SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND
LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

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1. Introduction

Language pedagogy (LP) and second language acquisition are two poles of a continuum; one pole includes teaching and teachers, and the other is concerned with learning and learners. There has been contradicting views on SLA and LP's relationship, from no relevance to complete and positive relevance. In this paper, I am trying to tackle this controversial area of relevancy and put forward some suggestions from a practitioner's point of view.

Professor Candlin in his preface to Sharwood Smith's book (1994) states that natural disciplinary allies, principally linguistics, psychology, sociology and pedagogy pose natural threats to the identity of SLA while at the same time they provide the wherewithal for sourcing of its disciplinary self-sufficiency. SLA is faced with central issues: that of directionality, that of directness and that of direction. Directionality, with an evolving nature, goes to the heart of the question of identity and identification in terms of whether drawing upon existing knowledge in other disciplines or, more dynamically, seeing its reflexive contribution to current disciplinary knowledge. "Territoriality and indirectionality appear to make the best of cocktail" (Sharwood Smith, 1994). There is still considerable variation in the ways that SLA researchers theorize and practice. Directness addresses the relationship between theory and practice. Researchers in SLA should take care against seeking credibility for their theorizing by promising instant applicability. As for that of direction, theoretically, practically speaking the links must be considered carefully to see whether convergence of SLA with pedagogy is helpful or not.

2. Background

The field of second language research (very broadly speaking) is divided into three stages of development, roughly equitable with the 1960s, the 1970s and the 1980s, respectively. The 1960s and the flourishing period of behaviorists' habit-formation psychology and structural linguistics to the problems of foreign language teaching techniques and material; an objective model, which viewed teaching as doing and mastery of habits and actions. It was supported and informed by process-product research (a positivist view of research) towards learning difficulties. In this period, the results of linguistic and contrastive analysis research were directly applied to the field of second language teaching. Charles Fries, more than anyone else, tried to give language pedagogy a basis in linguistic research.

The 1970s and the abandonment of the 1960s' framework, the rebirth of cognitive psychology and upsurge of generative linguistics which viewed teaching as thinking and doing combined; a cognitive model. This period was a beginning of the rift between the applied and theoretical aims of researchers in this area which saw the learner as an autonomous creator of language systems who was involved in a complex process of decision-making. This view was supported by teacher-cognition research. According to Stern (1983), second language learning as a psychological research problem was discovered at most with suddenness by several applied linguists and psycholinguists as an important and uncharted area of investigation. The upsurge of research and theorizing between 1972 and 1978 or thereabouts on the psychology of second language learning was astonishing to anyone who had been aware of the lack of proper second language learning research in the preceding decades.

The 1980s onward saw an attempt to refine current models of language learning and seek closer links between second language research and other theoretical disciplines, especially linguistics. This era mostly views teaching as knowing what to do; i.e., an interpretivist view and the teacher is viewed as an insider researcher. This period is associated with and informed by expertised research. Hereafter the

debates on the relationship between research and practice, concerning the application of SLA research results to language pedagogy emerged.

3. Relationship, Relevancy and Application Debate

Stern (1983) believes that research has been a part of language teaching scene for long enough to enable us to make some general observation about the nature of research and the contribution of research to language pedagogy. Planning, decision-making, practice and innovation in this area should not exclusively rely on tradition, opinion, or trail-error but should be able to draw a rational inquiry, systematic investigation, and, if possible, controlled experimentation. We must bear in mind that within the history of theory and research in relation to language teaching, research is not the sole answer to all the problems of language teaching. However, educational theory provides a broad framework and essential concepts for language pedagogy. "A complete theory of second language learning will have implications for teaching and no direct application" (Spolsky, 1989). Theory and research support each other. Research only makes sense if it can be related to an existing body of knowledge, or to questions and hypotheses which themselves form part of an ordered system of thought and inquiry to support in finding a framework for the central task of language pedagogy which is for learning.

Writers on language pedagogy and the profession of teaching have been aware of the discrepancy between the domains of theory and practice. Second language pedagogy presupposes three sources of inquiry to rely on: 1) language description, 2) a theory of language learning, and 3) a theory of language use (Stern, 1983). The potential importance of SLA research for the language teaching profession has led to the fact that much of research has applied perspective. Practitioners are irritated when the results of research seem inconclusive or remote from the realities of the classroom, and they may shrug off research as useless 'ivory tower activities' or dismiss it as 'play at science' (Stern, 1983).

