacy. It is, for instance, fairly well established that most vocabulary learning after the age of 7 or 8 is based on print exposure (e.g. Anglin, 1993). However, the extent to which the acquisition of an orthography has an influence on the learner's acquisition of the target language phonology or on domains such as the acquisition of morphological or syntactic knowledge is an issue in need of further investigation (but see, e.g., Goswami, Ziegler & Richardson (2005) on the relation between the acquisition of literacy and the emergence of phonological awareness). While the contributions are organized according to the age of the learner and the type of learning (i.e. instructed language learning in the classroom or learning in a home setting),

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the rightmost block in Figure 1 shows that the papers mainly focus on the acquisition of target interactional/conversational skills and lexical and (morpho)syntactic knowledge and usage. It is unfortunate that none of the papers discusses the acquisition of phonology, as the strongest claims with respect to, for instance, the advantage of younger learners concern the acquisition of a second language sound system (see, e.g., Moyer, 2009).

In this review I will focus on four major topics taken up in the volume and discuss how one or more contributions deal with them.

A first important topic in the study of child SLA is the effect of the AGE at which the acquisition process starts. While it is recognized that the early acquisition of a second language has an impact on the psychological/emotional state of the speaker (e.g. research has shown that people who start learning a second or third language at an early age suffer less from Foreign Language Anxiety than older learners; Dewaele, Petrides & Furnham, 2008), the impact of the age at which a child is exposed to the foreign language remains to be investigated (Bloch *et al.*, 2009). The topic of age is dealt with in a well-written contribution by Dimroth, who summarizes different approaches to age effects (i.e. maturational, usage-based and learner varieties approaches) and discusses a case study on the acquisition of syntactic patterns by two children differing in age. She finds similarities as well as differences between the two children, but remarks that it is unclear whether the differences pertain to acquisition rate or to ultimate attainment. Dimroth also points to the potentially important effect of the children's prior linguistic knowledge, i.e. whether children are actually second or third language learners. This is an area in which relatively little research has been carried out (but see Cenoz, Hufeisen & Jessner (2001) and Ringbom (2007) for overviews on L3 acquisition). The topic of age is also dealt with by Oliver, Philp & Mackey in their examination of different types of task-based instructions provided to ESL children aged 5–7 and 11–12. They found that on-task examples were very helpful to older children, but did not lead to modified output productions in the case of younger learners. For instance, in one of the experimental conditions Oliver *et al.* set up, the teacher provided individual on-task feedback and examples (such as 'Very good, but now you have to ask ''where are they?''' and 'And you have to say what?') when the children were performing information gap activities in the classroom. While older children, with a greater cognitive maturity, profited from on-task feedback and modified their output, younger children did seem to notice the interaction as much as the older learners and modified their output more when the teacher provided pre-task examples for the whole class. This finding provides a strong argument for adapting instruction methods to the age of the learners. Age-related factors also crop up in Mitchell & Lee's discussion of the effects of home activities on the learning of English by three Korean girls differing in age. Their analysis showed that

the home setting offers an ideal opportunity for the younger learners to develop fluency and gain confidence, and for the older and more proficient learners to take the lead and offer scaffolding to the younger ones.

A second topic is that of CROSS-LINGUISTIC INFLUENCE. While language transfer is mentioned in the introduction as 'particularly interesting' with regard to child SLA (p. 10), we find, in fact, relatively little discussion or novel data on transfer in the volume. In White's contribution (discussed below) we find the observation that contrasting a target grammatical rule with the L1 rule helps learners in the acquisition of the L2 rule. In addition, there is one article which deals with the topic at length, viz. Kwon & Han's contribution, included as the last chapter of the book. Kwon & Han report on a case study of a Korean-speaking child acquiring English in the US, and find correlations between 'substratum transfer' (i.e. transfer whereby the L1 is the source of influence) and L1 dominance on the one hand, and between 'reverse transfer' (when the influence comes from the L2; Odlin, 1989) and L2 dominance on the other hand.

The third topic which receives major attention in the book is the ROLE OF INSTRUCTION. A number of contributions investigate the relative success of particular language learning methods. Soler & Mayo examine the effect of unplanned reactive and pre-emptive focus on form on EFL acquisition by adolescents. They conclude that concentration on form leads to uptake of new lexical items, especially when the focus on form episode was initiated by the learner rather than by the teacher. However, there was no clear correlation between learners' successful uptake and their scores on a delayed translation post-test, suggesting that the effect on long-term learning may be marginal. This lack of a clear effect somewhat weakens the thrust of the study, which, as the authors acknowledge, is exploratory in nature. Since the researchers considered uptake successful even when it occurred immediately after the feedback, the importance of the factor 'successful uptake' in their study can be called into question. The uptake may actually in some cases simply reflect the fact that the form was still in the leaner's short-term memory and was consequently faithfully repeated. In such cases, it will not necessarily facilitate acquisition. White reports on three interesting studies examining the effectiveness of meta-linguistic awareness on the acquisition of the English possessive determiners *his* and *her* in communicatively oriented classrooms and concludes that the learners' readiness to make use of their analytic ability, their learning style and motivation (deduced from the degree of effort made, and from the appearance of enthusiasm versus boredom) all greatly impact the learning process and the effectiveness of particular pedagogical tools. Van den Branden asks whether negotiation of meaning occurs during reading tasks in primary school classrooms, and whether or not it enhances reading comprehension. His data consist of classroom observations in eight classes of 11- to 12-year-old

