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# Second Language Acquisition, Applied Linguistics, and the Teaching of Foreign Languages

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Given the current popularity of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) as a research base for the teaching and learning of foreign languages in educational settings, it is appropriate to examine the relationship of SLA to other relevant areas of inquiry, such as Foreign Language Education, Foreign Language Methodology, and Applied Linguistics. This article makes the argument that Applied Linguistics, as the interdisciplinary field that mediates between the theory and the practice of language acquisition and use, is the overarching field that includes SLA and SLA-related domains of research. Applied Linguistics brings to all levels of foreign language study not only the research done in SLA proper, but also the research in Stylistics, Language Socialization, and Critical Applied Linguistics that illuminates the teaching of a foreign language as sociocultural practice, as historical practice, and as social semiotic practice.

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## INTRODUCTION

The current popularity of the term *second language acquisition* (SLA) has created some confusion about the nature of SLA as a domain of research and the way in which it contributes to the teaching and learning of foreign languages. Up to 20% of all job openings in French, German, Italian, and Spanish in the MLA October *Job Information Lists* of the last 2 years required a knowledge of SLA, or foreign language (FL) pedagogy, or FL Education, or Applied Linguistics. But what do departments mean by SLA? Is it the same as FL Pedagogy or Applied Linguistics? Is it a field of research, a professional appendage to graduate students' scholarly pursuits, or a euphemism for language teaching?

In order to shed light on these matters, I informally surveyed some institutions that had advertised job openings in German and that explicitly

required a knowledge of SLA. I asked how they defined the field, what kind of doctorate the candidate was expected to have, and what courses he or she was expected to teach. Here are some of the responses I received.

University 1

Description: Job opening in second language acquisition in German at the rank of Senior lecturer. Ph.D. required. Responsibilities: undergraduate teaching, the training of graduate students, and the implementation of a new and innovative program of second-language acquisition in the college.

Response: The *ideal* candidate *does not need* to possess a *particular* kind of Ph.D. He/she must specialize in second language acquisition and possess training as well as demonstrate an interest in German Studies.

## University 2

Description: Assistant professor. Tenure track. Completed Ph.D. Area of specialization: Second Language Acquisition and Culture Studies. . . . Should be willing to train and supervise teaching assistants, shape first and second year language acquisition program and develop culture courses.

Response: It is not our goal at this point to hire a theoretical specialist who would solely focus on SLA theory with the aim of directing graduate research/dissertations of future theorists. . . . We definitely need an SLA practitioner with enough familiarity and expertise in theoretical SLA issues, teaching technologies and Culture Studies to raise him/her above the well-trained language teacher.

## University 3

Description: Assistant professor of German. Teach language courses at all levels as well as Applied Linguistics and Foreign Language Methodology.

Response: Besides German language courses on all levels, this person is expected to teach the department's methods course and a course in German linguistics.

## University 4

Description: Assistant professor of German. Required qualification: Ph.D. in German, applied linguistics (DaF), or linguistics. Duties include coordinating elementary and intermediate language courses and training of graduate teaching assistants.

Response: The successful applicant is expected to have developed a research program in applied German linguistics with respect to the teaching of German as a foreign language.

## University 5

Description: Tenure track. Ph.D. required. Primary responsibilities: teach in and

direct basic language program and supervise teaching assistants; teach and do research in language pedagogy *and/or* applied linguistics.

Response: We offer an M.A. in German and a Ph.D. in Modern Foreign Languages which permits second language acquisition as a minor field. The definition of second language acquisition is determined by the specialities and capabilities of the faculty in the program. Responsibilities will include, besides teaching language courses and training the TAs, teaching graduate courses in German in advanced grammar, contrastive linguistics, applied linguistics, or second language acquisition.

## University 6

Description: The German program seeks a tenure-track assistant professor with a specialization in second language acquisition or applied linguistics with an emphasis on German. Ph.D. or equivalent required. Should show evidence of good FL teaching and collaborate on research projects in the national center for language education and research. Teaching responsibilities include undergrad German classes and graduate courses.

Response: We are looking for an individual with training and expertise in theories of SLA, capable of conducting research on the issues currently being researched in that field. . . . There is definitely an interdisciplinarity aspect to our definition which we hope will enable the ideal candidate to fit nicely into our revised German Studies program.

