# Introduction: Why Should Second/Foreign Language Teachers Tune In To Instructed SLA?

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Born in the late 1960s, second language acquisition (SLA) is a field of study that addresses how non-native languages are learned, either in naturalistic or instructed settings. As a "burgeoning subdomain" of SLA (Ortega, 2013, p. 5) that emerged in the 1980s, *instructed second language acquisition* (ISLA) focuses on the latter, attempting to unveil the effects of instructional intervention, i.e., second language (L2) pedagogy, on the process of L2 learning. As such, a rich body of theoretical and empirical works that bears direct relevance to the L2 classroom constitutes ISLA, distinguishing it from related sub-domains within the more general discipline of second language acquisition.

Today, after over 30 years of ISLA research, we have arrived at the understanding that instruction matters (Loewen, 2015). In other words, the quantity, quality, and context of instruction are important variables influencing the success (or failure) of L2 acquisition. Yet the relationship between instruction and learning (i.e., the question of instructional efficacy) is complex and variable, given the multifaceted nature of instruction, L2 knowledge, the process of L2 learning, and learners' individual differences. In consideration of these factors and their potential interactions, researchers have begun to recognize the need for a more nuanced and deep understanding of this relationship. Hence, as efforts continue to better comprehend the effect of instruction on second language acquisition, current-day ISLA research represents a dynamic juncture at which SLA theory and classroom practice converge, offering the exciting prospect that advancement in theory and research will effectually translate into enhancement and innovations in L2 pedagogy.

Here in the Applied Linguistics and TESOL Program at Teachers College, Columbia University, the instructional perspective and goal of ISLA coincide with our commitment to advancing educational research and practice. As such, we offer a range of courses that draw from insights in ISLA, including *SLA in the Classroom*, *Task-Based Language Teaching*, and more recently, *Understanding Second Language Learners*. As many of our program's M.A. students are prospective second/foreign language teachers, we hope that these courses can equip them with up-to-date knowledge about L2 learning, which can be applied to their future classrooms. Moreover, in the coming year (2016), our program will host the 35th Second Language Research Forum (SLRF), with a thematic focus on "Thirty Years of ISLA: Learning, Instruction, Learning, and Outcome." Through this conference, we hope to not only bring together students and scholars of SLA, but also invite teachers, material writers, and policy makers to partake in the discussion as we share and reflect upon the implications of past, current, and future ISLA research.

To echo the theme the SLRF 2016, we asked the current forum's contributors, doctoral students in Dr. ZhaoHong Han's SLA seminar, to reflect on why second/foreign language teachers should tune in to ISLA. More specifically, we asked them to consider the following guiding questions: What are some significant pedagogical insights gained from ISLA research in your domain of inquiry? Have these insights been applied to the realms of pedagogy (e.g., classroom practices, curriculum design, textbook design, teacher education, etc.)? If so, what are the outcomes? If not, where are the gaps and what are some potential guidelines for application?

In the following forum, a total of ten commentaries address these questions from a variety of perspectives. Several commentaries focus on a specific domain of inquiry, providing a summary of key research findings and offering suggestions for pedagogy. Eun Young Kang, for example, summarizes L2 vocabulary research, especially as it pertains to incidental and intentional vocabulary learning, and offers practical guidelines for teaching vocabulary. Shafinaz Ahmed focuses on literacy instruction, especially reading comprehension. She explains the dual purpose of reading and suggests strategies to complement reading instruction. Mi Sun Park, on the other hand, focuses on an understudied area, phonology. She summarizes current research findings and their pedagogical implications, pointing out a notable gap in research and practice with respect to learning and teaching pronunciation.

Several studies focus on ways to enhance classroom practice. Among others, Rosette Finneran, in order to provide an example of how classroom instructors can approach grammar instruction from a form-meaning-function (FMF) perspective, shares an interesting anecdote of teaching grammar in an ESL class. Natalia Sáez, in turn, describes the implications of a Cognitive Linguistics (CL) stance on language teaching, which stresses the importance of enhancing meaning in the classroom, and encourages teachers to reflect on the conceptual networks of the target language and to create pedagogical materials that call learners' attention to when, how, and for what purpose certain L2 structures are used. On the other hand, Adrienne Wai Man Lew describes the different types of input sources in the classroom, e.g., teacher-talk, authentic documents, and textbooks, and what research has shown regarding the use and efficacy of various input-based approaches to language teaching.

Several contributions take a more theoretical perspective. For example, Haimei Sun describes the theoretical rationale underlying the promising research-based pedagogy, task-based language teaching (TBLT). Farah S. Akbar examines the intersection between TBLT and the field of Computer Adapted Language Learning (CALL), describing research on technology in the L2 classroom. Ji-Yung Jung focuses on unpacking the definition of "complexity," contending that defining the complexity of linguistic features from an "acquisitional" perspective (Han & Lew, 2012) entails several significant implications for future ISLA research. Finally, Timothy Hall concludes the forum with a commentary that urges teachers to pay attention to ISLA, and Usage-Based and Emergentist theories (UBE) in particular, in light of their compelling potential to serve as a communal space for teachers and researchers.

We hope that the issues addressed in this forum will be useful to a wide audience of students, researchers, and teachers. Given the fact that our world is becoming increasingly multilingual, and that second language acquisition "has long been a common activity for a majority of the human species and is becoming ever more vital as second languages themselves increase in importance" (Doughty & Long, 2003, p. 4), enhancing L2 pedagogy by bringing together theory and practice is an endeavor worthy of our efforts. We firmly believe that ISLA has much to offer in this respect.

## ACKNOLWEDGEMENTS

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## COMMENTARIES