Reviews

Japanese Applied Linguistics: Discourse and Social Perspectives.
**Junko Mori and Amy Snyder Ohta (Eds.). London: Continuum,
2008. xiii + 364 pp.**

Reviewed by
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This collection of papers promises to contain a critical linguistics and a critical pedagogy of Japanese language. The editors address their field in the title, *Japanese Applied Linguistics*, defining this as using language to consider real-world problems relating to the Japanese language. Their aims are to explore different issues linked to Japanese as spoken as a first language (L1) and as an additional language (p. 1), and to expand dialogue between Japanese language specialists and applied linguists in general (p. 6). All of the authors in this collection, with the exception of one, have either studied or now work in North American universities or do both, and are interested in pragmatics, interaction and conversation analysis (CA), sociolinguistics, or discourse-related topics.

The book has 12 chapters in four parts. Parts 1 and 2—the first seven chapters—focus on Japanese as L1. In chapter 1, Ono and Jones consider variations in the use of conditional modality forms in conversations using "usage-based linguistics" (p. 26). Mori then shows how interaction among nonverbal modes of discourse, including "syntax, prosody and nonverbal cues [and] the participants' shared understanding of the sequential order of turns" (p. 57), affect negotiating opinions in Japanese. A similar analysis of classroom interaction discourse in chapter 3 by Cook shows how the plain naked (informal) verb form (e.g., ~*u*; copula *da*) is used both in familiar informal settings and in detached, public, more formal settings. These chapters in Part 1 are the closest the book comes to descriptive linguistics (i.e., focus on Japanese language forms).

The focus of Part 2 shifts from language forms to the ethnographic and the sociolinguistic—language use and language choice in context. Wetzel's (chapter 4) timely update on *keigo* (honorifics) and its perceived ideology follows logically from Cook's preceding chapter on the observation of plain

verb forms in contrasting formal and informal contexts. Then, from polite language to regional dialects, Okamoto (chapter 5) considers switching from the standard Japanese (SJ, or *kyootsuugo*) variant to Osaka dialect. She found that the use of standard and regional forms changes with formality and social distance, except when variant choice is made for style management within a specific context.

The next two chapters are more ethnographic in focus. Okada (chapter 6) pays attention to gender by presenting a spatial and conversation analysis of a male boxer and a female coach (including photos). The rationale is to keep in mind the *joseigo/danseigo* (women's/men's language) dichotomy. However, Okada observes that in boxing professional identity and discourse supersedes gender in terms of linguistic behavior. Matsumoto examines elderly (female) identity in chapter 7. These case studies (of disclosure in extended conversations) reveal attitudes of women in their 70s and 80s towards the approach of death among close relatives and friends. Applying linguistic investigation techniques (in this case, CA) gives valuable insights into other sociocultural domains.

Part 3 turns to Japanese as an additional language (JAL) pedagogy. Ohta (chapter 8), on the function of laughter in lessons, shows that laughter is both therapeutic to and symptomatic of learning. Yotsukura (chapter 9) goes beyond classroom practice when she compares Japanese L1 users' and JAL learners' discourse strategies in *toiawase* (general inquiries). The chapter is instructive in two ways. First, it demonstrates variation among communication and language practices on one hand and assumptions about appropriateness across different language communities on the other. Secondly, it shows how variation in language structure and form is dependent on context and participants. This is an instructive chapter for teachers of Japanese and higher level Japanese users.

With a more sociolinguistic and intercultural focus in chapter 10, Kanno examines the issue of whether language-minority children in the Japanese education system are either insiders or outsiders ("guests" p. 275). Kanno views them as transnationals—neither insiders nor outsiders—with ties to both Japan and another culture. Her point is that educators in Japan have a fixated attitude: an authentic Japanese for insiders and an adapted one for outsiders to supplement their mother tongue.

