REVIEWS/RESENHAS

VanPatten, Bill. *Input Processing and Grammar Instruction in Second Language Acquisition*. Norwood: Ablex, 1996. Pp. Xiii + 177.

by Deise P. Dutra

This book, written for scholars and advanced students of second language acquisition (SLA) and teaching, links SLA theory and research with current pedagogical issues. It concentrates on describing an approach called *processing instruction*. This input-based approach favors focus on form activities which affect how learners utilize input data.

Following an introductory chapter briefly covering the motivation for processing instruction, the second chapter explains the nature of input processing and how learners make form-function mappings in the course of receiving input. Based on a cognitive psychology construct of attention that says that "only so much incoming data can be attended to at a given time" (VanPatten, 1996, p. 16), the author posits three principles of second language input processing. The basis of these principles are: (a) processing for meaning occurs prior to processing for form; (b) processing form that is not meaningful results when little attention is needed to process information; (c) detecting the agent in a sentence depends on the order of words - first noun phrase = agent.[1] Based on these principles, a model of input processing for grammatical forms and role assignment is suggested. It incorporates detecting mechanisms, resources available, assignment of roles, and universal grammar (UG - discussed in chapter 5). The complex process between input and intake makes certain linguistic forms available for the developing system[2] and how this phenomena occurs is what this model seeks to predict.

Chapter 3 describes input processing instruction which diverges from traditional output-based grammar. VanPatten criticizes the fact that most foreign language grammar instruction is still based on rule explanation and output activities. Traditionally, accommodation and restructuring of the developing system is believed to occur because of practice and not due to input. There is, then, a contradiction in language teaching practice since meaningful input is well recognized as crucial for learning a second language. Therefore, grammar instruction should also be based on input as opposed to output. Furthermore, traditional grammar instruction is not harmonious with the more learner-centered communicative language classrooms.

Input processing also contrasts with comprehension-based language teaching in the nature of their input. Comprehension-based language teaching uses input which is not nonstructured or spontaneous. In order to incorporate meaning-bearing input to grammar instruction, processing instruction is divided in three parts: (a) explanation of the grammar point emphasizing the connection between form and meaning; (b) information about the best processing strategies for this topic, pointing out the strategies that lead to misinterpretation of meaning; (c) structured input activities - input that has been manipulated and makes students focus on form-meaning mappings. VanPatten gives the reader guidelines for structured input. He says: "teach only one thing at a time . . . keep meaning in focus" (p. 67); "learners must do something with the input . . . use both oral and written input . . . move from sentence to connected discourse" (p. 68); "keep the psycholinguistic processing strategies in mind" (p. 69). After these guidelines are discussed, a sample lesson is presented. The author claims that structured input is central to processing instruction since it leads students to attend to the forms being studied.

Chapter 4 reviews five studies (VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993; Cadierno, 1995; VanPatten & Sanz, 1995; Cheng, 1995; VanPatten & Oikkenon, 1996) which focus on the effects of processing instruction. These studies followed reliable experimental research procedures: pilot studies, pre-tests and post-tests (split-block design controlled for test order), screening of subjects to eliminate variables, random assignment of treatment (traditional, processing or no instruction), balanced instruction material for all treatments (number of tokens, activity types, use of visuals, vocabulary, among other features), and inclusion of distractors. In addition, appropriate statistical tests were conducted in all studies (one-way analyses of variance - ANOVA). These analyses focused on syntax (object pronouns and word order in Spanish), verb inflections (the Spanish past-tense), communicative output (sentence-level versus discourse-level tasks), lexical-aspectual items (*ser* and *estar* in Spanish), and monitoring (explanation versus structured input versus both). The results showed that learners who have received processing instruction improved both their ability to process input and their access to target forms in their developing system. Although processing instruction is concerned with input, intake and learners' developing system, as opposed to output, the studies revealed the effects of processing instruction in both input and output. In other words, both traditional and processing instruction affect production activities; however, only processing improves learners' interpretation of the studied forms. VanPatten and Oikkenon's (1996) results showed that structured-input and the form-meaning mappings provided are responsible for the improvement observed in this and

the other studies. Explicit instruction may help, but explicit instruction is not sufficient to lead learners to significant gains. These studies lack a longitudinal perspective that could test the length of time over which these effects last. In Chapter 5 the author claims that traditional instruction did not improve the learners' developing system at all. Learners' improved scores in the output activities was due to their familiarity with the activities. I believe that the extent to which the developing systems improved with traditional instruction needs to be further tested with less controlled/familiar activities.