children in Flemish primary schools. In contrast with earlier observations that young children are willing to discuss the meanings of lexical items, van den Branden finds that in his data negotiation of meaning in fact rarely occurs. He attributes this to the face-threat associated with display of non-understanding in the classroom, and argues for a reading approach in which the teacher minimizes the social threat by working with small groups to create an intimate learning environment. Iwasaki's contribution does not examine the role of instruction, but focuses on the developmental stages in the acquisition of Japanese verbal morphosyntactic structures by an L1 English–L2 Japanese speaking seven-year-old uninstructed child, who is learning Japanese in a naturalistic setting. Using a Processability Theory framework (Pienemann, 1998), Iwasaki characterizes the developmental stages this uninstructed child goes through and finds that the structures emerge in the same order as for instructed adult learners, confirming Pienemann's claim that 'teachability is constrained by processability' (p. 244).

Finally, three papers deal with CHILD–CHILD and CHILD–ADULT INTERACTION. Philp & Duchesne explore the potential benefits of in-class peer interaction for the SLA of a six-year-old child. They observe that peer interaction is important in creating an opportunity for the child to become an autonomous language partner, and point out that the language learner him/herself plays an active role and has to use his/her social skills in order to create relationships that will contribute to language acquisition. Cekaite provides a longitudinal analysis of two seven-year-old children in a Swedish immersion classroom and focuses on the way the children perform the interactional task of seeking to secure the teacher's attention. They observe how over the course of a year the children's initiating moves showed increased grammaticalization and more L2 vocabulary and how these gradually more target-like moves also led to increased teacher's uptake, which demonstrates the importance of 'seemingly mundane classroom interactions' for L2 interactional development (p. 127). Another type of interaction is discussed in the contribution by Fogle on the role of repetition in the acquisition of academic discourse (in the broad sense of any type of discourse related to academic skills, such as telling stories and giving instructions) in child–parent interactions in adoptive families. Fogle presents a qualitative analysis of mealtime conversations in two English-speaking families with adoptees from Russia or Ukraine, who upon their arrival in the US spoke Russian or a mix of Ukrainian and Russian, and observes that both adoptees used other-repetition to gain conversational turns and self-repetition to maintain turns. Fogle points to the active role parents or older siblings can play in pushing learners' productions.

In sum, *Second Language Acquisition and the Younger Learner. Child's play?* is a highly valuable and timely collection of studies examining various

aspects of child SLA. It especially directs our attention to the crucial role of the learning context in the acquisition process. While many contributions present data from case studies and the findings cannot readily be generalized to all or other learner populations (a caveat which the authors never fail to mention), the cases are always fascinating and the analyses are thorough. As such, the volume certainly succeeds in its goal to 'stimulate reflection about the unique nature of child SLA and to spark future research' (p. 15). I have one comment with respect to the subtitle of the book, 'Child's play?'. The editors explain this title by referring to the recent observation that not all children experience SLA as an effortless and enjoyable process, an observation which contradicts previous views (Foster-Cohen, 1999; McLaughlin, 1989). The editors hence invite the reader to consider this issue while reading the book (Introduction, p. 4). While the volume certainly offers food for thought in this respect, one could wonder whether in order to answer that question, we would not ultimately need to explore young learners' language learning beliefs (e.g. how difficult do they consider various aspects of the learning process to be?) and beliefs about language learning strategies (e.g. how useful do children find specific second language practice exercises?). In applied linguistics circles the importance of learners' beliefs has long been recognized, since various studies have shown that there is a connection between learners' beliefs and the strategies they use as well as their relative success at acquiring the target language (Horwitz, 1988; Wenden, 1999). Even young children have beliefs about language and language learning (Kolb, 2007), and studies investigating those beliefs (by means of, for instance, interviews) could provide further insight into differences between individual learners as well as between age groups, and could help us to understand to what extent children themselves perceive the acquisition process as play or plague.

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Jane Simpson & Gillian Wigglesworth (eds), *Children's language and multilingualism: Indigenous language use at home and school*. London: Continuum International, 2008. Pp. 288. ISBN 978-0-82-649516-7.

Children's Language and Multilingualism: Indigenous Language Use at Home and School, edited by Jane Simpson and Gillian Wigglesworth, is a volume which should be of interest to researchers working in a number of research areas, not only the area of child language. The book contains thirteen chapters dealing with issues related to language use in indigenous Australian communities. Many deal with issues impacting the field of child language, such as the different languages children in one community may be exposed to, differences between home and school language, and the problems in assessing competency in the children's language. Others deal with topics of relevance to all indigenous communities today. These topics range from language maintenance and language planning to cultural differences between dominant and indigenous cultures in terms of child socialization practices, forms of literacy, attitudes toward multilingualism, and the relationship between language and identity. They all share a central focus on indigenous Australian speech communities and the contemporary realities