



## MLJ Reviews

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### MLJ Review Policy

The *MLJ* reviews books, monographs, computer software, and materials that (a) present results of research in—and methods of—foreign and second language teaching and learning; (b) are devoted to matters of general interest to members of the profession; (c) are intended primarily for use as textbooks or instructional aids in classrooms where foreign and second languages, literatures, and cultures are taught; and (d) convey information from other disciplines that relates directly to foreign and second language teaching and learning. Reviews not solicited by the *MLJ* can neither be accepted nor returned. Books and materials that are not reviewed in the *MLJ* cannot be returned to the publisher. Responses should be typed with double spacing and submitted electronically online at our ScholarOne Manuscripts address: <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/mlj>.

### THEORY AND PRACTICE

ATKINSON, DWIGHT (Ed.). *Alternative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition*. New York: Routledge, 2011. Pp. 196. \$36.95, paper. ISBN 978-0-415-54925-7.

This volume presents a comparative description of six alternative approaches to second language acquisition (SLA), characterized as approaches that “contrast with/or complement the cognitivism pervading the field” (back cover). Contributors and their respective approaches, presented sequentially in the volume include (a) Lantolf (sociocultural approach); (b) Larsen-Freeman (complexity theory approach); (c) Norton and McKinney (identity approach); (d) Duff and Talmy (language socialization approaches); (e) Kasper and Wagner (conversation-analytic approach); and (f) Atkinson (sociocognitive approach). An introductory chapter by Atkinson is also included, as well as a final chapter by Ortega entitled “SLA After the Social Turn: Where Cognitivism and Its Alternatives Stand.” In this final chapter, Ortega attempts to reconcile aspects

of cognitivism with socially oriented approaches, ultimately arguing for epistemological diversity within the evolving field of SLA.

In the introductory chapter, Atkinson sets the stage for the volume by describing cognitivism and then by identifying the purpose of the volume: “to collect under one cover SLA approaches that depart from the field’s dominant cognitive norms and assumptions, and to make those approaches directly comparable” (p. 16). The presentational format is well conceived, as the editor asked contributors to respond to common headings, thus easing readers’ ability to make direct comparisons among approaches. To this end, each chapter’s organizing themes include (a) an overview, (b) theoretical principles, (c) research methods, (d) supporting findings, (e) differences vis-à-vis other alternative approaches, and (f) future directions. All contributors, with the exception of Lantolf and Kasper and Wagner, follow this common layout; these contributors chose not to include the “Differences” section.

Each contributor draws attention to specific neglected areas of inquiry within the social aspects of SLA, while emphasizing that no approach should be viewed in isolation but rather as adding to a fuller understanding of how second languages (L2s) are acquired. In this vein, Atkinson’s call to contributors to compare their approaches with others in the volume is perspicacious, although one of the volume’s few shortcomings is that not all contributors took advantage of this opportunity. The editor valiantly attempts to reconcile and highlight all six approaches in his chapter on sociocognitivism. However, the ways in which the other contributors view their specific approaches within the field could have served as a demonstrable example of his project to bring diverse approaches into “mutual dialogue and engagement” (p. 17), a process that Atkinson claims in the preface is “crucial for progress” (p. xi) in the field of SLA.

One of the volume’s strengths is that, although much of what is included can be found elsewhere, contributors also describe their current areas of interest, therefore advancing each chapter’s discussion in comparison to other texts. For example, although Lantolf’s position on mediation as

author's writing style is also effective and engaging, which makes the reading, especially the parts about historical events and the lives of colorful historical figures, enjoyable.

My only question is the author's claim that "one does not have to learn the Chinese language in order to enjoy or even to write calligraphy" (p. 19). Although I agree with the author that calligraphy is a visual art, it is unique in that the content of the art is language, which has meaning. It would be difficult to appreciate a piece of calligraphy in its entirety if one could not go beyond the visual aspects of it, no matter how beautiful the brush strokes might be. Similarly, for calligraphers, it is possible to copy certain characters at the beginning stages if they do not know the language; but if the learners become more advanced and would like to be more creative in their work, not knowing the language would greatly hinder that process. Perhaps the author succeeded in her own teaching experience, probably with beginning learners.

