

# Reviews

## *Comptes rendus*

### COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING: TWO RECENT PUBLICATIONS

#### THE COMPUTER BOOK: PROGRAMMING AND LANGUAGE SKILLS FOR STUDENTS OF ESL

Mohyeddin Abdulaziz, William Smalzer and Helen Abdulaziz,  
Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985.

#### COMPUTERS, LANGUAGE LEARNING AND LANGUAGE TEACHING

Kurshid Ahmad, Greville Corbett, Margaret Rogers and Roland Sussex,  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

The premise for *The Computer Book* is excellent: teach English to English as a second language students through comprehensive input, in this case, while learning simultaneously to program computers in BASIC.

*The Computer Book*... is written with three ideas in mind. First, it is intended for high-intermediate ESL students whose reading skills are not advanced enough to enable them to tackle university texts... Second, the book can be taught by ESL teachers with little or no computer background; a complete answer key to all exercises and problems has been prepared for teacher's use. Third, *The Computer Book* can be used by classes with or without access to a computer.

The book, however, has serious flaws in its rationale and in its presentation of the material. While the chapters move from the elementary material covered in Lesson 1, "What is a Computer" to the more difficult material in Lesson 8, "Random Files and File Maintenance", the accompanying English lessons do not progress, but follow a set format. Each lesson contains exercises in "Vocabulary in Context," an outline to be reconstructed from the lesson passage, a cloze passage based on the passage, and a post-test using the true-false format. Surely, more unstructured activities like small writing assignments, oral presentations, etc. would be useful linguistic tasks to add to later chapters. As well, some of the exercises are elementary: the first exercise in the book asks the student to write down the number of the paragraph of the text where each part of the computer is mentioned. Is this the appropriate level to begin with intermediate high ESL students?

The presentation of the content is, as previously mentioned, logically developed, but there are some inconsistencies in the text that are troublesome. For example, Chapter 2 is entitled "How to Think like a Computer," yet on page 21 they write, "a computer cannot think." It would have been an easy matter to change the verb in the chapter's title.

Their second premise that the teacher need not have any computer experience in order to profitably use this text, is ludicrous. Students will obviously have questions about computers, about programming and about BASIC that the book doesn't address. Don't we want to encourage intellectual curiosity by responding knowledgeably to students' questions?

Thirdly, to suggest that one can teach a computer course without students' access to computers is counter-productive. The pleasure of writing programmes is seeing them work — or not work.

The students need the motivation of seeing their work on the screen, not just on paper. It is conceivable to teach about computers — about how computers solve problems, even about how flowcharts work — without computers, but this book is more ambitious than that: it wants students to learn another language. We would never expect ESL students to learn English without hands on practice.

In spite of my serious caveats about this book, teachers of ESL who are contemplating teaching BASIC to ESL students should look at this book, and decide for themselves if it serves their pedagogical needs. I'd let it pass; an improved second generation book of this type will no doubt come along soon.

*Computers, Language Learning and Language Teaching* is in the New Directions and Language Teaching series, edited by Howard Altman and Peter Strevens and adds another area to this important undertaking of the Cambridge University Press. The goals of the book are very well defined in the Preface:

[It] is an introduction to the use of computers in the teaching and learning of languages. It is intended for language teachers at all levels from primary to tertiary, including those in continuing education, and assumes no previous knowledge of computers or computing. ... It describes and analyzes the role of the computer in language learning, and highlights the potential, the successes, and the pitfalls of this exciting new educational medium. The book is not written as a manual, but is designed to put CALL in its historical and theoretical perspective, as well as drawing the reader's attention to certain practical conclusions.

*Computers, Language Learning and Language Teaching* successfully fulfills these goals; it is balanced and thorough. Anyone interested in a more practical introduction to CALL would be advised to read *An Introduction*

to *Computer Assisted Language Teaching* by M.J. Kenning and M.M. Kenning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) or *Computers in Language Learning* (London: Collins ELT, 1984) by J. Higgins and T. Johns. These two books while covering much of the same introductory material as the Ahmad et al. book, also present an introduction to CALL programming in BASIC.

