

BOOK REVIEWS

**Gass, S. M., Behney, J., & Plonsky, L. (2020).
Second language acquisition: An introductory course.
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Abstract. Susan M. Gass, Jennifer Behney, and Luke Plonsky's *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course*, fifth edition, is a foundational textbook for the applied linguistics and second language acquisition (SLA) disciplines. Since its initial publication, the book has become a world-wide adopted and highly cited textbook, utilized on SLA, TESOL, and linguistics programs globally. In fact, every one of the previous editions has been reviewed and responded to critically by scholars such as Bridson (1995), Jourdain, (2010), Kraft (2010), Leverett (2001) and Lewis (2016) over a number of decades, bearing witness to the book's long-standing influence and academic prominence. The current, fifth edition composed primarily for advanced undergraduates and graduate students, offers a wide-ranging but serious description of SLA theories, methodology, and applications. Its structure is rational and pedagogically motivated, with reflective questions, glossaries, and empirical references being fine scaffolds for new and experienced scholars. Through its eight parts and seventeen chapters, the textbook achieves not just explaining the what and how of SLA but also positioning the why, connecting theory with classroom realities and sociocultural ramifications.

Keywords: applied linguistics; interdisciplinary approaches; interlanguage development; learner individual differences; second language acquisition (SLA).

Анотація. «Вивчення другої мови: вступний курс», п'яте видання, авторів Сьюзен М. Гасс, Дженніфер Бені та Люка Плонскі, є фундаментальним підручником з прикладної лінгвістики та дисциплін вивчення другої мови (SLA). З моменту своєї першої публікації книга стала всесвітньо прийнятим та високо цитованим підручником, який використовується в програмах SLA, TESOL та лінгвістики в усьому світі. Фактично, кожне з попередніх видань протягом кількох десятиліть рецензувалося та отримувало критичні відгуки від таких науковців, як Брідсон (1995), Журден (2010), Крафт (2010), Леверетт (2001) та Льюїс (2016), що свідчить про давній вплив та академічну популярність книги. Поточне, п'яте видання, призначене переважно для

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студентів старших курсів бакалаврату та аспірантів, пропонує широкий, але ґрунтовний опис теорій, методології оволодіння другою мовою. Його структура раціональна та педагогічно мотивована, з рефлексивними питаннями, глосаріями та емпіричними посиленнями, що є чудовою опорою для нових та досвідчених науковців. Завдяки восьми частинам та сімнадцяти розділам підручник не лише пояснює, що і як відбувається в оволодіння другою мовою, а й пояснює, чому вона існує, пов'язуючи теорію з реаліями класу та соціокультурними наслідками.

Ключові слова: прикладна лінгвістика; міждисциплінарні підходи; міжмовний розвиток; індивідуальні відмінності учнів; оволодіння другою мовою (SLA).

Since its first publication in 1994, *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course* has established itself as one of the most influential and widely adopted foundational texts in the field of applied linguistics. Authored by leading SLA scholars—Susan M. Gass, Jennifer Behney, and Luke Plonsky—the book has shaped the teaching and learning of SLA across undergraduate and graduate programs globally. Over the decades, successive editions have garnered commentary and review from scholars such as Bridson (1995), Leverett (2001), Kraft (2010), and Lewis (2016), testifying to the work's enduring academic relevance and sustained scholarly engagement. The fifth edition continues this tradition by providing a comprehensive, research-informed, and pedagogically structured overview of major theories, methods, and developments in SLA, making it an essential resource for students, researchers, and educators alike.

Fundamentally, the book asserts that second language learning is a complex, multidimensional process shaped by the interaction of linguistic, cognitive, social, and individual variables. The authors emphasize that no single theory can fully account for SLA; rather, a holistic understanding emerges only through the integration of formal linguistic explanations, cognitive processing models, sociocultural perspectives, and learner-based differences. This central argument serves as the conceptual backbone of the text and provides a coherent lens through which the chapter-by-chapter exploration of major SLA constructs and theoretical traditions unfolds.

