

## REVIEWS

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**TENSE AND ASPECT IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: FORM, MEANING, AND USE.** *Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000. Pp. xvi + 492. \$34.95 paper.

Following previous work in L1 acquisition, SLA has witnessed a veritable explosion of research activity in the domain of temporality since the mid 1980s. In the hefty book under review here, Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig, for several years one of the most active protagonists in the field, sets out to organize the dislocated array of findings, methods, and approaches to date.

The book contains nearly 500 pages divided into seven chapters as well as a foreword by the series editor, an extensive reference section, and a combined author and subject index. It is impossible to do justice to the detailed discussions and analyses presented in this book. On the whole, the exposition is articulate and well supported with tables and examples. The book also contains several very useful overview tables of key studies, which illustrate both the diversity (in terms of data-elicitation techniques and analytic frameworks) as well as the limitations (in terms of research designs and target languages investigated) of L2 research on temporality.

Chapter 1 outlines the goals and organization of the book and provides a historical sketch of L2 research on temporality, which, according to the author, reflects the history of research in SLA in general. Chapters 2–6 explore five different approaches to understanding the emergence and development of temporal expression that “reflect the present state of the art of second language acquisition research” (p. 409); these include meaning and function (chap. 2), morphological form (chap. 3), lexical semantics (chap. 4), discourse structure (chap. 5), and instruction (chap. 6). Each of these chapters surveys a single framework of analysis and includes research on a number of target languages. Emphasis is on the identification of general trends, developmental orders, and acquisitional sequences. Following the crosslinguistic reviews, each chapter presents one or more of the author’s own (previously published) empirical studies of temporal expression in L2 English within the framework discussed in the chapter. Throughout the book, L2 corpora are examined from more than one research perspective to illustrate how the framework chosen colors the results concerning the developmental process.

Chapter 2 reviews studies employing the meaning-oriented approach, emphasizing that the expression of temporality is not restricted to morphological markers of tense and aspect but is always based on the combined application of different types of coding principles, including pragmatics, lexis, and morphosyntax. The overall trend is for L2 learners to move from pragmatic strategies to lexical expressions and finally to the morphological marking of temporal meanings, the latter not being achieved by all learners.

Chapters 3–5 are devoted to “functional form-oriented research” (p. 11) on the emergence and development of tense-aspect morphology. The first part of chapter 3 provides a rather cursory account of the tense-aspect systems in English, Dutch, German, Italian,

Spanish, and Swedish and describes sequences in the L2 acquisition of tense-aspect morphology in each of these languages. The second part presents a longitudinal study of the developing morphological expression of past time in L2 English, showing that learners first acquire the preterite, then the past progressive, the present perfect, and finally the pluperfect.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the extensive body of research done in the framework of the Aspect Hypothesis and the Discourse (or Narrative) Hypothesis. Chapter 5 also contains an interesting comparison of the expression of temporality in different types of narratives and considers how research on the influence of discourse structure on temporal expression can be extended to nonnarrative discourse.

Chapter 6 examines the impact of instruction on the development of temporal expression through a review of observational and experimental studies. Bardovi-Harlig concludes that “the tense-aspect system is learnable in a classroom setting” (p. 351) but also that “instruction is not a privileged variable. . . . The acquisition of temporal semantics of a second language remains the same linguistic process with or without instruction” (p. 406). Finally, chapter 7 (appropriately entitled “Past, Present, and Future”) summarizes the research presented in previous chapters, considers explanations, and outlines areas for further research.