Chapter 5 discusses issues related to both second language acquisition and instruction. Input processing is not a language model to substitute either UG or first language transfer accounts. These models cooperatively work together to better explain second language acquisition. The first issue VanPatten addresses is UG and how input processing contributes to it. According to Chomsky (1981 and elsewhere), language ability comes from a biological endowment called the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). This device carries some kind of innate linguistic structure, called UG. UG is formed by general principles (highly abstract properties of grammar) which no natural language can violate. Some of these principles vary in restricted ways from one language to another and are parameterized. This means that there is a set of finite options (parameters) from which languages get their particular characteristics. An example of a principle would be subjacency[3] and of a parameter pro-drop[4]. Within this theory, "children's internal processors should notice from the input data whether their language allows" (VanPatten, 1996, p. 132) certain parameters or not. VanPatten disagrees with this argument that input triggers the choice between parameters (White, p. 1989). He states that UG cannot rely on input because not everything that is input becomes intake. The author concludes that although UG is able to explain various developmental stages, it cannot account for all of them. "In short, whether or not a hypothesis generated by UG is confirmed or rejected depends on the intake data UG receives and not the input that the learner hears" (VanPatten, 1996, p.140). By the same token, VanPatten stresses the role of the first language in generating hypotheses to be tested by intake data.

The last two issues discussed in this chapter are: the teaching of meaningless items and functional categories through processing instruction. VanPatten discusses the problem of verb raising in SLA and its relationship with placing adverbs and objects when learning English and also the auxiliary *do*. It seems that processing instruction can always aid in focusing learners' attention to form since every form carries some kind of meaning even if it is grammatical-semantic information, such as *did* - past, *does* - third-person present.

Input Processing and Grammar Instruction in Second Language Acquisition is not only a book for researchers, but also for teachers. Based on sound research, discussions are presented in light of current SLA frameworks, such as UG and the role of first language in SLA, making this book a serious contribution to the field. Despite a few editorial problems, it is a cohesive presentation of both research and teaching procedures that can and should be further tested.

Notes

1 Several studies have tested this principle and argue that the first noun strategy is, in fact, a universal default strategy in the beginning stages of acquisition (e.g. Gass, 1989; Pléh, 1989). On the other hand, the Competition Model (Bates & MacWhinney, 1989 & Bates et al., 1984) claims that word order is just one of many cues that languages have and that there are no cues that are universal.

2 *Developing system* is the same as *interlanguage,* a term coined by Selinker, (1972).

3 Subjacency restricts how far one phrase can move from deep to surface structure.

4 This parameter restricts whether or not the subject of a clause can be omitted. Portuguese, Spanish and Italian are examples of pro-drop languages, while English is not.

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Lantolf, J. & Appel, G. 1994. *Vygotskian Approaches to Second Language Research.* Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

by Gloria Gil

Vygotskian Approaches to Second Language Research provides an introduction to the Vygotskian perspective (also called "Socio-cultural Theory"- SCT) on second language (SL) studies by presenting some studies which adopted this point of view to carry out different types of second language related research. The main tenet of Vygotskian Theory (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) is that human cognition is socially developed and constructed; thus, this approach offers the possibility of bringing together the cognitive and social domains, traditionally separated in human sciences. The book can be divided into two parts: a theoretical Chapter 1, and nine chapters that report on empirical studies carried out within the Vygotskian perspective

In Chapter 1, "Theoretical framework: An introduction to Vygotskian approaches to second language research," the editors, Lantolf and Appel, offer a clear account of Vygotskian Theory. After providing a historical overview, the authors develop an exploratory framework where they explain some of its key concepts: *Activity Theory* (Leontiev, 1981); *mediation, regulation and the zone of proximal development (ZPD)* (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) and *inner speech and private speech* (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1979). After commenting on the epistemological status of this theory and its unit of analysis, the editors briefly review the articles of the book.

After the theoretical Chapter 1, the ensuing nine second language studies, carried out from the Vygotskian perspective, are organised in three topically related sets. The first set of studies centres around the *ZPD*

construction, the second around *inner and private speech* and the third around *Activity Theory*.

Within the first set related to the *ZPD construction*, Donato's *Collective scaffolding in second language learning* seeks to demonstrate how students may help each other in group-work, and how this help, which can be considered within the zone of proximal development (ZPD), can foster second language development. The information presented in the article is illustrative of these potential *scaffolds*, as the real evidence of learning having occurred, i.e., the relation between the formal features that are negotiated during group work and how the learners later used the same features on their own, is only reported here, not shown. The second study of this set, Schinke-Llano's "Linguistic Accommodation with LEP and LD Children," reports on studies where caretakers help different types of children (native speakers of English - NS - vs. limited English proficient children – LEP, and pre-school normally achieving - NA - vs. learning disabled - LD) to carry out tasks. The results were not unexpected: caretakers used markedly different ways of talking to the less able children, basically being much more regulatory. Consequently, the author questions the need for using such over-elaborate forms of regulation which may inhibit rather than foster self-control. The third study, Washburn's "Working in the ZPD: Fossilized and Nonfossilized Nonnative Speakers," demonstrates how the ZPD construct can be a useful notion to have a fresh new perspective on *fossilisation*. The results of her study, where she compared two already assessed groups of fossilised and nonfossilised learners, showed that it is important to carry out different types of tasks when assessing levels of fossilisation, and that the differences between fossilised and nonfossilised learners are qualitative rather than quantitative.

