# *Alternative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition*

## Dwight Atkinson (Ed.). London: Routledge, 2011. 196 pp.

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*Alternative* *Approaches to Second Language Acquisition*, edited by Dwight Atkinson and published by Routledge in 2011, reviews six theories in SLA, presented by renowned experts, that provide an alternative to and complement the long-dominant cognitivist perspective and show how they interact with each other, as well as with cognitivism. The book, whose target audience is SLA teachers, SLA researchers, and graduate students, goes beyond cognitivism, connectionism, and other, more recent, theories that tend to focus on the purely linguistic evidence. Its key strengths are that it presents which areas of SLA are covered by one theory but not by another, its quick presentation of theories, frequent comparisons, and an excellent and updated bibliography for each theory. The book is recommended for those who want to improve their understanding of classroom teaching. Practical teaching strategies are not abundant in this book, though some of the strategies reported in it can be adapted to the classroom.

The book comprises seven chapters, as well as an introduction by Dwight Atkinson in which he provides a brief history of SLA. He also explains the structure followed in each chapter, which consists of the following sections: overview, theoretical principles, research methods, supporting findings, differences vis-à-vis other approaches, and future directions. In the first chapter, James P. Lantolf introduces us to the sociocultural approach to SLA, an approach that considers mediation as a central element of development and language use. In the second chapter, Diane Larsen-Freeman explains the complexity theory approach to second language development/acquisition, a theory that will be of most use to those trying to find a satisfying explanation to the role of variability. In the third chapter, Bonny Norton and Carolyn McKinney present the identity approach to SLA, centered on relations between the learner and the social world, and how relations of power affect learning. This chapter will provide insight for teachers working with previously successful students who suddenly lose motivation. In the fourth chapter, Patricia A. Duff and Steven Talmy introduce us to language socialization approaches to SLA, which take into account other forms of knowledge that are learned through language as well as more traditional linguistic evidence. The fifth chapter, by Gabriele Kasper and Johannes Wagner, describes a conversation-analytic approach to SLA, which draws from ethnomethodology and concentrates on the social aspects of language acquisition. In the sixth chapter, Atkinson returns to introduce a sociocognitive approach to SLA, which sees the mind, body, and world as working together in SLA; learning is constant. This approach advocates for placing learners in situations where they absolutely need to use their L2 in order to participate in social action. The last chapter, by Lourdes Ortega, provides an excellent review of all theories, answers questions on what the benefits are of comparing the differences and similarities between approaches, and how integrating both the alternative and traditional approaches covers areas that had been difficult to access.

Key chapters from a teaching standpoint are the sociocultural approach to SLA, since it introduces the concept of SCOBAs, which can be directly applied on the classroom; the language socialization approach

to SLA; the identity approach to SLA, as it will help teachers better understand students' motivation; and the conversation-analytic approach to SLA. All of these theories have been thoroughly researched. The recommendation of the sociocognitive approach—that learners should be in a situation where they are forced to use their L2—will remind teachers of the premises of CLIL and immersion programs.

From a researcher's standpoint, the chapters on the sociocognitive and the complexity theory approaches will be of most use in SLA, because both are relatively new. Though their research methods need to be perfected, the possibilities for research with each are virtually endless.

Graduate students will find the introduction invaluable for revision purposes; the whole book can be used as a reference for those wanting to get an array of perspectives in the field. For those that want to focus on a particular approach, its corresponding chapter would act as an excellent primer that will also afford an accurate idea of which resources from the bibliography will be of most use to them.

This book gives coherence to an area that is crowded with theories. Though not comprehensive by any means (reviewing all existing theories would be a monumental task), it covers some of the most recent ones, and more publications like this would be of great benefit to the academic community.



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