These job advertisements reveal a certain confusion about what an SLA specialist actually is: a teacher? a teacher trainer? a methodologist? a researcher? a linguist? And what exactly is his or her role in the doctoral program? University 1 clearly does not expect the candidate to play any role in the doctoral program besides that of professionalizing the teaching assistants. Universities 2, 3, and 4 expect him or her to play a scholarly role, but they do not make explicit the nature of

that role, despite their obvious need for someone with scholarly interests broad enough to bridge the language program and the literary, cultural, or linguistics studies branches of the respective departments. When the time comes to review the candidates at the first four universities for reappointment, promotion, or tenure, it will be difficult to know which criteria to apply to evaluate their academic achievements. By contrast, universities 5 and 6 clearly seek to integrate SLA or applied linguistics into the doctoral research agenda of the department.

After a brief historical survey, I will first try to tease out various aspects of SLA and SLA-related fields. I will then discuss the relevance of the issues researched in SLA/Applied Linguistics for the study of FLs. Finally I will examine the institutional debates regarding the role and status of Applied Linguistics research in the academic enterprise and suggest future paths of development.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Many foreign language and literature departments conceive of their doctoral programs in terms of either literary/cultural studies or areal linguistics (Germanic linguistics, Romance linguistics, etc.); many include, in addition, some professional pedagogical training for graduate students teaching in the undergraduate FL program. Over the last century, the intellectual base for the teaching of FLs has shifted with the changes in disciplinary focus of foreign language and literature departments. Before WWI, FL learning and teaching was rooted in philology, and the foundational discipline for language study was *Belletristik*. Between the two world wars, the rise of psychology and the sciences of education brought language learning and teaching within the orbit of education and the social sciences. The emergence of linguistics after WWII gave FL programs a new mentor discipline, namely theoretical linguistics. Linguistics replaced literature and education as the research base for FL learning and teaching. In the 1970s, a new interdisciplinary field, born at the confluence of linguistics, psychology, and education, started making its appearance: SLA. Second language acquisition research, born in the early 1970s from research in child language acquisition (e.g., Bloom & Lahey, 1978; Brown, 1973; de Villiers & de Villiers, 1978), as well as from the need to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) to a growing number of ESL learners around the world, has been found useful not only for the teaching and learning of other second languages,

such as *Français langue étrangère (FLe)* in France, *Deutsch als Fremdsprache (DaF)* in Germany, or *Español como lengua extranjera (ELE)* in Spain, but also for the study of foreign languages in educational settings (R. Ellis, 1990). It has gradually supplemented philological/literary scholarship and educational psychology as the theoretical base for the practice of language teaching in the United States (Byrnes, 1998). It has spawned new pedagogical methods and brought new insights into the success or failure of students studying foreign languages at school and in college.

#### SOME DEFINITIONS OF THE FIELD OF SLA

In addition to its matrix discipline, linguistics, SLA as a field of inquiry has benefited from insights gained in psychology (psycholinguistics) and sociology (sociolinguistics) and, because it always had major implications for the way languages are taught in educational settings, from the sciences of education (for overviews of the field, see Byrnes, 1998; V. Cook, 1993; R. Ellis, 1994, 1997; Gass & Selinker, 1994; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). Let us compare three different definitions of SLA given by different representatives of the field in the United States.

The first definition is from Bill VanPatten, former chair of the Second Language Acquisition and Teacher Education program (SLATE) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In "What Is Second Language Acquisition and What Is It Doing in This Department?" (1999), VanPatten wrote:

SLA is concerned with how people learn a language other than their first. This can be any language in any context (e.g., English as a Second Language in the United States, Spanish as a foreign language in Illinois, German as a second language by immigrant guest workers in Germany, French by monolingual English speakers in Canada). SLA focuses on both the processes and products of this learning and draws on the disciplines of linguistics (including syntactic theory, pragmatic theory, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis), cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics (including first language acquisition), educational psychology (especially reading research and the methodologies used to investigate comprehension), and others. . . . SLA is not language-specific . . . many of the questions [it investigates] ignore any classroom-versus-nonclassroom distinction in that the internally driven development of a second language does not change with context. As a theory-building enterprise . . . SLA research is largely concerned with the psycholinguistic, cognitive, and sociolinguistic aspects of acquisition that shape a learner's developing linguistic system. (pp. 49–50)

This first definition focuses on SLA as an internally driven, individual phenomenon that is largely independent of the context in which it takes place. In this definition, the goal of SLA research is not primarily to improve teaching practice but to build a theory of how second linguistic systems develop within individual learners.<sup>1</sup>

The second definition is taken from the original proposal for the Graduate Program in SLA in the Department of Modern Languages at Carnegie Mellon University (1994).