It would have been useful if Kanno's chapter had advocated attention to students' L1 and L2 literacy skills, or suggested expanding pedagogical repertoire to include lessons in all the languages mentioned using the content of non-language subjects. Literacy is alluded to in empirical research reported by Yoshimi (chapter 11). She suggests that competencies which students bring to

JAL learning situations can become a resource. This is not new, though the author may rightly believe it is new to people in Japanese language education.

A frequent purpose of critical pedagogy discourse is to establish more equitable and effective outcomes, such as better practice. Kubota embarks on this in chapter 12, drawing upon the critical pedagogy literature, notably Pennycook's understanding of "critical thinking," "social relevance," "emancipatory modernism," and "problematizing practice" (2004, cited on p. 329). Kubota explores how such perspectives could alter Japanese pedagogy, at least in North America. Echoing Okamoto in chapter 5, Kubota contends that unlike the situation with English, expanding on "the norm of Standard Japanese has not been scrutinized" (p. 336). She leans towards what she calls the open-minded linguistic internationalism of Japanese rather than linguistic patriotism. Voices like hers need a forum, and this collection of papers provides welcome company.

The editors establish cohesion among the chapters early on, and it succeeds for the most part. A critical-linguistic tone evolving in earlier chapters strengthens at the end, but at the expense of missing out on significant fields of Japanese applied linguistics. These fields include Japanese written language and its attendant field of literacy, philology (i.e., incursion of loanwords, their adoption and adaptation), forms and use of Japanese in new and changing media in the world, and the state of Japanese and of Japanese scholarship outside of Japan, Britain, North America, and Australia. These fields give scope for another volume of Japanese applied linguistics papers.

Despite the gaps cited, this book is eclectically informative, good scholarship, and a sound plug for conversation analysis, which is featured extensively. There is a fairly comprehensive index split between author and subject. Given the field of specialization and backgrounds of the authors, an edition in Japanese translation should be little trouble to publish. This would further assist specialists in Japan to realize some other ways people think about and employ the Japanese language outside of Japan.

For the reader primarily interested in descriptive linguistics of Japanese, Tsujimura (2007) gives more extensive and comprehensive detail of Japanese phonology, syntax, and semantics, but for work on Japanese applied linguistics from the same North American school, Mori and Ohta's collection is a significant, currently relevant reference book.

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京大学術語彙データベース基本英単語**1110** *(The Kyoto University Data-Based List of 1,100 Essential Academic Words)*. 京都大学英語学術語彙研究グループ **+** 研究社**. Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 2009. 270 pp.**

Reviewed by
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This work, which I shall refer to as *Kyodai 1,110*, is a compact wordbook consisting of 1,110 vocabulary items, divided into three sections. In my view, it represents a valuable addition to the still rather limited selection of academic vocabulary teaching materials useful for Japanese university students.

The book is of a type that will be familiar to any teacher who has looked around a Japanese bookstore, consisting of words on the left side of each page, with translations and examples on the right. The translations are written in red, and a sheet of red plastic is included to hide these translations and enable students to test themselves easily. The foot of many of the right-hand pages has helpful notes to clarify points that may puzzle students. For example, two of the words on page 62 are *incentive* and *differentiate,* and note boxes on page 63 explain briefly the differences between *motive*, *incentive*, and *inducement*, and between *distinguish*, *discriminate*, and *differentiate*.

The book is divided into three sections; within each section, items are not ordered alphabetically, nor clustered semantically. This means that they can be learned in the order given without interference from neighbouring items.

To determine the worth of the book, we might ask two questions: Is the selection of words a useful one, and does the book help students to learn them? To tackle the second question first, anyone looking for a full textbook for an academic English class with exercises and reading passages should look elsewhere (e.g., Huntley, 2005; or Schmitt & Schmitt, 2005). However, in most teaching situations in Japan, the practical choice is likely to be between studying a few words in rich contexts and with lots of reading, and learning many words with little context. For students embarking on their study

of academic English, with a limited knowledge base, the latter approach may be best. From that perspective, the design of the book is suitable, and the self-testing feature is particularly valuable. Separating the vocabulary learning component from what students will actually do in class leaves the teacher considerable flexibility. Spending large amounts of class time on supervised learning of the words, using the remaining time for activities of the teacher's choice, would be a sound option, while teachers wanting to spend more time on other activities could simply assign word learning for homework, perhaps conducting tests in class.