The Preface effectively sets the stage for the book's interdisciplinary scope. Here, the authors reflect on the historical development of SLA within broader paradigms of linguistics, psychology, sociology, and education, highlighting the field's interdisciplinary yet sometimes fragmented nature—an issue they aim to address through a systematic, student-focused presentation. Their scholarly humility is evident in acknowledging earlier contributions, including those of Larry Selinker, and in their emphasis on fostering student engagement and reflective learning. The Preface also details the substantial updates introduced in the fifth edition, such as rewritten chapters, new pedagogical tools, and an

expanded focus on current research methodologies, indicating that this edition represents not a minor revision but a genuine evolution of the text.

Part One: Preliminaries serves to present necessary definitions and concepts that constitute the cornerstone of SLA research. Chapter 1 gets the tone right by outlining what SLA is and, crucially, what SLA is not. Authors insist that SLA is distinct from language pedagogy, though there is overlap where learning mechanisms are determined by teaching practice. This chapter is a handbook for readers, positioning SLA as a rich, complex area of study that is not only relevant to linguists and teachers but also to cross-cultural communication practitioners, language planners, and social integrators. Chapter 2 raises the level of this foundation by investigating the means by which data in SLA are collected and analyzed. The variety of research methods from narrative and eye-tracking to narrative study and neurolinguistic data maps methodological diversity in the field. The chapter is especially useful for new researchers in that it myth-busts data types, elicitation methods, and analysis procedures and stresses replication and meta-analysis importance.

Part Two: Historical Underpinnings of SLA Research traces the intellectual roots of SLA, providing essential historical context. Chapter 3 focuses on the impact of the native language and introduces readers to behaviorism, contrastive analysis hypothesis, and error analysis. The explanation is not only descriptive but also critical, helping readers understand the appeal and shortcomings of these early hypotheses. Chapter 4 reviews the basic shift from cognitive to behaviorist models and how morpheme order studies are important and so is Krashen's Monitor Model. Although Krashen's hypotheses have been widely criticized, their theoretical and pedagogical impact is reasonably done justice to. Chapter 5 offers a renewed reassessment of L1 effects in terms of such ideas as avoidance, overproduction, and differential rates of learning. The authors convincingly argue that L1 effects are not deterministic or invariant, but mediated by an enormous range of learner and contextual variables. This chapter is successful as a whole in mapping the theoretical terrain of SLA and describing how earlier views have been constructed or reimagined.

Part Three: A Focus on Form: Language Universals of the book addresses formal linguistic theory, in this case, on Chomskyan ideology. Chapter 6 considers Universal Grammar (UG) and related theories, such as the Minimalist Program and the Fundamental Difference Hypothesis. The writers are to be praised for being able to break down such advanced theories into manageable chunks. However, readers who lack a background in generative linguistics may struggle with this chapter. The discussion of L2 transfer as a part of UG is delicate and introduces important differences such as levels of representation and learnability constraints. Chapter 7 continues on to typological explanations, with a much-needed counterpoint to the formalist

school. Through such illustrations as the Accessibility Hierarchy and voice contrast acquisition, the authors show how cross-linguistic congruence and mismatch can prescript interlanguage development. Rich in theory, this section aims to illustrate that even certain formal aspects of language are not learned decontextually but conditioned by larger linguistic patterns and typological similarity.

This transition into Part Four: A Focus on Meaning is a move from form-based to function-oriented models. Chapter 8 presents functional and discourse approaches, including the Aspect Hypothesis and Discourse Hypothesis. These models strike hard with teachers since they are more adaptable to communicative language teaching practices. Chapter 9, on the lexicon, is one of the best chapters in the book. It is well beyond naive vocabulary learning notions, exploring word derivation, collocation, multiword expressions, and depth versus width of lexis. The chapter also covers the cognitive and contextual mediation variables in learning vocabulary, such as incidental learning, input type, and depth of processing. Overall, these chapters highlight the importance of making meaning in SLA and provide strong alternatives to purely formal models.