The article by de Guerrero, "Form and Function of Inner Speech in Adult Second Language Learner," begins the second set of articles centred around *inner and private speech*. This article, the best from the collection, presents the clearest evidence that using Vygotskian Theory constructs can provide a way of access to the mechanisms of SL development. After demonstrating the importance of studying *inner speech*, a largely neglected aspect within SL studies, this author focuses on *mental rehearsal* as a "fertile ground to explore and observe L2 inner speech" (p.84). Then, de Guerrero reports on a study that she conducted with college students of different proficiency levels to assess the importance that inner speech had for their learning of English. The study consisted of two phases. In the first phase (of mixed qualitative/ quantitative nature), 472 learners answered a questionnaire on inner speech, and in the second one (of a more qualitative orientation), the protocols of nine learners individually interviewed were analysed. The results of the study

yielded a fairly complete picture of inner speech main features and functions which highlights inner speech dynamic nature and shows some identifiable patterns in relation to learner proficiency level. The second paper of this set, Macfferty's "The Use of Private Speech by Adult ESL Learners at Different Levels of Proficiency," deals with the use of *private speech* by SL learners and its relation to language development. In this article, the author reports on a study in which he replicated an experiment carried by Lantolf and Frawley (1984). The study used as operational constructs Wertsch's three regulation levels of private speech, i.e., *object-regulated*, *other-regulated* and *self-regulated*, and it provided some preliminary evidence (not really surprising), that "comparatively, learners at lower levels of proficiency, . . . produce more forms of self-regulatory private speech than the more advanced learners" (p.133). To complete the set related to *inner speech*, Ushakova's article "Inner Speech and Second Language Acquisition: An Experimental-Theoretical Approach," as the title indicates, deals with theoretical issues and experimental data that connect *inner speech* and second language acquisition. The theoretical part is interesting as it informs on the way Russian scholarship has seen *inner speech*. On the other hand, the two experiments reported, rooted in a clear Pavlovian paradigm, showed some evidence that when learning a second language, learners rely on semantic categories from the first language, in addition to employing some already developed verbal skills such as the use of mnemonics.

The last set of articles, which centres around *Activity Theory*, begins with Ahmed's "Speaking as Cognitive Regulation: A Vygotskian Perspective on Dialogic Communication." The paper reports on a study that aimed at describing mechanisms of control (object-regulated, other regulated and self-regulated) in peer interactions, by comparing dyads of native speaker (NS)-non-native speaker (NNS), and NNS-NNS, and using the choice of different verbal tenses as main signal of regulatory control. The results of this study showed that, contrary to expectations, in the case of difficult tasks, even NSs may exhibit self-regulation, thus no absolute distinction can be drawn between NSs and NNSs. The study also revealed that, when performing the same task, the same individual may exhibit the three types of regulatory behaviour, thus revealing the dynamicity of task performance. Caughlan and Duff's article "Same Task, Different Activities: Analysis of SLA Task from an Activity Theory Perspective," the second one of the third set, puts at stake the common belief among SL researchers that an experimental task is non-variable. By presenting data from two interviews with NNSs, they illustrate how interviewers construct the data together with the subjects in a moment-by-moment

fashion, and how the expert-novice roles can sometimes be interchangeable. In fact, through the results of this study, they demonstrate that tasks of this kind are quite variable, and that "second language data cannot be neatly removed from the sociological context in which it was created or collected" (p.190). The last article related to "Activity Theory" is Gillete's The Role of Learner Goals in L2 Success. As the title indicates, Gillete's main concern was to identify whether learners' goals were essential factors for language learning success. She reported on a longitudinal study of six learners, three effective and three non-effective, in which she used three data sources to get access to the students' approach to SL learning: language learning histories, language learning diaries and class notes. Her study yielded evidence that L2 achievement is closely linked with the students' goals in the course of instruction.

To conclude, although this book is a fair introduction to what the Vygotskian perspective has to offer to the study of SL development, it has certain drawbacks. First of all, in the Introduction Vygotskian theory is dealt with in a very general way, with very little emphasis on the relation between this theory and SL development. Second, the articles themselves show some dissimilarities in the way in which the central constructs of Vygotskian theory are being used, such as the different ways of looking at *inner speech* by the authors of the second set of works, material which could provide a fertile ground for a deeper comprehension of the relation between Vygotskian Theory and SL development. Finally, each of the three articles in the last set, (supposedly) centred around *Activity Theory*, makes only brief references to or connections with this theory (the clearest one provided in Gillete's article), thus leaving the reader pondering about the role of this unifying link.

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