These days, much work on academic vocabulary is based on the Academic Word List (AWL) compiled by Coxhead (1998, 2000). This list consists of 570 words, representing the items that Coxhead found occurring above a specific frequency threshold in multiple academic fields within the four larger groupings of Arts, Science, Law, and Commerce. The AWL can be considered a general academic rather than narrowly specialist or technical list. However, Ward (1999) has shown that the AWL may not have particularly good coverage of the vocabulary of any given academic field. There is arguably a gap to be filled between highly specialized fields and general academic vocabulary.

The Kyoto work, like that of Coxhead, involves databases compiled from a range of fields, but introduces a new layer between the discipline-specific databases and the database of general academic vocabulary (English for General Academic Purposes, or EGAP). This layer includes two databases: the database of academic vocabulary for liberal arts (EGAP-A), compiled from literature, law, education, integrated human studies, and economics databases, and the database of academic vocabulary for science (EGAP-S), compiled from medicine, engineering, science, pharmacology, and agriculture databases. The book features 477 words from the EGAP, followed by 311 words from EGAP-A and 322 words from EGAP-S.

This division is somewhat arbitrary—one could for example imagine including economics in EGAP-S, in addition to or instead of in EGAP-A; or one could create a three-way division of arts, hard science, and social science—but the project is valuable in partially replicating Coxhead's research with a different selection of subject divisions. In addition, it is likely that the selection of words reflects the needs of Japanese students better than Coxhead's work, which used a New Zealand university with a different faculty structure.

Let us look at some examples of the words featured in the respective lists. The first two pages of the general academic section contain the following words: *function*, *factor*, *individual*, *indicate*, *variable*, *significant*, *involve*, *es-*

timate, and *interaction*. The first two pages of the arts-based section have the following words: *treaty*, *jurisdiction*, *judicial*, *cite*, *statute*, *executive*, *dispute*, *legislative*, *defendant*. Finally, the first two pages of the science-based section have: *protein*, *telomere*, *antibody*, *strain*, *assay*, *mutation*, *receptor*, *component*, *membrane*, *substrate*, *chromosome*, *cancer*, *concentration*, and *constant*.

A glance at the various lists leaves the clear impression that the three lists are indeed very different in character. I would have little hesitation in recommending the first list to any student interested in academic English. The other two lists raise a few more questions, though.

The words listed from the arts section seem to have a strong bias towards legal fields, raising the possibility that the criteria used for including words in the book might benefit from some modification. Turning to the science-based list, I question whether *telomere*, for instance, is a word that all my students in science fields should know. We seem to have a mix of more-or-less technical words from various fields such as biology along with more general science words.

Some of these idiosyncratic word selections call into question details of *Kyodai 1,110*'s theoretical base. For teaching purposes, however, I would suggest that they do not detract greatly from the book's value. Certainly, I would be happier asking my arts-based students to learn *quote*, *undermine*, and *articulate* than *oscillation*, *fluorescence*, and *curvature*. When moving on to the two final sections, some selectivity when asking students to memorize words should prove sufficient. In summary, *Kyodai 1,110* does a well-defined job, and does it well, but teachers should exercise their judgment when deciding exactly how to use it.

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Understanding Second Language Acquisition. Lourdes Ortega. London: Hodder Education, 2009. xv + 320 pp.