The field of SLA encompasses research on basic and applied aspects of non-primary language acquisition and use. Basic SLA research focuses on the discovery of the general principles and processes that underlie knowledge of a second language and seeks to relate these findings to our broader understanding of cognition and behavior. Applied SLA research addresses issues related to the learning and teaching of second languages in both the classroom and naturalistic settings with a focus on both cognitive and social issues. Of central interest are the identification of learner, teacher, and curricular variables that contribute to successful second language learning outcomes. SLA researchers also examine the role of second language knowledge and use in social identity, success in schooling, and integration into the culture.<sup>2</sup> (p. 2)

This definition is broader than the first. It includes, besides language acquisition, language use; it makes the distinction between “basic SLA research” that investigates the areas covered by the first definition and “applied SLA research” that focuses, in addition, on the nature of the learning environments—schools, classrooms, and curricula. Applied SLA research explores the effects of social identity, schooling, and cultural integration on the learning and teaching of FLs. With its “central interest” turned toward identifying the “learner, teacher, and curricular variables that contribute to successful language learning outcomes,” applied SLA research, according to this definition, seems to be related to FL Education (see section 2).

The third definition is taken from a recent proposal for a Ph.D. program in SLA at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (University of Wisconsin–Madison Committee on Second Language Acquisition, 1999):

To study second language acquisition, today, is not the same as to study how to teach a second language effectively. Neither is it the same as to study how infants and young children acquire their mother tongue. Indeed, the study of Second Language Acquisition goes far beyond a comparison of the linguistic structures of learners’ first and second languages. Today, SLA researchers conduct systematic study of

individual and societal multilingualism, with particular attention to the relations between multilingualism and education. In the individual, the study of SLA focuses on how competence in two or more languages is acquired, maintained, or lost. In society, it is the study of language contact and change. In the educational sphere, it is the study of how individual and societal multilingualism is acquired in formal instruction and in informal contexts. The term “second language acquisition” refers to the acquisition of any language (foreign or second, third or fourth) beyond the native language (also known as “mother tongue”).<sup>3</sup> (p. 2)

This third definition distinguishes SLA research from second language (L2) teaching methodology and first language (L1) acquisition research. But it also distances SLA research from the early behaviorist “contrastive analysis hypothesis” (Lado, 1964), according to which a comparison of the linguistic structures of learners’ L1 and L2 enables researchers to predict the success or failure of language learners. In the University of Wisconsin’s definition, SLA research not only strives to explain basic and applied SLA phenomena, it also encompasses societal concerns and the role that language learning, including ESL, plays in multicultural societies such as the United States. With its “systematic study of individual and societal multilingualism,” this definition of SLA research encompasses many aspects of the general field of Applied Linguistics (see section 3).

From definition 1 to definition 3, we note an increase in the perceived scope of the field of SLA, from a phenomenon that is purely internal to the learner, to an interaction between the learner and an educational context, to the individual and societal aspects of multilingualism. Across these definitions, the link between SLA research and language teaching remains unclear. Whereas language teaching methodology (i.e., the study of how to teach a second language effectively) is not mentioned in the first definition and is explicitly excluded from the third, the second definition specifically includes language education (i.e., the study of variables that contribute to successful learning). In the next section I will examine each of the various strands of research that I have identified up to this point.

## SLA AND SLA-RELATED FIELDS

### *Second Language Acquisition*

Second Language Acquisition focuses on the acquisitional aspect of language learning and teaching, both inside and outside the classroom.