Part Five: Cognitive and Processing Approaches to SLA provides a comprehensive overview of psycholinguistic and cognitive models. Chapter 10 examines processing and production of language, and introduces Processability Theory, Input Processing, as well as emergentist models such as the Competition Model. Chapter 10 is theoretically advanced but explained clearly, with variation in theory but not to the point of being overly sweet. Chapter 11 continues with the discussion of cognition to concepts like automaticity, attention, working memory, and priming. The explanation of the different kinds of knowledge (i.e., declarative vs. procedural, explicit vs. implicit) and how they interact is particularly useful. This chapter does an excellent job of bridging theory and practice, especially for those wishing to design instruction that is based on cognitive realities of language learning.

Part Six: The Social Environment of Learning delves into the social conditions of SLA as the authors move toward interactionist, sociocultural, and pragmatic models. Chapter 12 foregrounds sociocultural theory through Vygotskian concepts of mediation, private speech, and zone of proximal development (ZPD). The intersection of gesture, variation theory, and pragmatics of L2 language exposes the richness and multidimensional character of language use in ordinary life. Chapter 13 focuses on input, interaction, and output, canvassing dominant hypotheses and emphasizing negotiation and feedback. Of particular note is the way the authors distinguish between types of feedback (e.g., recasts, elicitation, metalinguistic feedback), relating these to attention and uptake theories. Chapter 14 covers various

learning environments, from classrooms to study abroad and technology-supported settings. The thoughtful discussion of task design, input enhancement, and focus on form is especially useful to practitioners. This section does a particularly good job to demonstrate the means by which social and contextual factors not only enable but also shape language development.

Part Seven: The Individual Language Learner foregrounds the learner's psychological and experiential factors. Chapter 15 is an exemplary synthesis of individual difference variables, such as age, aptitude, motivation, affect, personality, and learning strategy. The introduction of the L2 Motivational Self System and entities like grit and anxiety are timely and practical. The inclusion of meta-analytic data adds empirical rigour to the arguments. Chapter 16 expands its scope to include multilingualism, bilingual acquisition, heritage learners, and deaf or hard-of-hearing learners. The chapter is an authentic addition, for it answers to learner profile diversity and to the reality that SLA research needs to get away from the monolingual assumption. Collectively, this set of chapters reaffirms the heterogeneity and specificity of language acquisition processes, reminding teacher and researcher alike that every learner is distinct.

Finally, Part Eight: Conclusion, encapsulated in Chapter 17, offers the integration required of the many theoretical strands threading throughout the book. Using the apperceived input, comprehended input, intake, integration, and output framework, the authors offer an active SLA model that addresses the multi-stage, multi-modal nature of SLA. This chapter unites the textbook and offers a conceptual landscape for future research and pedagogy. It serves as a reminder to think holistically and highlights the interconnectedness of linguistic, cognitive, social, and individual variables.

Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course (5th edition) is ultimately a masterwork that achieves an admirable balance between historical depth and current relevance, theoretical breadth and empirical specificity, and scholarly solidity and pedagogic readability. Each chapter contributes uniquely to the general knowledge of SLA, making the book a valuable source for students, researchers, and teachers. While some chapters may be challenging for readers without a linguistics background, the authors' inclusion of summaries, glossaries, and discussion questions ensures accessibility and supports comprehension. Despite its exceptional comprehensiveness and clarity, however, the book is not without limitations. Some of the more complex chapters, particularly those dealing with formal linguistic theory and Universal Grammar, may remain difficult for non-specialists, and although the authors integrate updated research, the discussion could more fully address recent developments in technology-mediated learning, artificial intelligence,

i.e. driven language tools, and multilingual digital environments, all of which have become increasingly central to contemporary SLA research. In addition, the text pays relatively limited attention to critical applied linguistics issues such as power, identity, and social justice in language learning contexts, areas that have recently gained momentum. Nonetheless, these gaps represent promising avenues for future editions and invite continued scholarly engagement rather than detract from the book's contribution. Overall, the fifth edition reaffirms the text's status as a foundational resource in SLA studies and will undoubtedly continue to shape and inspire future researchers and teachers.

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