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Lourdes Ortega's *Understanding Second Language Acquisition* is a graduate-level introduction to the field of SLA and provides students of linguistics with a comprehensive overview of the latest major theories and recent trends in the related areas of bilingualism, interlanguage, age, crosslinguistic influences, cognition, language aptitude, and motivation. Rather than a practical teacher's handbook like H. D. Brown's (2007) *Teaching by Principles*, Ortega's book takes an academic approach best suited for students of linguistics. This is not light reading, and at times the introduction to multiple theories on the same subject can be overwhelming. However, the novice teacher is exposed to a vast new area of language education, the basics of applied linguistics, and several well-chosen case studies. Students of linguistics are encouraged to think deeply about the different theories examined by Ortega, and compare the theories with their own experiences.

The book opens with an analysis of critical periods for the acquisition of human language. Controversy over the critical period hypothesis continues to this day, with Ortega taking the middle road. She encourages the reader to keep an open mind and suggests a rather extensive further reading list for the more highly self-motivated readers who absolutely must satisfy their curiosity about the issue.

On another topic of interest, Ortega tackles the complex phenomenon of crosslinguistic influences (transfer), which includes a pertinent discussion of Japanese language students learning English. Japanese students, whose L1 pattern is quite different from English, tend to avoid the use of relative clauses in order to reduce the potential for mistakes. Ortega points out that such risk avoidance may produce more accurate output, but in the long term may hinder L2 development.

Ortega devotes substantial attention to cognition, and the basics of skill acquisition theory (automatization), long-term memory, working memory, attention, and noticing (a learner's inclination to see the difference between his output and that of a native speaker). Noticing requires not only higher levels of motivation, but also focus on L2 form, usually grammar. This is a key element of language learning, and noticing on any level will contribute

to acquisition (Schmidt, 2001). Ortega admits, however, that the jury is still out on whether or not learning without attention is possible.

This book also introduces an exciting new approach to SLA, *emergentism*, which draws on the tenets of information processing theories. This approach, promoted by language psychologist Nick Ellis (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2006), argues that simple learning mechanisms operating across human perception and cognition systems interact with language learning as a part of a communicatively rich human social environment. This means humans are driven to exploit the functionality of language (i.e., to communicate actively in a socially and linguistically rich environment). This presents a significant challenge to those from homogeneous nations with one official language and with very small ethnic or linguistic minorities.

Foreign language aptitude is presented through the case studies of two radically different learners. One learner grew up in Minnesota in the 1960s and developed a lifelong infatuation with learning the French language and culture. Study abroad and immersion experiences helped to shape her L2 identity, which eventually led to a PhD in French. In contrast, another learner of French struggled tremendously trying to learn to speak the language. Although he could read and translate complex philosophy texts in French, at age 55 he was unable to communicate effectively with his French colleagues despite strong motivation and extensive time on task.

Ortega asks how we can account for such significant individual differences in language learning. Of course, we cannot. Not only are several questions left unanswered, but several more are posed. Some readers may feel left hanging as they are expected to pursue the topic through further reading.

Memory, age, foreign language anxiety, and learning strategies are also discussed in subsequent chapters, with the author refusing to support any single theory. As readers, we are left to seek the answers for ourselves again through the suggested further reading. It is likely that only the most motivated readers would do so.

Ortega finds it necessary to draw heavily on theories and methods from social psychology when dealing with the topic of motivation and SLA. She addresses the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery, Gardner's integrative/instrumental motivation paradigm, intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, and Yashima's international posture. All of these engaging topics are thoroughly examined, giving the reader an extensive background on the history and direction of studies on motivation and linguistics. I found this to be one of the most interesting sections because it filled in a number of gaps in my previous understanding of motivation and SLA.

Throughout the book, students are given a solid foundation upon which to build their knowledge of SLA. Although the author leaves us to ponder various theories, there are useful chapter summaries that wrap up the key points succinctly, while providing annotated suggestions for further reading to satisfy those who want to read more. That is what I like the most about Ortega's book: The door is left open for readers to pursue topics of interest, to follow up, and ultimately, to come to their own conclusions.