This volume represents a solid contribution to one of the enduring achievements of SLA scholarship: It integrates a wealth of detail about the development of temporality in L2 and articulates the complex, sometimes contradictory findings and hypotheses that have been proposed in the field. The explicit attention to methodology is also much to its credit. There are nevertheless also some shortcomings and grounds for disagreement. First, some of the claims and conclusions in this book seem underdetermined by the available data (e.g., that the L1 only has a nugatory effect on the L2 development of tense-aspect). Second, the survey of research in chapters 2–6 is somewhat unbalanced. Some studies, particularly those of the author and her students (which are all firmly rooted within the quantitative paradigm), are presented in great detail (see, e.g., the nearly 20 pages of biographical sketches of the informants in one of the author’s studies; pp. 355–373). Other studies receive a far more cursory treatment or are missing altogether. Given the claim of exhaustiveness in chapters 2–5, one notes omissions (especially of European research) that contain findings that detract from the conclusions drawn or that contain information identified as lacking (e.g., Havranek, 1993; Kihlstedt, 1998; Tickoo, 1996; Vogel, 1989). Finally, some readers might also have welcomed a more systematic attention to findings from language typology and L1 acquisition—two fields with a strong tradition in temporality research.

Third, the deluge of findings and degree of empirical detail can be overwhelming, particularly for readers not familiar with temporal semantics. It would have helped those readers if Bardovi-Harlig had started the book with a description of this domain of language to provide a theoretical framework for the subsequent surveys of L2 research. More generally, greater synthesis of research findings and more explicit discussion of explanatory theories and concepts would have strengthened the value of the book. Many key concepts (e.g., tense, aspect, inherent aspect, anteriority, and prototype) are only loosely defined, and some terminology is not used consistently (e.g., past vs. anterior, imperfect vs. imperfectivity). Additionally, in a state-of-the-art work of this size one might also have expected a more rigorous attempt to construct a principled interpretation of the data in linguistic and psycholinguistic terms.

The above remarks notwithstanding, *Tense and aspect in second language acquisition*

is undoubtedly the most comprehensive text on one of the richest areas of L2 research available to date and therefore deserves the critical attention of all researchers and students of SLA.

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**SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION IN AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE.** Ceil Lucas, Robert Bayley, and Clayton Valli. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2001. Pp. xviii + 238. \$55.00 cloth.

This is the seventh volume in the highly acclaimed “Sociolinguistics in Deaf Communities” series published by Gallaudet University Press. This volume is the first major attempt to document and analyze linguistic variation in American Sign Language (ASL). Based on seven years of research spread across the United States, including data collected from seven sites (Staunton, VA; Frederick, MD; Boston, MA; New Orleans, LA; Fremont, CA; Olathe, KS, and Kansas City, MO, together; and Bellingham, WA), *Sociolinguistic variation in American Sign Language* is a major contribution to the growing literature on the linguistics and sociolinguistics of ASL. It seeks to “provide a comprehensive description of the variables and constraints at work in sign language variation” (p. xv), building on the existing linguistic literature dealing with ASL. It succeeds admirably, if not in providing the final word on these complex issues, then by offering not only fascinating insights into sign language variation but also an empirical database that is unmatched in its depth and breadth in the field.

The volume is divided into nine chapters. The first two chapters provide the theoretical framework for the research project that was undertaken as well as a description of the process by which the ASL corpus was collected and analyzed. Chapter 3 then addresses the sociohistorical context for linguistic variation in the American Deaf community, examining in detail the important role played by residential schools for the deaf in general, and of the American School for the Deaf (in Hartford, CT; formerly the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb) in particular, as well as other social and political organi-

zations created by and for Deaf people. Chapters 4 and 5 deal with phonological variation in ASL, with the emphasis in chapter 4 on variation in handshape and in chapter 5 on variation in location. For readers not familiar with the linguistics of sign languages, the idea of phonological variation in a nonoral language may be a bit puzzling. In essence, linguists studying sign languages use the term phonology to refer to the study of the smallest units that make up individual signs—handshape, movement, location of sign, palm orientation, and nonmanual features of the sign. These phonological parameters function in a signed language in the same manner that phonemes operate in spoken languages. Chapter 6 takes us to the next step, focusing on grammatical and social conditioning of phonological variation in ASL. Chapter 7 deals with syntactic variation, focusing on the important and controversial issue of null-pronoun variation in ASL. Chapter 8 addresses the broad area of lexical variation—the only facet of linguistic diversity in ASL that has really received even limited attention in the past (albeit fairly superficial treatment that is more anecdotal than scientific in nature).