The term *second language* (L2) is generally used to characterize languages acquired, in natural or instructional settings, by immigrants or professionals in the country of which that language is the national language; *foreign languages* (FLs), by contrast, are traditionally learned in schools that are removed from any natural context of use. However, there are many cases where this distinction does not hold, for example, the teaching of English as a foreign or international language. Second Language Acquisition as a field of research includes both L2 and FL acquisition, even though, as I will explain, the study of FLs at colleges and universities has, in addition, unique features that have been researched within the general field of Applied Linguistics.

When instructional settings are studied, the focus of SLA is primarily the learner, secondarily the teacher. As an original offshoot of research in L1 acquisition, SLA was first studied in natural nonschooled settings, as in the case of immigrants learning the language of their host country on the street or in the workplace. It was fueled by the social and political concerns raised by the integration of immigrants and by the need for intercultural communication in an increasingly global economy. Second Language Acquisition research is concerned with the process by which children and adults acquire (learn) second (third or fourth) languages in addition to their native language and learn to speak and read these languages in transactions of everyday life—whether they acquire these abilities in natural settings (by living in the country in which the language is spoken) or in instructional settings (classrooms or individual tutoring of various kinds, including virtual environments). Second Language Acquisition is interested in the nature of these learner languages and their development throughout life, as well as in the nature of bilingualism, language attrition, and loss.

Mainstream SLA research explores such questions as: To what extent do adolescents and adult learners draw on their natural language endowment or Universal Grammar, and to what extent do they need formal instruction? What is the nature of learners' developing linguistic systems, as they try to approximate the native speaker norm? What kind of rules do they make for themselves as they go along? To what extent are language structures transferred from L1? What are the cognitive, linguistic, and social processes in the acquisition of L2 grammar, vocabulary, and phonology (e.g., attention, memory, learning, and communication strategies)? What is the role of input and interaction in the development of in-

terlanguage? What role is played by such sociocultural factors as affect, motivation, interactional style, and desire to identify with the native speaker? To what are individual differences in performance and achievement attributable? How can language competencies best be assessed and evaluated? In recent years, SLA researchers have begun asking additional questions that fall into the larger domain of Applied Linguistics (see below).

### *Foreign Language Education*

Whereas most SLA research focuses on the learner as an autonomous entity (see, for example, Kasper's response to Firth and Wagner in Kasper, 1997), scholars in FL Education turn their attention to the schooling process. They attempt to understand how teachers teach and how students learn languages in schools, and especially how they acquire foreign literacy skills, that is, the ability not only to comprehend and interpret but also to create written texts in the FL. Foreign Language Education, as studied in Graduate Schools of Education, inquires into the cognitive, social, and institutional dimensions of language instruction in institutional settings.<sup>4</sup> It has become, since the 1920s, a highly scientific field of research that draws its insights mostly from social and educational psychology.

Related to curriculum and instruction, FL Education addresses questions of (a) diversity and equity in K–12 schools, (b) articulation between levels and between secondary and postsecondary instruction, (c) standardization of teaching and testing practices, (d) syllabus and curriculum design, and (e) program administration and models of teacher preparation. As mentioned in SLA definition 2, it seeks to identify “learner, teacher, and curricular variables that contribute to successful second language learning outcomes.” Related to literacy, that is, the acquisition of reading and writing in a foreign language, it asks such questions as: What makes a text difficult to read? How much background knowledge does one need to make sense of a foreign text? How much is decoding, how much inferring, guessing, interpreting? How much transfer can one expect between L1 literacy and L2 literacy (e.g., If one knows how to read and write well in one's L1, do these skills transfer to the L2 or FL)? How much in the acquisition of L2 literacy is, in fact, socialization and schooling (e.g., Is the failure to write an appropriate essay in German due to a lack of grammar and vocabulary, or to deficient schooling in the genre of the academic essay)? What are

the epistemological and social aspects of the use of computer technology for language learning (e.g., Do students learn the FL better by communicating via email in the FL than they do by traditional methods, or do they learn email language)? What is the relation of visual, filmic literacy to print literacy (e.g., To understand foreign television, what else does one need to know besides grammar and vocabulary)?