Because Ahmad et al.'s book aims to present an overview of the computer as an educational aid, it does not suggest that one pedagogical approach is 'better' than another. Thus, if the CALL teacher is particularly interested in CALL books written with a "communicative approach" bias she can read *Computers in Language Learning* by J. Higgins and T. Johns and *Linguistics, Computers and the Language Teacher: A Communicative Approach* by J. Underwood. (This latter book was reviewed in *TESL Canada* 3.1:91-91).

Ahmad et al.'s book bears closer comparison with *Using Computers in Teaching Foreign Languages* by G. Hope, H. Taylor, and James Pusack (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1984). While both books are good, Ahmad et al.'s book provides more extensive coverage of the issues.

In short, the language teacher with little or no previous knowledge of CALL or computers should "know enough about the subject to approach the computer from a more informed viewpoint and with a critical perspective" (p. 142) after reading *Computers, Language Learning and Language Teaching* by K. Ahmad, G. Corbett, M. Rogers and R. Sussex.

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## **SPEAK UP, BEGINNING PRONUNCIATION AND TASK LISTENING**

**Cheryl Pavlik, Newbury House, 1985.**

Are you a teacher of upper beginner or lower intermediate students of English on the lookout for some new and varied exercises for improving listening skills and working on common pronunciation and speech problems? *Speak Up* may just fit the bill. Consisting of a student workbook and a set of cassette tapes, *Speak Up* is carefully designed to focus on common pronunciation problems of Asian and Spanish speakers, syllable stress, sentence rhythm, intonation patterns and reduced speech. Each of the

forty two-page units consists of a dialogue emphasizing the pronunciation and listening items in the unit. The dialogue is followed by exercises for pronunciation and discrimination of problem sounds. Additional exercises cover such topics as syllabification, syllable stress, intonation patterns, and reduced speech. Each unit winds up with a practical task listening exercise which combines all the elements of the unit.

The *Speak Up* student text is well laid out, with clear print and simple but effective illustrations. Adequate space is provided for students to record their answers. The tapes are of good quality. The voices are pleasant and have mild American accents. The speech is at natural speed, but unfortunately the pauses allowed for students to repeat after the tape are too short for most ESL beginners.

The dialogues which begin each unit start out short and simple and build up to quite complex by the end of the text. The subjects of the conversations are everyday matters and the language is functional. The characters in the dialogues reoccur so that students become familiar with their names and roles. Teenagers feature rather prominently and American place names occur quite frequently, but the content is nonetheless quite suitable for Canadian adults. The level of vocabulary and cultural references, however, definitely put the text into the range of upper beginners/lower intermediates rather than new students of English.

The exercises in each unit employ great variety of ways in which to get students to discriminate between, and produce, sounds, words and sentences. Directions to the student are clear and concise. Review units occur every tenth lesson. The listening tasks which complete each unit are very practical — listening for times, dates, telephone numbers, prices, etc. within the flow of conversation and then recording this information on a memo, calendar, survey form etc.

As stated in the introduction, *Speak Up* was written as a supplementary text to *Beginnings 1 and 2* in the Express English series, but it certainly can be used alone. For upper beginners level students, *Speak Up* would probably best be utilized in a classroom situation with a teacher in charge as students will need more explanations of syllabification, intonation, stress and rhythm than the text provides. New vocabulary items will also have to be covered by the teacher before the listening activities begin. Intermediate students could work independently with the workbook and tapes for review and additional practice. Dialogue transcripts and an exercise answer key at the back of the student workbook would allow them to self-correct.

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## IMAGES AND OPTIONS IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Earl W. Stevick, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

During an illustrious career spanning three decades, Earl W. Stevick has contributed seven thought-provoking books on second language teaching. In his latest, *Images and Options in the Language Classroom*, he presents reasoned and practical application of his theme in *Teaching and Learning Languages* (1982) that language teaching should be a matter of choice.

