Book Review

Introduction to instructed second language acquisition

The volume *An Introduction to Instructed Second Language Acquisition* is intended as an overview of key issues related to the process in which learning of additional languages can be shaped with a view to enhancing its effectiveness, one that would be not only representative of the latest developments in the field but also comprehensive, succinct and reader-friendly. Taking as a point of departure the definitions available in the literature, such as those proposed by Ellis (2005), Housen and Pierrard (2005), or Loewen (2013), the author defines instructed second language acquisition (ISLA) as ". . . a theoretically and empirically based field of academic inquiry that aims to understand how the systematic manipulation of the mechanisms of learning and/or the conditions under which they occur enable or facilitate the development or acquisition of a language other than one's first" (p. 2). He then goes on to explain the components of this definition, stating that the term *second* refers to any additional language or languages, that the word *language* is meant to denote not only grammar but also lexis, pronunciation and pragmatics, that the term *acquisition* is inclusive of

both conscious and subconscious processes and products, and that ISLA can occur in different contexts. In fact, it is precisely this wide scope and the multifaceted approach to ISLA adopted in the book that makes it such a needed, timely and valuable addition to the existing literature on the effects of instructional intervention on second language development. This is because, while there are influential book-length publications providing state-of-the-art overviews of various aspects of form-focused instruction, particularly corrective feedback, such as those authored by Ellis (2005), Nassaji and Fotos (2011), Mackey (2012), Pawlak (2014) or Nassaji (2015), they are limited in the subsystems they target or the techniques they focus upon, with none of them managing to bring together so many issues of relevance to the process and outcome of instruction.

The volume comprises eleven chapters, most of which have an identical structure, with a clear progression from a brief consideration of key theoretical issues, through presentation of relevant empirical evidence and consideration of pedagogical solutions, to practical activities intended to encourage reflection on the topics covered. The book opens with an introductory chapter, which, apart from providing a definition of ISLA in terms of the degree of pedagogic manipulation and attempted acquisition by the learner, sheds lights on theoretical perspectives, methodological choices, empirical investigations and instructional options that are and are not relevant to the area of ISLA, as well as considering various contexts of pedagogic intervention. In the second chapter, which, in my view, is of pivotal importance for framing the discussion in the remainder of the book, the focus is placed on the nature, acquisition and measurement of second language knowledge, with a crucial distinction being made between explicit and implicit knowledge (Ellis, 2009). Chapters Three and Four are respectively concerned with the role of interaction and negotiation of meaning in promoting acquisition, and the effects of the more implicit types of instructional intervention, as embodied in the focus on form approach (Long, 1991), such as input flood, input enhancement or the provision of corrective feedback. Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight, in turn, shift the focus of attention to more explicit instructional techniques which are discussed in relation to the acquisition of four main subsystems of the target language, namely grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and pragmatics, highlighting the specificity of each of these areas. Subsequently, Chapter Nine considers the role of context in shaping the contribution of ISLA, both with respect to learning in the classroom (i.e., foreign vs. second language settings, immersion education and content-based instruction) and outside (i.e., study abroad and application of computer-assisted language learning), while Chapter Ten zooms in on the role of individual learner differences, the ways in which they impact ISLA and the extent to which they themselves can be subject to manipulation. The final chapter is intended as a

summary of the issues touched upon in different parts of the book, it ties up all the loose ends and closes with the assertion that "the goal of ISLA is . . . to enable learners to achieve the highest levels of success possible in their endeavor to learn a second language through classroom instruction" (p. 182), and it also includes a list of general principles of successful instructed language learning, as proposed by Ellis (2005).

Without doubt, the greatest value of the book lies in the fact that it strives to offer a unified account of ISLA, extending many of the claims thus far made mainly for grammar, as the most extensively researched area, to vocabulary, pronunciation and pragmatics, a task that poses a formidable challenge in view of the paucity of empirical evidence in some cases. Particularly commendable is, to my mind, the attempt to discuss the acquisition of all the language subsystems with respect to both explicit and implicit knowledge, something that has so far primarily been done in research on the effects of different types of instruction on the acquisition of grammar structures. Although there are doubts as to which aspects of lexis, phonology, sociopragmatics or pragmalinguistics are learned as explicit and implicit knowledge or the extent to which it is possible to develop a tacit representation of consciously held aspects thereof, it is obvious that, due to limited attentional resources, interaction in real time requires that knowledge of this kind be employed largely automatically so that communication can proceed smoothly. For example, even if a learner has sufficiently automatized the passive voice and can access it relatively effortlessly under time pressure, difficulty in accessing appropriate lexical items, drawing on requisite pragmatic conventions or using the required stress patterns may hamper effective attainment of the envisaged communicative goals. It is self-evident then that placing greater emphasis on the need to help learners gain greater control of such features as well as devising and researching instructional options that could achieve this goal is of vital importance. The book has undeniably succeeded in bringing our attention to this key issue, which is of equal relevance to researchers and practitioners, even if some of the assumptions can only be tentative due to the scarcity of relevant empirical studies.

