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## Probing the evidence: Can we bridge the theory-practice gap in language research? *Book Review*

Sato, M., & Loewen, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Evidence-based second language pedagogy: A collection of instructed second language acquisition studies*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Theory and practice are often perceived as quite different, indeed opposing kinds of activity: this as opposed to that, them and us, East and West - and as Rudyard Kipling has it: 'East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet' (Widdowson, 2012: 3).

To try to bridge this gap, researchers in Instructed Second Language Acquisition (ISLA) attempt to understand second language (L2) learning and teaching issues in instructional settings and examine the effectiveness of pedagogical interventions in order to offer teachers evidence-based pedagogy. With this book, Sato and Loewen (Eds.) aim at providing researchers

and L2 teachers with empirical evidence which can inform both SLA theories and L2 teaching. There are fourteen chapters in this book which are categorized into four parts: types of instruction, learning processes, learning outcomes, and learner and teacher psychology.

In the first part, three studies examine the implications of different types of instruction. In chapter 2, Lantolf and Esteve examine a program where concept-based instruction was implemented as an instructional framework. In chapter 3, Bardovi-Harlig *et al.* employed a Corpus-Based approach to teach clarification in L2 pragmatics. Finally, in chapter 4, Oliver *et al.* examine mathematics



and science Content and Language Integrated Learning classes at an elementary school in Australia. The overarching feature of this part is the level of investment of these researchers regarding training the participating teachers in their instructional approach. However, the main challenge remains reconciling teacher beliefs and ISLA theory with their classroom practices.

The second part of the book illustrates research studies that seek to examine learning processes. In chapter 5, McDonough and Hernández González explore vocabulary development in a collaborative prewriting condition. Chapter 6 examines peer feedback from Activity Theory (Storch & Aldossary). In chapter 7, Butler and Liu observe the role of peers in language learning using social networks. In chapter 8, Li and Fu investigate cognitive aptitudes and oral task performance under instructional conditions. These four chapters underscore the social aspects in students' learning processes. Whether it is done through a pre-writing discussion or peer feedback, learners are more

involved in their learning when a sense of community exists.

The third part examines the impact of various interventions which observe learning outcomes. In chapter 9, Michel and Stiefenhöfer investigate priming as a pedagogical tool in a computer-mediated communication setting. As for chapter 10, Bowles and Bello-Uriarte explore how instruction influences heritage learners' argumentative writing skills. Finally, in chapter 11, Kim and Monteiro examine students' perceptions of listening task difficulty. The take away from this part is that there seems to be an agreement that there is noticing of structures and/or patterns when learners are cognitively engaged in tasks.

The last section focuses on learner and teacher psychology. In chapter 12, Dewaele and MacIntyre examine the correlation between learner and teacher personality traits in regard to foreign language enjoyment and foreign language classroom anxiety. As for learner psychology, Sato and Lara in chapter 13 examine a classroom intervention which was designed to increase motivation



within the framework “L2 motivational Self System”. Finally, Csizér, in chapter 14, focused on teacher psychology, more specifically how teachers’ language learning experience influence their professional practice. The learning experience of learners and their own vision of themselves impact their decision making for both language learning and teaching. For this reason, it is important for researchers to find a way to make both learners and teachers evolve and adapt their pedagogical stances.

The book contains various helpful features. First of all, chapter highlights are provided in point form which helps the reader grasp the main ideas and concepts the authors wanted to emphasize. Moreover, each chapter concludes with a list of research proposals and pedagogical recommendations. This aspect highlights the importance of bridging the theory-practice gap, which aligns with the recent initiative OASIS<sup>1</sup> which aims to provide language educators with one page summaries of research studies in nontechnical language (see Marsden, Trofimovich & Ellis, 2019).

However, whether the book does enough in order to connect both research to practice and vice versa, remains to be seen. The practicality of pedagogical interventions needs to be increased before any trickle-down effect can occur at the classroom level. Furthermore, much of the observations that teachers make in a classroom draw on theory in an eclectic fashion and often in combination with other theories, as opposed to one single type of evidence-based pedagogy at a time. As highlighted in chapter 14, self-awareness of potential pedagogical blind spots is a prerequisite to expanding one’s research horizons. In other words, teachers tend to research what they know, but what they do not know does not compel them to further investigate a potentially promising ISLA stance.

There is great value to be had in continuing research projects in the field of ISLA, since it plays a deterministic role in the acquisition of a L2 in an instructional setting. There is still a lot to be done in order to enhance the visibility of such a theoretical area, especially from those outside the scope. However, with this optimistic book, we are



leaning in the right direction in order to reach a wider audience. As such, for readers that wish to find more in-depth information on ISLA theories, *The Routledge Handbook*

*of Instructed Second Language Acquisition* (Loewen & Sato, 2017) can be a great addition to the current book.

## End Notes

1 *Open Accessible Summaries in Language Studies*

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