Central to the entire book is the concept of "image". According to Stevick an image "refers to the totality of reactions that one has to a given word or experience.... We have images of the spoken or written forms of words, as well as of physical objects and experiences" (p. ix). Language teachers should consider the possible mental images which students may generate from the various teaching techniques used. Based on their imagery potential, principled choices can be made from a teacher's repertoire of techniques.

Stevick's suggestions are not based on theory alone. They are based on practical teaching experience in which he has found that he does in fact choose options based on the mental image criterion presented in this book (p. 163).

*Images and Options* is about teaching English as a second language; it is about teaching any second language; and it is about teaching anything at all. However, it is most useful to the ESL teacher, since the examples are taken from eight different sets of current ESL material at pre-beginning, beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. With these examples, Stevick shows how 33 general options in teaching techniques and their various combinations can generate exciting and effective ESL teaching.

*Images and Options* is a fresh new resource book for language teacher training and inservice. It reverses the customary order of presenting theory and ideas followed by questions and activities. Stevick's order begins with an exercise from which the ideas flow, and the exercise and ideas are considered against the background of the real life personal experiences of the teachers in language learning and instruction.

*Images and Options* is a book for new teachers, for experienced teachers, and especially "for all teachers who are ready to take a fresh look at what their students are doing" (p. vii).

**Pat Mathews**

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## COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT: RESEARCH AND APPLICATION

Edited by Charlene Rivera. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters, 1984.

The concept of communicative competence, which Hymes viewed from a sociolinguistic perspective, has had a major impact on second language teaching. However, efforts to apply the concept to the development of assessment instruments have been largely fruitless. What seems clear is that the practical application of the theory of communicative competence to the development of evaluation tools requires further exploratory research.

In March 1981, researchers, practitioners and policy-makers held the Language Proficiency Assessment Symposium with the stated goal of developing "a working definition of communicative proficiency" (p. xvi.). The resulting volume, *Communicative Competence Approaches to Language Proficiency Assessment* reflects this goal. More specifically, the purpose of the papers is to examine (1) "the relationship between language proficiency and communicative competence", (2) the relationship between communicative competence and academic achievement, and (3) the application of research to the development of "new language proficiency measures" and to the better use of currently available instruments.

The book is divided into two sections: "Approaches to Communicative Competence" and "Application". The first section attempts to clarify the concept of communicative competence and to develop valid communicative proficiency assessment instruments. The second section introduces current research which sets out to explore practical assessment of communicative competence.

In the first section, Wallat provides an historical overview of the development of communicative competence in educational settings. Throughout this paper, an illustrative model suggested by Dunkin and Biddle (1974) is examined. Wallat concludes with a review of recent research which assesses the processes of classroom interaction, and which examines children's capability of reconciling their sense of communicative competence with the rules of classroom interaction.

Bachman and Palmer describe three approaches to language proficiency assessment: the "skill-component approach", the "communicative approach", and the "measurement approach". They concentrate on the measurement approach, suggesting that further conceptualizations of technical terms (e.g. "linguistic competence", "communicative performance", "language skills") are possible.

Duran concludes the first section with an examination of qualitative

approaches to the assessment of communicative competence. He argues that the interpretation and theoretical design of integrative language proficiency tests may be improved by paying closer attention to discourse modes and interactional skills. He further discusses the possibility of "clinical" assessment techniques which are based on an evaluation of interactional skills in naturalistic settings.

Overall, this first section underlines the tenacious conceptual problems in the definition and understanding of communicative competence. These researchers' struggles against these difficulties of definition are admirable, but it would seem of little avail. This is due largely to the contextual dynamics of actual communication. For example, Bachman and Palmer comment on reciprocal interaction of communication, stating that an individual's communicative success depends to some extent upon his or her relationship with interlocutors (p. 42). Duran also recognizes that contextual changes makes a drastic difference in children's communicative fluency (p. 56).

In the second section, Cummins, Swain, et al. hypothesize that "older immigrant students whose L1 academic proficiency is better developed on arrival in Canada will acquire English academic skills more rapidly than younger immigrant students" (p. 61). The results of this study support this interdependence hypothesis; that is, L1 and L2 proficiency here are found to be interdependent.