However, this may not be a good book for those who easily become lost in the details of numerous academic expressions and unfamiliar case studies. The linguistic terms, references, and concepts are of a scholarly nature and may require the guidance of a linguistics professor for comprehension. This is exactly what makes Ortega's *Understanding Second Language Acquisition* a great textbook for any linguistics program, as it pushes the reader to not simply accept modern theories of SLA, but to consider them deeply. I highly recommend this book for university libraries as well as for the bookshelves (and the eyes) of highly motivated language teachers. If you are considering professional development (or even simply want to become a better teacher), you will find Ortega's book aptly titled.

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Japanese Language Teaching: A Communicative Approach. Alessandro G. Benati. London: Continuum, 2009. ix+214 pp.

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The main aim of this book is to help students and instructors of Japanese, as well as young researchers into the learning of Japanese, have a better understanding of what communicative language teaching really is and how it can be used in the language classroom. While it is aimed at teachers of Japanese, many language teachers can benefit from the detailed discussions of theories related to second language learning and the design of communicative activities for the classroom. This book also helps language teachers rethink two things: the sensitiveness of instruction and the rationale of focus on form.

In the 1980s, communicative language teaching (CLT) was popular in Japan and influenced Japanese language education deeply. Because Japanese education in Japan, unlike English education, is not influenced by backwash from entrance examinations, the basic concepts and tasks of CLT were taken up widely among Japanese teachers (Suzuki, 2007). However, while advocating a learner-centred type of education (Sawada, 2003), teachers and researchers in Japan rarely have focused on questions about method or approach. This created an emphasis on one of the main characteristics of CLT, deemphasizing instruction. In a timely manner, Benati in this book reminds us of the importance of instruction. Although it is a very complex and delicate process to prove the effects of instruction, the author argues that teachers and researchers should spend more time and effort identifying and detailing these effects.

This book also reconsiders the meaning of focus on form. Many Japanese teachers in Japan combine practices of the Audiolingual Method and CLT in their classrooms. However, some instructors have emphasized the differences between the Audiolingual Method and CLT too much and have forgotten that instruction by CLT includes a focus on form. This book also reminds us that instruction by CLT should not simply be meaning focused, but must carry with it some degree of attention to the grammatical properties of language.

The book has seven chapters, divided into three parts: preliminary considerations (Part A), communicative language teaching (Part B), and

classroom research (Part C). In Part A, Benati reviews some of theories and research findings concerning the important factors (e.g., input, interaction, output, and the role of instruction) and the effects of focus on form in second language acquisition.

Through this detailed review, Benati argues that although the effects of instruction are limited, grammar instruction can facilitate acquisition and help learners to become aware of items in the input. This suggestion on the effects of grammar instruction is particularly encouraging for language teachers.

In Part B, the characteristics of CLT are presented and discussed. After providing an overview of CLT, Benati suggests three approaches to grammar teaching and presents various tasks for teaching Japanese. These practical approaches support teachers' daily instruction and comprise one of the most significant parts of this book. One of these approaches is "processing instruction" (PI) (p. 41). PI is a new type of grammar instruction which encourages learners to make form-meaning connections. The greatest difference between PI and traditional grammar instruction is who (teacher or learner) connects the form and the meaning. For example, in the PI approach, the form -*mashita* should be connected to the meaning *past* by learners, not by teachers.

However, a more extended discussion of the appropriateness of each grammatical task is needed. For example, Activity D (p. 88) is a task on input enhancement to learn *ne* (the sentence final particle in Japanese), and shows a dialogue containing many instances of the target item. In the sentence *I must go to a bank* in Activity D, *ne* cannot be attached. Without a grammatical explanation about when we cannot use the target item, learners will not be able to tell when they are using this particle incorrectly.

In Part C, the process of conducting classroom research through the use of experimental methodology is presented. The final chapter shows the results of a study conducted to measure the effects of PI on two linguistic features (tense forms) of Japanese. The results of these experimental studies support those obtained by other studies investigating the effects of PI on different romance languages.

