



Content list available at <http://ijltr.urmia.ac.ir>

***Iranian Journal
of
Language Teaching Research
(Book Review)***



Essentials of SLA for L2 Teachers: A Transdisciplinary Framework, Joan Kelly Hall, Routledge, New York (2019) xi+ 172 pp., ISBN: 978-1-138-74407-3

Mohammad Salehi ^{a,*}

a Sharif University of Technology, Iran

The writer capitalizes on the notion of a transdisciplinary approach to SLA. In chapter one, Introduction, the writer elaborates on eight themes on which the entire book rests. The book comes into nine chapters, each chapter corresponding to a theme save chapter one. Where possible, the writer has made an endeavor to embellish different concepts with examples, often real life ones. Furthermore, the book is embroidered with a 'pedagogical activities' section which I think is the linchpin of the book.

In chapter two, the writer expands on the first theme which is 'L2 knowledge is complex and dynamic'. She reminds the reader that there is no one to one correspondence between form and meaning. Also discussed in this chapter is the movement from linguistic competence to multicompetence. While linguistic competence is associated with Chomsky, multicompetence is invoked to capture variability among bilinguals and multilinguals. Additionally, referred to in this chapter is the notion of 'repertoire' which captures resources available to bilinguals and multilinguals. Furthermore, the writer refers to the term 'linguaging' to capture the ways individuals use their repertoires. The last but not certainly the least, an important concept that is elaborated on is 'translanguaging' which is associated with Garcia (2009) among others. An example of translanguaging is *Chinsumer* from *Chinese Consumer*. Examples of languages using the concept are Chinglish, Pinglish, and Spanglish in which constructions from English are fused with those of other languages like Chinese to make new utterances. I think the strength of this chapter lies in its coverage of 'translanguaging' which has given rise to a number of research studies.

Chapter three with the theme of 'L2 knowledge is a repertoire of diverse semiotic sources' makes a distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic means of communication. The latter is termed semiotic resources that encompass non-verbal communication. The concept of multimodality is elaborated upon referring to the fact that words alone do not signify anything unless they are analyzed in the context in which they are offered. Furthermore, attempts are made to draw readers' attention to the fact that meaning potential exists in words. For example, "m'am" may be

* Corresponding author: Sharif University of Technology, Tehran, Iran

Email address: m_salehi@sharif.ir

© Urmia University Press

used in a positive way in some parts of the USA and in some parts it might carry a negative connotation. In my opinion, the problem with this chapter and perhaps the entire book is that it goes to great lengths to explain the concepts, whereas what language teachers really need is a demonstration of how the cognizance of SLA concepts can be beneficial for teachers. Furthermore, the writer highlights the importance of nonverbal behavior that has meaning potential. As a case in point, the writer mentions “raised hand” that might signal one wants to stop an action or in a court case it might signal taking an oath. As mentioned before, the example, though significant, hardly touches on classroom realities. Speaking of nonverbal behavior, the author could have mentioned cross-cultural differences in terms of nonverbal behavior.

In chapter four under the theme of 'L2 knowledge is situated, and attentionally and socially gated', the writer advocates the idea that language learning takes place at a micro level as the result of interactions with the caregiver. This chapter is more aligned with the title of the book. In the chapter, the author talks about “salience” which is an SLA specific term and captures the prominence of an item. The writer also talks about two types of frequency: token frequency and type frequency.

In chapter five with the title of 'Learning is mediated and embodied', the writer deals with how language is inextricably linked to social and cultural knowledge. *Indexicality* refers to the fact that certain meanings are invoked depending on contexts. For example, “how are you?” may invoke informality when produced by expressions such as “hey, man”. As another example of the indexical use of language, the author mentions “raise your hands” which is appropriate for asymmetrical relationships between teachers who issue such directives and students. It might be the case that the expression is used within peers to invoke superiority of one over the other. The writer rightfully argues that L2 socialization is different from L1 socialization in that learners and adults bring their own experiences to the learning situation. It is also a truism that L2 learning takes place in a formal setting.