Ramirez attempts to examine the relationship (1) between linguistic and communicative competence, (2) of linguistic competence to pupil achievement, and (3) between pupil characteristics (e.g. home language use, self-concept, cognitive style, sex and years in the U.S.) and linguistic and communicative competence. This research findings is that field independent learning styles and positive self-concepts produce better results on communicative competence.

The next paper by Canale provides a theoretical framework for communicative proficiency assessment which consists of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. Canale thus points out the broad boundaries of communicative competence, stating that the aforementioned components interact with other human knowledge, skills and actions. He also begins to outline the application of this framework to practical instruments.

Bruck focuses on learning disabled children in French immersion programs. She argues from the results that these children require remedial assistance which fits individual needs of learners rather than a change in the language of instruction.

The volume concludes with Genesee's examination of psycholinguistic aspects of communicative competence. He discusses four assumptions

about communicative competence: characterization, assessability, teachability, and its relationship to academic achievement. He concludes by reiterating the complexity of communicative competence assessment. This second section thus introduces some communication-oriented test instruments, the reliability and validity of which would seem to necessitate further examination and careful research.

To summarize, Rivera's volume presents a broad overview of the conceptualization of communicative competence and current research, noting along that way some attempts to develop communicative assessment instruments. For educators and consultants, it should stand as a warning of the potential for misconstruing the results of language proficiency assessments as indicative of actual, useful communicative competence. Although it does not ultimately come to terms with the complexity of the problem, it remains a sound, accessible resource which could form the basis of further, exploratory research and theorizing.

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## **INPUT IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

**Series on Issues in Second Language Research**

**Susan M. Gass & Carolyn G. Madden (Eds.), Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1985.**

Second language research has recently shifted a focus on the learner's production to include the learner's linguistic environment — the speech models and interactional patterns available to the NNS (nonnative speaker) as vehicles for learning. This volume offers a selection of papers from the first conference to provide a forum for this field of study (Xth University of Michigan Conference on Applied Linguistics: Language Input: Learners' Use and Integration of Language in Context, Ann Arbor, 1983).

The twenty-four papers are presented under four major headings: language in an instructional setting; interaction, modification and negotiation; input, intake and output; and methodology and theory. The editors' introduction includes a short but effective sketch of the background issues, and handy summaries of each paper which serve as a reference guide in the absence of authors' abstracts.

This volume will be of interest to anyone curious about the new directions in SLA research, involved in input research itself, or even



approaching it from a purely applied perspective. Much of the research reported on here takes place in classrooms, and is presented in the light of learning and/or instructional application. As well, there are numerous bits of tantalizing evidence such as the finding that teacher-fronted activities are more successful in promoting second language learning than student-centered ones (Wong-Fillmore; Pica and Doughty). Teachers will find it interesting to consider the implications of some of the research concepts such as the distinction of input and intake, and in observing themselves and their students at work, they can engage in their own valuable on-going classroom research.

The first four chapters deal with language input to children in classroom settings. Lily Wong-Fillmore presents observations from 40 elementary classrooms containing limited English proficiency (LEP) students in an attempt to distinguish what characterizes classes that promote second language learning. The three additional papers address the effects of the broader cultural environment on children learning a second language (Muriel Savielle-Troike) and the nature of the teacher's language as a function of the language proficiency of the students (Jo Anne Kleifgen; Rod Ellis).

Two papers deal with adult classroom situations. Marjorie B. Wesche and Doreen Ready compare the discourse style of two university professors, each teaching the same content class to NSs and NNSs. Teresa Pica and Catherine Doughty investigate the effects of input in teacher-fronted as opposed to small group activities in adult classrooms.

The first three papers in the second section all address discourse aspects of input. Tuula Hirvonen discovers that while both monolingual and bilingual children modify their interactions in speaking to NNSs, the former were able to do so better than the latter. Susan M. Gass and Evangeline M. Varonis continue their investigation of negotiation of meaning in NNS-NNS discourse, here as function of context, social role of the participants, and task type. Barbara Hawkins questions whether appropriate responses of NNSs represent actual comprehension.