The research project on which this book was based, funded by the National Science Foundation in 1993, sought to answer two questions: (a) Can the internal constraints on variation, such as those defined and described in spoken languages, be identified and described for variations in ASL? and (b) Can the external social constraints on variation, such as those defined and described in spoken languages, be identified and described in ASL? In chapter 9, the concluding chapter of the volume, the authors provide the answer to both questions: clearly and demonstrably, yes. They also offer a powerful and compelling argument for the importance of research such as that reported in this volume, both in general and in particular for the Deaf communities in the United States and elsewhere.

There is, needless to say, a great deal about variation in ASL and other sign languages that is worth knowing that we do not yet know. If *Sociolinguistic variation in American Sign Language* is not the final word, it is nevertheless an incredibly valuable first word. As Roger Shuy notes in his “Foreword” to the book, “Although the last word on ASL sociolinguistics has not been said here, this book sends us on our way with a flourish.”

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**LANGUAGE TESTING.** *Tim McNamara.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Pp. xvi + 140. \$7.40 paper.

McNamara’s book on language testing is part of a series that introduces various areas of language study to readers with little or no formal training in linguistics. Like the other books in the series, it provides a broad overview of trends and issues in the field rather than going into technical depth in any one narrow area. The intent of this approach is to make the material accessible to a wide audience and to provide a “bigger picture” perspective that would render deeper consideration of particular language testing is-

sues more meaningful. McNamara succeeds in making his contribution to the series comprehensible, while at the same time making it challenging and provocative on both intellectual and social levels.

The remainder of this review describes the organization of the book and maps out the ground covered in the survey. The book is divided into four sections: a survey of the field of language testing, short readings with study questions, annotated references, and a glossary of terms. The survey section is the largest portion of the book. Its eight chapters cover basic concepts and definitions, test design and development, the rating process in performance-based assessment, validation, measurement, social issues related to testing, and possible future directions.

In chapter 1, McNamara presents basic test types and the most common purposes for administering language tests. Achievement and proficiency testing are discussed, and the idea of alternative assessment is introduced. More specialized areas, such as aptitude and diagnostic testing, receive little or no treatment, which is a sensible omission, given the text's goals of clarity and accessibility. To close the chapter, attention is given to the central notion of making inferences about the ability to use the target language in future "real life" situations on the basis of observations made during the test itself.

McNamara illustrates in chapter 2 how test design has been influenced by various approaches to linguistics and scholarly thinking about language and language use. He notes that these views have expanded on early, relatively concrete descriptions of the "parts" of language and now include cognitive and social dimensions as well. Readers are intellectually challenged by McNamara's suggestion that these improved views of language use have yielded frameworks and models that may be too complex for most test designers to use.

In chapter 3, McNamara highlights the main features of the so-called testing cycle without getting bogged down in the details of step-by-step test development. Chapter 4 focuses specifically on the rating process and is especially appropriate given the current emphasis on performance-based testing. Chapters 5 and 6 handle validity and measurement fundamentals in a clear and insightful way. The importance of measurement concerns is acknowledged and put into meaningful perspective with other social and educational factors that must be considered when making decisions about the nature and the design of language tests.

McNamara elaborates on the topic of the social aspects of language testing in chapter 7. In recent years, there has been explicit acknowledgement of the far-reaching influence of language tests on communities and on social and educational policies. Thus, topics such as ethics and the social responsibility of testers have received increased attention. The discussion in chapter 7 exemplifies a prominent feature of the book as a whole, which is that it does not just present issues in the field but further conveys the relevance and importance of those issues to readers who are not testing specialists or test developers.

Sections 2–4 form a nice complement to the survey just described. Section 2 consists of a collection of short readings written by scholars who have had a major impact on the language-testing scene. Each reading is followed by study questions. Section 3 contains annotated references complete with readability ratings. Section 4 is a glossary of the terms that appear in boldface print in section 1.