Chapter six titled 'Learning is mediated by learners' social identities' capitalizes on how social identity contributes to our understanding of SLA. The writer evokes the term “transportable identities” to refer to the characteristics we are born with which tend to linger with us for eternity. The writer makes it abundantly clear that these transportable identities are inextricably liaised with our social identities. Boiled down to an Iranian context, a woman is not supposed to be a taxi driver. I surmise the most interesting part of this chapter deals with research studies which have implications for classroom contexts. For example, gender and social class did prove to have a determining role in some studies. As for social class, a country like Canada has different systems for immigrants two of which are business investment and skilled working. Those who enter the country through business investment send their children to private schools while the children of the second category go to public schools and as a result, children in the two categories experience language learning in markedly different ways. *Imagined identity* is also significant in that nonnative speakers carve out an imagined community of native speaking community before they arrive in the country. Their expectations might shatter once they set foot in Canada or the USA. Therefore, they may stop communicating with native speakers.

In chapter seven, the author talks about ‘motivation, investment and agency’. As for motivation, she mentions Dörnyei and his colleagues’ *directed motivational current* (DMC). The writer conceives of investment as being complementary to motivation as motivation is not able to capture the complex relations between power, identity and language learning. To further elaborate on the concepts, the writer does refer to some studies conducted in the realm of investment. In one case, Norton is said to have found out that out of five women in her study, two dropped out for reasons of being marginalized and positioned as immigrants. Finally, individual agency is referred

to which is defined as “socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (p. 115). The writer mentions the asymmetrical roles of teachers and learners in that learners are not positioned as agents whose voices can be heard. This is reminiscent of testing situations in which test takers are not in a position to decide. Individual agency is very much palpable in learning situations like in Iran in which learners are not entrusted with decision making.

Chapter eight which is titled 'Learning is mediated by literacy and instructional practices' deals with literacy and how it affects language learning. The writer resorts to some research studies which substantiate the role of literacy. For example, in one study children from rural families and those from urban areas functioned differently in terms of using language in that the way the latter used language more closely aligned with school standards than did the former. Scaffolding is also mentioned in this chapter which builds upon Vygotsky's ZPD. I agree with the writer that Vygotsky never intended his ZPD to be interpreted as scaffolding. It looks to be the case that researchers have gone overboard about Vygotsky's ZPD.

The essence of chapter nine is that language learning is mediated by language ideologies. Language ideologies are sets of beliefs about a language. We might hold the opinion that a language is complicated or difficult. The *ideology of standard language* is based on the assumption that one variety is superior to the other on the grounds of being codified and having formal use. It is not the case that one variety is inherently superior but that it is associated with prestige. The *ideology of monolingualism* is based on the belief that one language is sufficient for an entire nation. It is perhaps based on this belief that a naturalization test requires all citizens to take an English test (Kunnan, 2009). The *ideology of native speaker* states that only native speakers of a language set the benchmark for correct and proper use of a language. Such an ideology has adversely affected language education in the world. As Kumaravadivelu (2006) maintains the fountain pen of job chances for native speakers will never dry up.

As a way of conclusion, the book is commendable in its treatment of SLA concepts in exhaustive details embellished with research studies. Teachers holding a masters or PhD degree may immensely benefit from the book. There are a lot of takeaways from this book for these readers. The book, however, may be of little practical importance for teachers who do not have solid backgrounds in applied linguistics or related fields. The book does have implications for course designers especially when it comes to teaching language for immigration purposes. The section “pedagogical activities” is very useful for language teachers. I think that the book can be used as a teaching material for an SLA course at an MA level in applied linguistics.

References

- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). *Understanding language teaching: From method to postmethod*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers.
- Kunnan, A. J. (2009). Testing for citizenship: The U.S. naturalization test. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 6(1), 89-97.