Different propositions have been brought up concerning the relationship, relevancy and application of SLAR to LP. Ellis (1997) has emphasized the distinct and separate nature of the discourse of SLA and LP:

This has been deliberate because I wish to dispel what still seems to be a prevailing assumption within SLA, namely, that research or theory can be used to identify desirable teaching behaviors that teachers are then expected to implement in their classrooms. Such an assumption is not justified because SLA and LP have different goals- theory building versus practical action- and draw on different epistemologies- technical versus professional knowledge. A simple transfer of information from one Discourse to the other is, therefore, simply not possible. Transformation, not transmission is called for. (p. 88)

Hughes writes, "It must be said at the outset that it is not at all certain that at the present time there are any clear implications for language teaching... " (in Ellis, 1989). Ideally, second language researchers should, first and foremost, pursue their investigation without paying attention to the concerns of teachers (Sharwood Smith, 1994). It is useful, then, to accept distinction in SLA studies between pure and applied research.

Whereas some experts in the field believe in application with caution (Hatch), some others are skeptical and state that 'do not apply at all', because the field is in its infancy and it is too soon to be certain of the results and their relevancy to LP. Widdowson (1990) proposes a pragmatic mediatory scheme of appraisal and application. "Findings are frameworks for assessment, not formulas to be rigidly applied. Teachers should act as mediators between theory and practice, between the domains of disciplinary research and pedagogy". He believes that pedagogic relevancy of any valid description in its own terms still needs further evaluation.

There are other great figures in the field of SLA and LP who believe in a positive and desirable relationship between the two and consider LP as a strong contributor to SLA affairs. Crookes (1997), from a socio-educational perspective and concerning the present social, economical, political and educational status of teachers, states:

In short, a practical relationship between SLA research and S/FL pedagogy depends particularly on the conditions of S/FL teachers. If SLA researchers are to take any responsibility for sustaining it in practice,

they must either incorporate sociopolitical considerations, particularly as they apply to teachers, into their investigations (...), or they must engage directly, rather than through SLA research, with the educational and political systems that persist in devaluing the knowledge and work of teachers while preventing them from engaging in the sort of reflexive practice that would sustain the kind of relationship between research and pedagogy that is most desirable.(p. 110)

Another point which needs mention here in appraising SLA theory in relation to LP is the UG-based research. Ellis (1995) has found application of universal grammar which is an L1 theory to an entirely different domain, such as L2 pedagogy useless. He states that UG-model fails critical examination with regard to the aims of a theory of SLA; i.e., completeness, operational constructs, falsifiability and simplicity. However, special Nativists believe in its partial application to SLA. This debate of relevancy brings us to the point to conclude our discussion and make a few suggestions.

4. Concluding Remarks

The new second language research is not target-oriented, like teaching, but it focuses on the nature of a particular current state of knowledge in a given learner or a group of learners. It is a part of general investigation into the workings of the human mind, and consequently, this might be the reason for its contradictory and controversial nature. Although the field is in a state of truce in the area of method debate, the state of SLA research is chaotic and controversial. Sharwood Smith writes "The plea is more for a certain indirectness in the relationship between what SLRers' main concern should be and the urgent and very specific needs of a given type of language practitioner". He further adds "(Unbiased) research to date has not revealed a golden language technique that absolutely guarantees successful acquisition" (1994, p.6).

Hakuta (1981; in Ellis, 1989) states that, "The game of language acquisition research can be described as the search for an appropriate level of description for learner's system of rules" (p.248). Ellis himself in the same book writes, "Researchers know what happens in SLA, but less about why it does" (p.248). They are right, but the scientists and the researchers of our field are adherents to different schools of thought, philosophy and psychology, and some are more sensitive to the cries of linguistics and others than the teachers education and teaching profession, because this group do not have the upper hand in the market.

Are the researchers in SLA, as some of them implicitly state, after science for the sake of science, or are they doing science for the benefit of the teachers? It is at least apparent, in our country or in other countries as well, that some researchers do science for their own sake than science or people. What we need now is a unified and cooperative field not a scattered one. The researchers should have something to say to the teachers after they have probed the questions in the field. Practitioners are busy with their text books, pupils and classrooms, but what they need is insight from scientists and researchers in the field. One of the essential characteristics of a good theory is said to be, that of 'falsifiability', and if our researchers have something to say, they should put it to test. These tests will give them more insights back helping them either to expand or remodel their hypotheses.

Realizing the reciprocal and mutual ties and relevancy of the two poles of the continuum, brings me to the end of this paper to pose a minor question. Not considering whether the means justifies the end, or the end justifies the means; what is the ultimate aim of science in our field and specifically in SLA if it is not to be applied to language pedagogy and second language classroom?

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