

RESENHA/ BOOK REVIEW

Doi: 10.5007/2175-8026.2017v70n3p265

Slabakova, R. (2016). *Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 512 p. ISBN: 9780199687268

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The acquisition of a second language (L2) has always been an object of observations given the difficulties that can arise in the communication between different language speakers. This led to the rise of theoretical hypotheses on the L2 phonological acquisition mechanisms and to the creation of real linguistic models aimed at explaining the processes of L2 acquisition. Learning a different language is a complex task, which requires the acquisition of new skills. In fact, it is something much more diverse and complex than knowing how to communicate or learning rules and structure of a sentence. It means learning to live there, to become part of a new linguistic and cultural community and share its principles and rules (Ellis, 2015). Studies carried out during the 1940s and 1950s were particularly important because they provided a valuable contribution to the study of L2. Until that time, learning a language was considered like an acquisition of linguistic habits and behaviours, learned through the imitation of a model, the prolonged repetition of action sequences and the reinforcement. The belief was that the mother tongue language influenced the target language, resulting in interferences in the pronunciation. In this way, the previously acquired language habits become an

obstacle to learning new languages. To prevent errors due to the influence of L1, in those years a model based on a comparative analysis, called “contrastive”, arose. The aim of such model was to compare the morphological, syntactic, phonological, lexical and cultural systems of the language that are involved in the learning process, in order to identify differences and similarities and predict the possible learner’s difficulties (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Roumyana Slabakova’s book “Second Language Acquisition” (2016, Oxford University Press, pp. 416) addresses important questions about the acquisition of an L2 by assessing the main theoretical and linguistic hypotheses formulated in the last 30 years which belonged to the better known perspective of generative linguistics. The aim of this monograph is to give more visibility to current knowledge about the biological and cognitive mechanisms involved during the Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Throughout the course of the reading, the author has outlined the recent research efforts on the acquisition of a second language. It is through comprehending such ideas that the author establishes the presence of a critical period for the attainment of compositional semantics. The critical period hypothesis holds that there are unique ages in which the acquisition of new linguistic skills is paramount, observing the difference in punctuation or pronunciation for children under ten. It is important to note that the work features ideas from the perspective of generative linguistics over the last thirty years. If that is not enough, the author has outlined how cognition plays a role in the development of new linguistics skills, which is illustrated by the increased focus on the workings of the brain and mode of communication in the second language (Slabakova, p. 236).

The author adopts the generative theory, in which the description of linguistic competence is subject to highly abstract and unconscious grammatical system, allowing learners to fully produce and even comprehend language. It means that syntax, phonetics and semantics are components of the unconscious system or universal grammar (cf. Chomsky, 1995). It is important to note that the numerous studies reviewed in the publication cement the notion that there are minimal barriers to ultimate

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linguistic success in the development of phrasal semantics. The author has elaborated forms of language acquisition in which principles and parameters dictate the tempo of the learning process and are affected by bilingualism. Such parameters include the null subject parameter, in which children reset their understanding as they grow older and wiser. Universal grammar is important in uncovering the internal mechanisms supporting the acquisition of a second language (Slabakova, p. 214). Such propositions were confirmed by Donna Lardiere (2009a; 2009b), in which feature reassembly is what learners need in the course of attaining their linguistic targets.

The author has gone ahead and given incidences of studies supporting or negating the need for the critical period hypothesis. It is important that the research offers a considerable improvement over previous efforts, which is heightened by the inclusion of more subjects, a battery of tests as well as the statistical treatment of data. It means the critical period is present in the society and greatly factors in the linguistic performance of adult learners over their younger counterparts. Additionally, the author has gone a long way in embracing the Bottleneck Hypothesis, which allows her to portray a unifying perspective. It means second language learners have scarce resources of difficulty in grasping new linguistic skills. The hypothesis uncovers the hard and easier part of second language acquisition. It means instructors should do more in aiding learners grasp the difficult syntax while leaving the simpler elements to be self-taught. It is important to note that the hypothesis holds that inflectional morphology coupled with its accompanying features present the most daunting tasks, necessitating remedial action, to say the least. In other words, students and teachers should take advantage of the easily available learning resources in handling complex linguistic topics.

Ultimately, the information offered in the publication serves to introduce readers to predominant linguistic concepts that are useful not only to undergraduates but also researchers in mental sciences. Such a publication is recommended for the perfect comprehension of linguistic teaching and learning. Furthermore, the author has presented findings from the neurofunctional imaging

(PET scans and fMRI) as well as taking advantage of electrophysiology (ERPs) of the second language comprehension (cfr. Foucart & Frenk-Mestre, 2011). Eye-tracking is also another viable avenue for examination, revealing a lot of information on how information is relayed and interpreted in a different language (cf. Leah & Siyanova-Chanturia, 2013). The examination of these findings goes a long way in helping teachers and stakeholders understand the need for linguistic refinement, specifically in experimental tasks. It is also notable that the author has gone a long way in using evidence from behavioral studies on learners. In the same vein, the author has done enough to categorize learning situations, beginning with situations that present learners with complicated syntax and simple semantics and those that offer complex semantics mismatches in simple syntactic perspectives.

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Recebido em: 21/02/2017

Aceito em: 19/06/2017