Another merit of the book is the fact that it takes account of the different contexts in which ISLA can occur, not only those traditionally associated with the classroom, considered in terms of foreign and second language settings, but also content-based instruction, study abroad as well as in- and out-of-class learning, enabled by modern technologies. While there exists some research on the effectiveness of instruction in these areas, these efforts should certainly be intensified in light of the weight currently given to integrating content and language in the classroom, the increasing numbers of individuals taking advantage of

study abroad programs, such as Erasmus Plus, or the ubiquitous impact of information and computer technology on our lives. What certainly adds to the value of the book is the inclusion of hands-on activities and the varied nature of such tasks, in which readers are requested, among others, to assess measures of implicit and explicit knowledge (Chapter Two), identify specific types of corrective feedback and speculate on its potential effects (Chapter Four), or suggest ways in which teachers could integrate content and language in a literature course (Chapter Nine). This considerably extends the range of uses to which the book can be put, constituting not only an approachable source of information about different aspects of ISLA but also representing a resource that can be applied in class in order to enhance students' critical skills, reflection and engagement. Last but not least, the book is written in a way that is easily accessible to classroom teachers, thereby making an important contribution to bridging the gap between theory, research and classroom practice, a feat that, whatever the academic domain, few specialists are able to accomplish. For me, as a long-time senior high school teacher, this is an invaluable asset. In fact, this alone would be ample reason for me to read the book from cover to cover even if I were not fully cognizant of its strengths which I can pinpoint as someone actively involved in research on different aspects of ISLA.

Having said that, it is fitting at this juncture to mention the few things that did not quite live up to my expectations and left me somewhat disappointed when I got to the end of the book. What particularly whetted my appetite when I examined the table of contents was the chapter devoted to the coverage of individual difference (ID) factors as I expected a discussion that would address the mitigating impact of such variables on the effectiveness of ISLA. This would have been fully warranted because Ellis (2008) makes it plain in his overview of the study of second language acquisition that although such variables mediate the contribution of different instructional options, ". . . it may be premature to draw any conclusions" (p. 903). What I found instead was an overview of selected issues in ID research which did take into account the latest theoretical and empirical developments but focused mainly on ways in which factors of this kind can be manipulated rather than interact with different types of instructional intervention, notable exceptions being the subsections dealing with anxiety and language learning aptitude. Moreover, it is not entirely clear to me why the chapter on ID factors does not include a section on beliefs which can be hypothesized to impinge on teachers' instructional practices, learners' responsiveness to such practices and, as such, albeit primarily indirectly, exert an influence on learning outcomes (cf. Ellis, 2008). Finally, the concept of English as an international language (Jenkins, 2002), brought up in the discussion of the goals of pronunciation teaching in Chapter Seven, could be said to apply in equal

measure to formal instruction in pragmatics, a possibility that is for some reason overlooked. After all, it could reasonably be argued that the knowledge of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features in the target language is relevant only when learners are expected to interact with native speakers, which may on many occasions simply not be the case, not to mention the fact that nonnative teachers' competence in this domain is often blatantly lacking, which casts doubt on their ability to provide effective instruction.

These reservations, however, are reflective of my own concerns, experiences, interests and preferences as a researcher as much as a practitioner, and do not in the least detract from the undeniable value of the publication which offers a refreshing look at a wide array of issues related to ISLA. The admittedly successful attempt to view ISLA through the lens of all the target language subsystems, the consideration of their mastery in terms of the development of explicit and implicit knowledge, the comprehensive perspective on various contexts in which additional languages can be studied, and the discussion of the role of ID variables in that process all dictate that the publication will constitute an important point of reference as well as a major source of inspiration for students, researchers and practitioners. I am confident that in offering this fresh outlook on ISLA and highlighting some fundamental issues that might have thus far eluded and been neglected the specialists, Shawn Loewen's book will, on the one hand, pave the way for numerous empirical investigations into how instruction can be most beneficially manipulated to augment learning outcomes, and, on the other, provide food for thought for teachers wishing to boost the effectiveness of their instructional practices with respect to different components of the languages they teach.

Reviewed by
Mirosław Pawlak
Adam Mickiewicz University, Kalisz, Poland
State University of Applied Sciences, Konin, Poland
pawlakmi@amu.edu.pl

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