Mackey, A. (Ed.). (2007). *Conversational interaction in second language acquisition: A collection of empirical studies.* **Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-019-4422249-9. 496pp.**

Applied linguists working within the mainstream of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research owe a considerable debt to Stephen Krashen. His bold claim that comprehensible input and a low affective filter were necessary and *sufficient* condition for language acquisition gave rise to a rich research agenda that is still alive and kicking. Among those who challenged his "hypotheses" can be numbered Merrill Swain, who has for twenty years developed her argument for the importance of comprehensible output, Manfred Peinemann whose Teachability Hypothesis has led to some interesting studies, and Michael Long, who over the years has refined his Interaction Hypothesis, which, in its current version,

> includes elements of a hypothesis (an idea that needs to be tested about a single phenomenon), elements of a model (a description of processes or a set of processes of a phenomenon), as well as elements of a theory (a set of statements about natural phenomena that explains why these phenomena occur the way they do (Gass & Mackey, 2006, p. 174, cited in the present book, p. 5).

Certainly, Long's Interaction Hypothesis has generated a very large number of published reports and many more unpublished theses and dissertations.

This new book edited by Alison Mackey provides a clear overview of the state of research into the role of interaction in SLA, and includes 16 new studies especially written for this book. Altogether, 27 university-based authors contributed to these studies – two in New Zealand (Rod Ellis and Rebecca Adams), two in Japan, and the rest in the USA or Canada, which were also the settings for 10 of the 16 studies, while two others were carried out in Japan, two in South Korea, and one each in Thailand and New Zealand. All of the participants were adults, and the majority university students (most often, it seems, in the same sites as the researchers).

The book begins with an extremely useful introduction by the editor, which among others things, lists and categorises over 70 studies since 1991 investigating the role of interaction in SLA. It then summarises the key points of each of the 16 studies in the collection, and then uses extracts of data from the various chapters to illustrate some of the principle tenets of the Interaction Hypothesis. The book concludes with an Epilogue by Alison Mackey and Jaemyung Goo, "Interaction research in SLA". This is a meta-analysis and research synthesis of 26 published studies of interaction carried out between 1990 and 2006, as well as some of the new studies reported in the present volume.

These 16 chapters between the Introduction and the Epilogue are divided into three parts. The first six studies consider how interaction might be seen to promote learning

among a range of different types of learners and interlocutors, according to age, gender, motivation, proficiency, etc. Part Two contains five chapters, all of which focus on considering the effectiveness of recasts: Chapters 7 and 8 in terms of learners' working memories, the following two chapters on the perceptions of learners and their instructors about interaction and feedback, and Chapter 11 investigates how different levels of learners' awareness of feedback may be related to learning outcomes. The five chapters in Part Three all focus on directly testing whether, and how, conversational interaction can be associated with language development. Two of the studies investigate different sorts of feedback – recasts (again) and clarification requests. Rod Ellis in Chapter 14 examines the effects of explicit and implicit feedback on two grammatical structures, and Shawn Loewen and Toshiyo Nabei's study focuses on measuring the effect of feedback on L2 knowledge. Chapter 16 investigates the linguistic scope of the interaction hypothesis beyond the tendency of most studies to focus on morphosyntax.

The Epilogue addresses the effectiveness of interaction in promoting the acquisition of linguistic forms, and proceeds to identify the relationships in interaction of various factors. After a very detailed review and through discussion of the wide range of theoretical and methodological issues involved in this aspect of SLA research, the authors conclude (p. 446) that interaction does facilitate the acquisition of both lexis and grammar, and that there is scope for further research within the SLA paradigm. Indeed, their review provides many useful directions – theoretical, contextual and methodological – where future studies could break new ground.

The 16 chapters are each very clearly written and the editor has ensured that each follows a similar organisational structure, making it easy to examine and compare the various studies in detail. There is a comprehensive bibliography (rather than one at the end of each study) and a very adequate index, which also facilitates cross-referencing.

Undoubtedly, this book will be invaluable to those who are currently investigating, or intending to investigate, the role of interaction within SLA. Because it provides many clues as to where research 'gaps' exist, waiting to be filled, it can be highly recommended to students wishing to undertake doctoral or masters theses in this somewhat specific, but evidently still open, area of applied linguistics.

But for those outside the mainstream approach to SLA research, a number of questions might arise as to the terminology adopted within the field generally, and in these studies in particular. The title of this book refers to *conversational* interaction in language *acquisition*. Most of the sixteen studies – and the vast majority of others cited by the authors – actually take place in contrived environments over very limited periods of time. (Indeed, *all* the studies analysed in the final chapter were experimental or quasi experimental in design.) Are such conditions those which actually promote acquisition rather than learning? One does not have to agree with everything Krashen has argued, but his distinction between acquisition and learning,

though hardly a hypothesis, does seem to mark if not a clear boundary, then a distinct continuum, between the two fundamentally different sorts of language development. Therefore, the sort of interaction investigated by most of these case studies – even those which contain some features of genuine communication (e.g. information gap tasks in the chapter by Adams) do not correspond to what many might consider as truly conversational – i.e. open-ended interactions by people in fairly unstructured contexts.

Which brings me to my final point – that many mainstream SLA researchers continue to discount, or even ignore, the essential point that classroom learning (which a number of these studies intend to illuminate) comprises individuals who have unique backgrounds and personalities, and who are in a constant state of developing relationships with one another. This is the fundamental premise of those who view learning and acquisition from a sociocultural point of view. The 2007 international conference in Auckland, "Social and Cognitive Aspects of Second Language Learning and Teaching", brought together many researchers from both sides – including several of the contributors to this volume – and indeed a measure of common ground was reached among the participants. It is to be hoped that there will be further meeting of minds, and empirical investigations, which will help those actually involved in exploring language teaching to more fully understand the role of interaction in language acquisition and thereby more effectively and practically assist learners to develop competence in this area.

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