The discussion of calligraphy created by the Modernists during the Avant-Garde movement, which started in the 1980s, is intriguing, but no examples are given. Some readers would probably want to see examples of such interesting new developments.

In sum, this is a great introductory textbook for teaching the fundamentals of calligraphy and for introducing various aspects of Chinese culture through calligraphy. For those institutions that cannot fit such a course into their curricula, it is a useful reference book for instructors of Chinese to teach students how to write characters correctly, which is no easy task, and to introduce certain aspects of Chinese culture, especially those related to writing and calligraphy. Even for the average American student of Chinese who does not study calligraphy, the rules and techniques that are taught in this book would offer tremendous help in writing Chinese characters.

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## JAPANESE

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NOMURA, KIMIHIKO. *Japanese Grammar: The Connecting Point*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010. Pp. xv, 459. \$56.00, paper. ISBN 978-0-7618-5311-4.

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This book consists of twelve chapters: (a) "Pronunciation and Writing Systems"; (b) "Basic Sen-

tence Patterns"; (c) "Verb Categorizations"; (d) "Verb Conjugations and Functions"; (e) "Verbals and the Particles *ga*, *o*, and *wa*"; (f) "The Copular Verb"; (g) "The Copular Noun"; (h) "Adjective"; (i) "Auxiliary Verb"; (j) "Adverb"; (k) "Noun"; and (l) "Pronoun." The main text occupies 186 pages; pages 187 through 454 are appendices, listing grammatical patterns. Japanese sentences are presented in the Roman alphabet and *kana*; Chinese characters are rarely used.

This reviewer finds it difficult to identify the book's target audiences and its intended functions. The preface implies that it is written for learners of the Japanese language, rather than for students of Japanese linguistics. Nevertheless, the very first sentence of chapter 1 reads: "Students must first learn new sets of characters that represent Japanese phonemes (the smallest acoustic unit) to be able to read and write Japanese" (p. 1). This statement is incomprehensible because Japanese orthography is basically syllabic, not phonemic.

The author calls the volume a grammar book, not a textbook. Does this mean that it is intended to supplement an elementary-level textbook? If so, does it provide useful information not available in typical textbooks, or is it designed to make the learning process easier? Unfortunately the answer to this query is that it does not.

The book's most egregious problem is that it contains several statements that are blatantly incorrect. For example, "There are 9 basic consonant sounds in Japanese, ... /k/, /s/, /t/, /n/, /h/, /m/, /y/, /r/, and /w/, creating the basis for the 46 basic Hiragana characters when combined with the five vowel sounds. Among these nine consonants, *four of them undergo phonological changes generating /g/, /z/, /d/, /b/, and /p/...*" (p. 3; emphasis by the reviewer). The consonants /g/, /z/, /d/, /b/, and /p/ are not derived from other consonants; they have existed independently since ancient times.

The author also states that "there is a significant number of stative verbs, including the verb すみます (*sumimasu*) = 'to reside.' This verb sounds like a dynamic verb, but in Japanese the location of residency is static, because of the perception that the subject will remain, or intends to remain, in one place long enough to be identified as a place of residence" (p. 39). The verb *sumimasu* is not stative in any theoretical or grammatical framework. Another serious error is found in the statement that "か (*ka*) is the stem of the verb, and く (*ku*) is the third formative" (p. 48). The stem of the verb *kaku* ('write') is *kak-*, not *ka-*.

The book is saturated with linguistic terms, most of which are used in an abnormal way. For

example, the author writes that “ふ is often represented by (fu). However, there is no /f/ sound in Japanese. /f/ is a *labial dental voiceless fricative*” (p. 5; emphasis by the reviewer). One doubts that the instructors who use this book have to teach the basics of articulatory phonetics. Indeed, is it necessary? These terms never recur in the book.