However, two questions arise from these results. First, it is relatively easy for learners to connect the form and meaning of tense. As mentioned above, for many other linguistic features with complex meanings, it is difficult for learners to connect form and meaning. Are there any effective activities for these other complex features? Second, the tests (pp. 197-200) are more suited for a PI group than a traditional instruction group because the tests

are similar to the activities of PI. There must be other ways to measure the effectiveness of grammatical instruction.

Despite these criticisms, Benati shows us the connection of theory and practice to experimental studies as well as the significance (and difficulties) involved in measuring the effects of instruction. As Benati points out, further research should be conducted to support these results. The important point is that language teachers and researchers must continue discussion on the effects of their own instruction.

Throughout the book, there are many helpful questions to help us to understand the theories and concepts related to CLT. Each chapter has key terms and suggestions for further reading. There is also a detailed bibliography of studies on CLT, second language acquisition, and the acquisition of Japanese as a second language.

Japanese Language Teaching succeeds in its main aim to be a helpful reference book on the underpinnings of CLT, especially for teachers, and at the same time addresses the essential questions of what second language acquisition is. In answering these questions, this book encourages teachers to reflect on the effectiveness of their own instruction, while suggesting that researchers return to the classroom.

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***Insights on Teaching Speaking in TESOL*. Tim Stewart (Ed.). Alexandria, VA: TESOL, 2009. x +262 pp.**

Reviewed by
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The latest volume in the TESOL Classroom Practice Series will be especially useful to EFL teachers in Japan. *Insights on Teaching Speaking in TESOL* was thoughtfully put together and edited by Tim Stewart, an active member of the local teaching community who is adept at making practical connections among teachers throughout the EFL world. The authors of 5 of the 17 chapters in this volume have a wide range of spoken-language teaching experiences with Japanese university students. Although teachers in Japan have a prominent place in the collection, the teaching practices reported in the other chapters come from ESL classrooms in Canada, the USA, and the UK as well as from EFL classrooms in Taiwan, the UAE, Vietnam, and Germany. Many of the authors, both native and nonnative speakers of English, also have years of teaching experience in several different nations.

The first section has eight chapters on the development and implementation of teaching materials; the second section's three chapters are about teaching public speaking; and the five chapters of the final section focus on ways to provide feedback to students and ideas about assessing speaking proficiency.

Even though most of the authors teach university students or adult learners, the lessons described will likely also interest teachers of younger intermediate-level students. Indeed, readers will find that many of the ideas in the book can be adapted to a wide variety of teaching situations. For example, a description of the development of lessons for primary school children in Germany which outlines how children learned to move away from rote imitation to become imaginative, creative speakers offers generally applicable ideas about motivation. Another chapter explains how an original scaffolding approach was successfully used to adapt conventional speaking tasks for use in an English for Occupational Purposes course for nursing students. Many of us face similar challenges in adapting textbook speaking tasks for our classes.

Several chapters may be of special interest to teachers who are involved in developing blended-learning speaking lessons which combine traditional EFL teaching methods with Internet resources. In a chapter entitled

"Authentic iBT Speaking Practice Using Open-Source Voice-Recording Software" Saito-Stehberger and Oh describe ways to teach speaking that support the development of skills needed for the speaking tasks on the Internet-based TOEFL test. Chartrand's chapter "From Podcasting to YouTube: How to Make Use of Internet 2.0 for Speaking Practice" explains efficient ways to integrate the use of podcasting and social networking websites with speaking course lessons. An additional use of the audio and video features of Web 2.0 technology for the assessment of public speaking tasks is described by Yeh in "Practical Strategies for Assessing Students' Oral Proficiency Through Vlogs." Yeh presents a convincing argument that the new easy-to-manage, web-based audio-video technology promotes the creation of a constructive classroom learning community which can lead to improvements in public speaking skills.