This book would be of interest to anyone who wished to learn more about the field of language testing, including language teachers, language teacher educators, and lan-

guage program directors. The book would also serve well as a text in an applied linguistics survey course or as an early reading in a language-testing course, and, almost needless to say, despite the introductory nature of this book, the professors who use it in their courses would surely benefit from reading along with their students.

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**THE POWER OF TESTS: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE USES OF LANGUAGE TESTS.** *Elana Shohamy*. London: Longman, 2001. Pp. xxvi + 182. £18.99 paper.

In the introduction to *The power of tests: A critical perspective on the uses of language tests*, Elana Shohamy raises the following questions: What is the meaning of a test for test takers, parents, teachers, and school administrators? What are the short- and long-term consequences of tests on the lives of individuals? What are the motivating factors behind the administration of language tests? What are the politics of the tests? These kinds of questions logically arise when the examination of testing includes a concern with the use of tests by educational institutions, policy makers, and society at large. Focusing primarily on the misuse of tests, this volume chronicles both intended and unintended test consequences.

The book is divided into four sections: Part 1 presents the effects of tests on individuals and institutions; part 2 reports findings associated with studies of the uses of tests in selected institutional settings; part 3 discusses and interprets those results; and part 4 presents guidelines for “critical language testing.”

The author’s arguments concerning tests draw heavily on the theories of power and surveillance advanced by French poststructuralist philosopher and historian Michel Foucault. The use of Foucault’s thinking in relation to educational testing has appeared before, and readers attracted to this perspective may want to refer to Hanson (1993). Shohamy’s application of Foucault’s thinking is credible with respect to the misuses of language tests: She demonstrates that tests function as shortcuts for broader educational reforms, force changes in curricula, reward and punish teachers, and require conformity on the part of test takers. Indeed, Shohamy’s argument that testing policy, or rather that abusive testing policy, has become the de facto language policy in many contexts is persuasive.

However, the most interesting discussion of the power of tests is provided through scrutiny of the uses and impact of actual tests in actual institutional contexts. Part 2 focuses primarily on the influence of three language tests—a reading comprehension test, an Arabic test, and an English test—with respect to the intentions attributed to the decision makers who instituted the tests and the effects of the tests on the institutions in which the tests were administered. Interestingly, Shohamy’s analysis demonstrates that the power of tests is not a given. A test may be abandoned or its influence may diminish over time if the societal context in which the test is administered does not support the acceptance or expansion of influence. The impact of other tests, for which

the nexus of societal influence seems to converge, is considerable. Shohamy examines test impact over a range of time, and the value of her studies is obvious.

Another strength of the book lies in Shohamy's expansion of the concept of the tester. She argues that the concept should involve all interested parties, "policy makers, researchers, question writers, statisticians, groups that pay for the test, language supervisors who make a decision to administer the test, parents who support or motivate the introduction of tests, or even presidents who believe that tests will save their nations" (p. 145). Expanding the concept of the tester is a central step in the move toward "democratic testing"—a notion at odds with the murky idea of surveillance and control as the function of a malevolently powerful, centralized authority. Shohamy comments that the power and authority of those in control is "almost magical" (p. 143) and that the danger of this perspective lies in the acceptance of the idea of the test taker as the victim of forces that will always be immune to influence or modification. In fact, the first section of the book is so relentlessly negative in its assessment of the consequences of tests on individuals that readers may be tempted to abandon hope or, at least, abandon tests. Shohamy, however, recognizes that it is unlikely that testing will be abolished, and the final section is relatively positive in its presentation of general guidelines for the establishment of ethical and democratic testing practices. Thus, the idea of ethical testing may not be an oxymoron.

The realization of so-called democratic testing will necessitate a considerable investment of time and money to raise the critical consciousness of all stakeholders, including that of applied linguists and language testers who are the received authorities on the nature and development of communicative competence. The systematic scrutiny of the uses and the impact of tests, exemplified by *The power of tests*, finally becomes an encounter with critical consciousness-raising that deserves a wide audience and is sure to stimulate discussion.

#### References

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