### *Foreign Language Methodology*

Foreign Language Methodology, as per SLA definition 3, is engaged in developing the most "effective" way to teach FLs. Mostly through a principled selection of textbooks, teaching materials, and a learner-tailored design of classroom activities, sometimes through teaching experience, teachers and teacher trainers develop methodologies that are, by their very nature, context sensitive and appropriate for the subject at hand (e.g., Omaggio Hadley, 1993; Richard-Amato, 1988; Richards & Rogers, 1986). It is an important field of knowledge for practitioners in language teaching and one that is implicitly or explicitly informed by theory, but, as we have seen, it is not generally included under SLA research or theory-building scholarship. The questions it asks are of the performative kind, for example: What is the best way to motivate students? How should one organize group and pair work? How can one use computer software to teach vocabulary? How can this or that point of grammar best be taught? Should the teacher correct all errors immediately? What is the optimal ratio of student talk to teacher talk? What is the most equitable way to test what has been taught? These questions are often inspired by research in SLA (e.g., Lightbown & Spada, 1999; VanPatten, 1992a, 1992b, 1999).

Foreign language methodologists may write their own textbooks and design their own instructional materials and software, based on their understanding of the variables identified in the field of language education or SLA mentioned above. Their application of such materials, however, to the local context of their particular institutions, classrooms, and language learners requires what Clifford Geertz (1983) calls a "local knowledge" that is different from the cumulative weight of published, theory-building SLA research described in definition 1. Local knowledge has to be discovered and activated anew at each instructional encounter, and it is this ever-changing context of the instructional encounter that ultimately

shapes research in language education and in SLA.<sup>5</sup>

The field that encompasses these language-related strands of more or less theoretical, more or less practice-oriented inquiry is Applied Linguistics. Rather than attempt to stretch the concept of SLA to cover all the strands of research discussed previously, it seems more appropriate to view the general field of Applied Linguistics as the overarching construct that is most relevant to FL departments.<sup>6</sup> Taking Applied Linguistics, as it pertains to SLA, as our chief paradigm also allows us to include other strands that usually fall outside of mainstream SLA but belong to Applied Linguistics, such as Stylistics, Language Socialization, and Critical Applied Linguistics, all of which are of eminent relevance to the study of *foreign* languages, as I will discuss below.

### APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Founded in Europe in the late 1950s by linguists and educators as an interdisciplinary field of research for the study of all aspects of language use, general Applied Linguistics is distinct from, but related to, the language-specific linguistics found in single FL departments, such as Hispanic Linguistics, French Linguistics, Germanic Linguistics, and so on. The field includes, besides L1 and L2 acquisition and the SLA-related fields mentioned previously, such areas of research as: communication in the professions, communication disorders, language and the media, language and the law, language policy and planning, translation and interpretation, language and technology, stylistics and rhetoric, literacy, discourse and conversational analysis, and sign language research. What binds these rather disparate areas of research under the rubric *Applied Linguistics* is the focus on the relationship between psycho- and sociolinguistic theory on the one hand and social practice on the other, as they relate to the acquisition and use of language in various contexts (see Davies, 1999). The field has been visible in the United States since the foundation in 1959 of the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C., the launching of *Language Learning: A Journal of Applied Linguistics*, and the establishment in 1978 of the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL).

When it focuses on L2 or FL acquisition, Applied Linguistics explores such questions as: What norms of language use should one adhere to in the face of linguistic variations and regional differences? What is the status of standardized (written) national languages vis-à-vis the large lin-

guistic databases of authentic spoken language use (e.g., Stubbs, 1996)? Is the notion of native speaker an artificial construct of grammarians, and to what extent should nonnative speakers speak and behave like native speakers (e.g., V. Cook, 1999)? What stylistic differences do learners bring with them to the acquisition of another language? How does language in discourse both reflect and create social structures and political ideologies (Pennycook, 1994, 1998)? What is the relation of language to social and cultural identity (Peirce, 1995)? To what extent does institutional discourse define what is taught and learned in schools and language classrooms in particular?