The volume also has much to interest teachers of English for Academic Purposes. Incorporating the teaching of critical thinking skills into the design of speaking tasks is a theme found throughout. In addition, there are several descriptions of EAP lesson materials intended to prepare students to make presentations at conferences, including an interesting pedagogical rationale for moving away from the ubiquitous slideshow speaking aids to poster presentations.

I see three ways that teachers can use this book. First, it could serve as a graduate school TEFL program course book. This is a book that can, chapter by chapter, encourage constructive discussion and inspire creative lesson planning. The consistency in the step-by-step presentation of the teaching ideas and the straightforward writing style in each chapter make it an accessible textbook for Japanese graduate students. Each of the authors introduces the topic, sets the context, and after describing each aspect of the learning task in short clear sections, concludes with a personal reflection—all done from the perspective of a conscientious, unpretentious teacher who has found ways to have learning theory inform teaching practice.

Secondly, the book provides a collection of models of good research writing that teachers can use to make plans to conduct and publish their own classroom research. Many of the chapters, especially the editor's introduction, include plenty of useful and up-to-date references to the literature related to teaching speaking. For those of us who are a few publications away from a better job and for people who need to keep publishing to keep their research grants, *Insights on Teaching Speaking in TESOL* offers support.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, reading this book may be an effective antidote to "stagnation" in teaching, a term that Stewart uses, instead of the more common expression *burnout*, to describe what can

happen to some teachers who have had too many speaking classes, year after year, that are easy to get through but at the same time difficult to teach well. A common survival strategy is to build up a short collection of guaranteed crowd-pleasing lessons that through repetition can be delivered perfectly. The result can be a period of stagnation in our careers in which we cease experimenting with new ways to teach speaking. If you're stuck in a rut with your speaking classes, you owe it to yourself, and to your students, to try to get out: As Stewart says, "This [stagnation] is why we need to challenge ourselves in our teaching, and that should involve challenging our students as well" (p. 117).

Insights on Teaching Speaking in TESOL offers much more than insights. Enough practical information is given to make it possible for us, as busy as we are, to try out some of these new ways to teach speaking in our next classes.

Exploring Second Language Classroom Research: A Comprehensive Guide. David Nunan and Kathleen M. Bailey. Boston: Heinle, Cengage Learning, 2009. vii + 496 pp.

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Exploring Second Language Classroom Research truly is a comprehensive guide to research in ELT classrooms. By exploring second language research in 500 pages, David Nunan and Kathleen Bailey confirm their reputations for thoroughness. Happily, they also deliver the goods once again with tremendous organizational facility and transparent prose. Indeed, it is difficult to think of writers in the field better situated to explain second language classroom research. Nunan and Bailey have lived and shaped the developments they describe through their research, teaching, and learning activities since the 1970s.

This book bridges a significant gap in ELT reference materials. In my graduate courses on language classroom research, I have encountered considerable difficulty finding a textbook to recommend to my students. The books I have surveyed until now have had a narrower focus, either generic

how-to-do-research manuals, or those explaining qualitative research, or surveys of particular methods of conducting classroom research such as case studies or action research. Nunan and Bailey deliver a comprehensive survey.

Exploring Second Language Classroom Research is divided into four parts: (Part I) an overview of second language classroom research, (Part II) research design issues, (Part III) data collection issues, and (Part IV) data analysis and interpretation issues. Each part of the book is informed by the four underlying themes listed below. These recurring themes illustrate the pragmatic stance of the authors.

1) **Empirical research matters.** Nunan and Bailey make a strong pitch for a balanced, practical approach to research: "empirical research does have an important place alongside common sense and experience in helping teachers to determine what they can and should do to facilitate learning" (p. 5). Bias against the experimental method amongst ELT practitioners is convincingly shown to be unnecessary and unhelpful.

2) **Teachers should be involved in classroom research.** The authors' fundamental belief is that "there is a central place for teachers in the research process" (p. 5). To encourage teachers to put on their researcher hats, Bailey and Nunan dive right into the muck of what it is to do research and how to get started in Part I. This immediately provides context for readers with limited experience. They express concern about how "neat and tidy" published research "is in many ways a misrepresentation" of a messy process with "missteps, blind alleys, false starts, and frustrations" that neophyte researchers should be aware of (p. 438).