In the subsection on phonology, Charlene Sato looks at the effect of the type of interactional situation on phonological features via stylistic variation in a longitudinal study of word-final consonants and consonant clusters in a Vietnamese child. Jane Zuengler introduces a sociolinguistic consideration in examining the effect of status of the conversational partners on the phonological input of NSs to NNSs. Peter Avery, Susan Ehrlich and Carlos Yorio find that phonological adjustments depend on the discourse function, and that this is true for NSs in conversation with either NNSs or other NSs.

The third section concerns itself with "what is available to go in"

(input), “what actually goes in” (intake), and “what comes out” (output). Of the eight papers presented, Merrill Swain suggests that SLA requires not so much comprehensible input but comprehensible output, since the latter is necessary for testing and refining aspects of the IL (interlanguage). Craig Chaudron investigates the relationship between input and intake in a lecture comprehension study, while Helmut Zobl and Juana Liceras, in two separate papers, look at the relationship between input and grammatical competence (or output), and the former raises an interesting question: how do learners develop grammars which go beyond the immediate input?

The section on methodology and theory begins with Michael Long arguing for an indirect casual relationship between modified input and SLA. Michael Sharwood Smith raises what is probably the most far-reaching issue touched upon in this volume. In investigating placement of adverbs in ILs, he finds that a whole range of factors contribute to the phenomenon. Leslie M. Beebe proposes that sociolinguistic variables such as status and solidarity within the social context affect the learners' choice of “what input becomes intake”. The final paper, by Patsy M. Lightbown and Alison d'Anglejan, suggests a more careful investigation of the nature of the input forms, which may be less standard than we are generally led to believe. Diane Larsen-Freeman concludes the book with a state of the art analysis of the field of input study before and after these papers were presented, and a proposal for continuing research directions.

*Input in Second Language Acquisition* is important as the first collection of research on input. In addition, the editors have done well in their organization and presentation of the material. In concluding their introduction they touch on an important new direction in SLA: an awareness that seeking a single determining factor to explain second language data is ultimately unproductive (Sharwood Smith). Input is only one factor (and a hugely composite one at that) among many factors affecting language competence. Related to this is the idea, alluded to by Wesche and Ready, that individual variation must be accounted for in input studies. For example, a recent input study in which the subject was treated as a variable, suggests that teachers modify their interaction with foreigners based on personality and individual style as well as linguistic factors. This raises the question of how meaningful the results of studies are, in which NSs' behaviour is averaged over the sample, as if each subject were an equally good representative of some common behaviour construct (Brulhart 1985).

The issue of input versus interaction both as a problem in defining terms and one of theoretical model was avoided but is worth mentioning. The term ‘input’ in the title clearly refers to interactional as well as form

features of speech, whereas at least one set of authors (Pica and Doughty, "Input and interaction in the communicative classroom: a comparison of teacher-fronted and group activities") use it in the sense of form as opposed to interactional features of speech. The larger question of the theoretical underpinnings will, one hopes along with Gass and Madden, be a direction for further research in SLA, so that a clear distinction can be drawn between a style model and a dynamic interaction model of SLA.

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#### REFERENCES

Brulhart, Marilyn. 1985 Foreigner Talk in the ESL classroom: interactional adjustments to adult students at two language proficiency levels. Masters' thesis. University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

#### *ERRATUM:*

On page 40 in Volume 3, Number 2 of the Journal, the biography given of the author, Glen Dixon, was in error. The following represents a corrected version of that biography:

Glen Dixon is the Director of the Child Study Centre and Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of British Columbia. He has an M.Ed. from Tufts University and an Ed.D. from the University of Georgia. He has been a preschool, kindergarten and elementary grade teacher in Winnipeg, Boston and New York, and before coming to UBC nine years ago, he served on the faculty of the University of Texas at Austin.

#### *ERRATUM:*

Vol. 3 No. 1, March 1986, contains the following errors: p. 99, paragraph 3, line 6, [th] should read [t<sup>h</sup>] and on line 10, [th] and [kh] should read [t<sup>h</sup>] and [k<sup>h</sup>]. Our sincere apologies for any inconvenience caused.