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THEORY AND PRACTICE


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
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JAPANESE


This book consists of twelve chapters: (a) “Pronunciation and Writing Systems”; (b) “Basic Sentence Patterns”; (c) “Verb Categorizations”; (d) “Verb Conjugations and Functions”; (e) “Verbs 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, ...” (p. 1). This statement is incomprehensible because Japanese phonemes (the smallest acoustic unit) to be able to read and write Japanese” (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 *sume* (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 “*kak* (ka) is the stem of the verb, and *ka* (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 “☆” is often represented by (fu). However, there is no /ʃ/ sound in Japanese. /ʃ/ 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, で (wa) are dominant in spoken and written Japanese. When translated into English, sentence patterns with で (wa) best represent the idea of the English subject. However, the nominative case marker, は (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, で (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: "あわじます (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 ておもい masu (mood) and てえす desu ‘think that . . . ’ are not linked to each other, as they are not related to the same grammatical construction. However, in Japanese, a speaker uses a phrase like てえす desu ‘think that . . . ’ to describe their thoughts. It is an emotional state of affairs. However, in the conventional use of the terms perfective and imperfective, imperfective describes the event as a whole, without concern for the internal structure.

The book also uses unconventional terminology and nomenclature; for example, and P-deploc (destination and direction, an event and place), P-dyloc (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, gakkó, 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


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