3) **Research is a set of skills people can learn.** The authors encourage language teachers not to shy away from researching their teaching, pointing out the significant professional development benefits. Bailey and Nunan explain that "the ability to do research is not a matter of one's appointed position, but rather of one's knowledge, skill, and attitude" (p. 5). Classroom research is not an impossible task. What teacher-researchers require are desire, time, and diligence.

4) **Research methodology should be appropriate to the circumstances.** Throughout the book, the authors make strenuous efforts to discount the debate on the value of qualitative versus quantitative approaches to classroom research since, "neither approach is inherently superior to the other" (p. 439). Nunan and Bailey suggest possibilities for combining psychometric and naturalistic research methods and procedures. Their open-minded view of research is refreshing as they argue for teacher-researchers to choose a

research method, or to blend methods, based upon appropriateness: "as researchers we must be eclectic and choose data collection and analysis procedures that are appropriate for answering the research questions we pose" (p. 5). Yet, they candidly caution about the pitfalls of blending methods. Besides data management and time concerns, Nunan and Bailey highlight the possibility that different types of data could lead to different interpretations of results. Conversely, the two types of data used in combination can help to explain anomalies in results.

Through their elaboration of these interlinking themes, Bailey and Nunan convey an understanding that ELT is a big tent supported by academics and practitioners, and fortified by results the research process generates. They define classroom research broadly to encompass both classroom-based and classroom-oriented studies. The concept of classroom-based studies refers to research surrounding the interaction of teachers and students during lessons, an idea that has been complicated with the advent of the virtual classroom where students and teachers no longer need to inhabit the same physical space. Classroom-oriented studies, on the other hand, are not conducted in classroom settings, but make claims potentially relevant for classroom teaching and learning. When defining research, the authors list three key components: (a) a question, problem, or hypothesis; (b) data; and (c) analysis and interpretation. To complete the research cycle, results need to be presented in writing or in a talk.

Each of the four parts of the book is introduced with a very brief explanation of what follows together with bulleted lists of individual chapter aims, particularly welcome in a volume of 500 pages. Placed throughout the explanations in each of the 15 chapters are two types of reader task boxes requiring either *action* or *reflection*. In addition, sample studies illustrating the key points of each chapter are presented. Chapters conclude with summaries of the payoffs and pitfalls incurred by different methods and techniques, a concluding recap of chapter highlights, as well as a list of questions and tasks for readers to consider. Selective annotated lists of references for further reading are also provided.

Despite the comprehensiveness of the guidance, or perhaps because of it, I found reading this volume to be surprisingly non-taxing. The skillful delivery of information is accomplished through a pragmatic approach to issues, combined with transparent prose, and aided by ample use of clear headings, tables, and figures. These veteran writers demonstrate their teaching skill through a careful recycling and expansion of key concepts to aid understanding.

It would be impossible to cover this material in a single graduate course, but the organization allows teachers to pick and choose sections to explore. I was somewhat surprised that collaborative research and the importance of working with colleagues are not emphasized more in this comprehensive book, though. Collaboration seems to me to be central to the activity of teachers' research in classroom settings (e.g., Edge, 2002; Johnston, 2009); however, this does not diminish the usefulness of the book for ELT professionals who are now researching their own practice, or are contemplating becoming teacher-researchers.

Nunan and Bailey aim to introduce the state of the art in language classroom research and to help readers develop practical skills to conduct their own investigations. In particular, they hope to empower language teachers to "examine their own classroom contexts systematically" (p. 4). In support of these aims, this introductory manual contains good practical explanations of the latest technical and theoretical research frameworks in ELT. Both beginning and advanced ELT researchers will find *Exploring Second Language Classroom Research* a valuable contribution to the field.

References

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