

An interview with Dr. Bill VanPatten

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Editorial Board members Philip Choong and Alick Liao recently had the pleasure of speaking with Dr. Bill VanPatten, the invited guest speaker at the 2008 APPLE Lecture sponsored by the Programs in TESOL and Applied Linguistics at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Dr. VanPatten is Professor of Applied Linguistics and Second Language Studies at Texas Tech University, where he teaches graduate courses on second language acquisition and second language instruction. He has published widely in the areas of input processing, processing instruction, and second language acquisition, more generally. Dr. VanPatten has received both local and national awards for his teaching and research, and among practitioners is best known for Making Communicative Language Teaching Happen (co-authored with James F. Lee) and for several top selling Spanish Language Textbooks and video projects. He has also published over 70 articles and book chapters, six authored or co-authored books, seven edited or co-edited books, and a number of reports and interviews.



When not engaged in academic pursuits, Dr. VanPatten performs standup comedy and writes fiction. His collection of short stories, Chicago Tales, was published in 2007, and he is currently working on a novel that takes place in West Texas called Seidon's Tale.

We'd like to thank Dr. VanPatten for graciously taking time to talk to members of our Editorial Board. We'd also like to thank Monika Ekiert for her technical assistance on the recording of the interview.

Click on each of the questions below to watch the interview.

1. [How did you first become interested in the field of second language acquisition \(SLA\)?](#)
2. [Your model of input processing is among the most widely-cited in the field of SLA. You first advanced it in the early 90s and in 2004 you published a new book on input processing. Could you give us a quick update on where you are with your thinking about the model?](#)
3. [How would you position processing instruction in relation to communicative language teaching? Would you characterize processing instruction as an explicit approach to grammar teaching, as Doughty and Williams did in their 1998 book?](#)
4. [Is there any particular aspect of processing instruction that has proven challenging to implement in language classrooms?](#)
5. [How do you suggest teachers blend their own experiential knowledge with the findings of SLA research? In other words, to what extent do you think that the discipline of second language acquisition can inform the practice of second language instruction?](#)

6. There has been a lot of controversy among researchers over the role of explicit and implicit learning in SLA. Where do you stand on this issue?
7. Almost two decades after Robert Bley-Vroman proposed the “Fundamental Difference Hypothesis,” you have recently put forward the Fundamental Similarity Hypothesis. Peter Robinson has also talked about the Fundamental Similarity Hypothesis. Can you distinguish the two and talk about how your concept of fundamental similarity relates to your previous work?
8. In your 2007 book co-edited with Jessica Williams, entitled Theories in Second Language Acquisition, you assemble a number of scholars to present their theories and frameworks in their own words. What do you see as the direction for theory development in the field of SLA? Do you think that we can expect fewer or more theories as our understanding of the process of acquisition grows?
9. You are founding editor of Spanish Applied Linguistics, and you are currently on the advisory board for Studies in Second Language Acquisition. You are also the recipient of the 2005 Stephen Freeman Award for an outstanding publication in Foreign Language Annals. From your perspective, what makes a good study in SLA?
10. Your first non-academic book, a book of short stories titled Chicago Tales, is to be published in the early summer. You have also performed stand-up comedy in the Chicago area. How did you become interested in creative writing and acting, and how do you find the time to engage in these activities?