In chapter 2 the reader finds the following statement: “Sentences with the particle, は (*wa*) are dominant in spoken and written Japanese. When translated into English, sentence patterns with は (*wa*) best represent the idea of the English subject. However, *the nominative case marker*, が (*ga*), is the only true *syntactic subject* translates into English” (p. 16; emphasis by the reviewer). Typical language learners are unlikely to comprehend such statements. Furthermore, the distinction between the concepts of subject and topic is a profound one that is never explained in the book. And yet, the author contends: “Place は (*wa*) immediately following the *subject* of the sentence. In other words, は (*wa*) indicates that the noun or noun phrase immediately preceding it is the *topic* of the given sentence” (p. 24; emphasis by the reviewer). Are subject and topic considered synonymous in this book?

On page 41, another bewildering explanation appears, this one regarding aspect: “あいします (*aishi masu*) = ‘to love,’ in English, is a stative verb, as it is an emotional state of affairs. However, in Japanese, it is *imperfective* and communicates that one has not yet reached that threshold of emotion. Once emotional involvement reaches point B, the state of being in love begins” (emphasis by the reviewer). The term *imperfective* is used without any definition. Nevertheless, this statement appears to be a confusion between tense and aspect. In the conventional use of the terms *perfective* and *imperfective*, *aishimasu* is perfective because it describes the event as a whole, without concern for the internal structure. Whether or not the event has taken place is expressed by tense.

The term *suffix* is used in a peculiar way in chapter 8. The phrases *to omoimasu* ‘think that . . .,’ *mo ii desu* ‘it is okay to do,’ and *koto ga arimasu* ‘there was a time that’ are all listed as suffixes.

The book also uses unconventional terminology and nomenclature; for example, and *P-deploc* (destination and direction, an event and place), *P-dploc* (destination and direction, place only), and *P-dyloc* (location of action or event) (p. 17). They play no significant role in explaining the grammatical constructions in question.

As a minor point, nonstandard Romanization is used everywhere: *gakkou* ‘school’ (p. 17; should be *gakkō*, *gakkō*, or *gakkoo*); *hutsuu* ‘ordinary’ (p. 111;

should be *futsuu* to be consistent with the rest of the book); *kocchi* ‘this way’ (p. 167; should be *kotchi*).

Finally, although occupying more pages than the text itself, the appendices are not linked to any part of the text; therefore, their use is unknown. Moreover, Appendix B includes numerous typographical errors in the form of nonsense sequences of syllables, giving the strong impression that the book was produced hastily.

The idea of a supplementary grammar book is a welcome one. Creating such a tool requires careful planning. Is it to be used mainly in the classroom? Or is it perhaps for self-study? What is the assumed fluency level of the reader? Just what is its connecting point? Regrettably, purchase and consideration of the contents of *Japanese Grammar: The Connecting Point* cannot be justified.

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## PORTUGUESE

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RECTOR, MONICA, REGINA SANTOS, & MERCELO AMORIM, with M. LYNNE GERBER. *Working Portuguese for Beginners*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010. Pp. xv, 485. \$ 74.95, paper. ISBN 978-1-58901-638-5. CD-ROM, free to adopters. PowerPoint slides, free to adopters.

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This impressive, well-organized beginners’ textbook is divided into six units, each unit with four chapters. Thus, there are 24 discrete lessons encompassing areas of language, culture, and business vocabulary in Portuguese. This package includes a CD-ROM with additional audio exercises and PowerPoint presentations for instructors. The dual purpose of these independent units is to equip learners with the ability to speak the language and to navigate the cultural intricacies of business relationships in Brazil. The authors contend that it is a pedagogical tool in a business Portuguese class, not a self-help book. The last unit presents an independent project through which students can put to practical use what they have learned. The first unit covers typical topics such as greetings, forms of address, and body language etiquette. The second unit covers grammar features such as articles, gender, number, copula verbs, interrogative pronouns and comparisons. The third unit covers the present