Three additional aspects of *foreign* language study, especially at the advanced levels, are of direct relevance to applied linguists. The first concerns the acquisition of textual competence in a FL, that is, the ability not only to decode written, visual, and virtual texts, but also to understand their places and their symbolic values within their contexts of production and reception by native speakers. This is the field of Stylistics, represented by such applied linguists as Carter and Simpson (1989), G. Cook (1994), Fowler (1996), Short (1988, 1996), Toolan (1998), Widdowson (1975, 1992), and others. The second aspect of FL study is related to the problems associated with the use of a FL by nonnative speakers in the target country, that is, problems of legitimacy, social and national identity, and voice (e.g., Kramsch, in press; Peirce, 1995), and, particularly in the case of English as a FL, problems of language socialization into Anglo-Saxon culture (Gnutzmann, 2000). The third aspect pertains to what Pennycook (1990, 1997) recently called "Critical Applied Linguistics," an area that he views less as a separate strand of research like Critical Discourse Analysis (Caldas-Coulthard & Coulthard, 1996; Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 1996) or Critical Pedagogy (e.g., Giroux & McClaren, 1989) than as a critical attitude that should permeate both the research and the practice of language in discourse, pedagogy, and education. This attitude leads both researchers and practitioners to question what makes certain types of inquiry or practice feasible, even possible, and others not, within given institutional and political structures. I will return to these three aspects when discussing institutional models and future options for the study of Applied Linguistics.

Because of its position at the confluence of several disciplines and at the intersection of theory and practice, Applied Linguistics is the site of unusual intellectual ferment. I will turn now to

some of the current debates and issues in the field to the extent that they are relevant to the study of FLs in educational settings.

#### INTELLECTUAL ISSUES WITHIN APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND THEIR RELEVANCE FOR THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The debates currently going on in Applied Linguistics are symptomatic of a field that draws on older, well-established disciplines such as Linguistics, Social and Educational Psychology, and Sociology, whose members may consider language and learning as their areas of expertise and inquiry. In addition, it is a field that brings together two domains, the theory and the practice of language acquisition and use, which often do not share the same discourses (Pennycook, 1994). Having to deal with the way research informs language teaching practice and, vice versa, how teaching practice provides research with its models and hypotheses, the debates in the field circle around issues of theoretical legitimacy and empirical validity. These debates often have a passionate ring to them, especially because findings from research are eagerly used by language teachers and textbook publishers to justify pedagogic practices<sup>7</sup>—hence the frequent discussions among applied linguists regarding the ethical responsibility of the researcher vis-à-vis institutional power and commercial interests. Without going into the details of the controversies, I mention in the following some of the issues that I find most relevant to the teaching of FLs in high schools and colleges.

##### *At the Confluence of Multiple Disciplines*

The field of Applied Linguistics speaks with multiple voices, depending on whether one's original training was in linguistics, anthropology, psychology, sociology, education, or literature.<sup>8</sup> Second Language Acquisition research, traditionally more psycholinguistic in nature, has recently begun to include voices from sociocultural and sociolinguistic theory. To take an example that is particularly relevant for the teaching of FLs, the second definition of SLA mentioned above, with its inclusion of social identity and cultural integration, seems to align itself with sociocultural approaches to SLA. There has been in the last 10 years a growing interest in Soviet psychology and in a more socially situated theory of cognition (e.g., Lantolf, 1994; Vygotsky, 1962; Wertsch, 1985). This viewpoint, in turn, has led to an interest in the use of semiotic and activity theory to

explain SLA (Lantolf, 2000). From this perspective, the FL learner is viewed not as an individual mind, who, like a computer, is intent on assimilating certain linguistic structures, but as a social and cultural being whose psychological processes are first experienced as social processes of interaction with others and are only later internalized as individual cognitive processes. Such a theory does not ignore the linguistic and psychological aspects of SLA but gives primacy to the learner's social and cultural makeup and to his or her interaction with the social and cultural makeup of native speakers and writers, as well as with the educational culture of the FL classroom. Hence there has been increased attention devoted to the cultural dimensions of language study (Kramersch, 1998) and, in particular, to the multilingual, multicultural student in FL classes (Blyth, 1995).

Sociolinguistic approaches to SLA problematize the notion of the native speaker as unduly essentializing both the foreign national citizen and his or her national standard language (V. Cook, 1999; Davies, 1991; Kramersch, 1997; Medgyes, 1992; Rampton, 1990). Language learners, it is argued, do not necessarily have to approximate the vernacular communicative style of native speakers on the streets of Beijing, Rome, or Bogotá. They have the privilege of outsiders, who can play with language (G. Cook, 1997, 2000), imbue the conventional code with their own meanings, and engage in their own ritualistic practices (Rampton, 1999). These playful uses of the FL are nowhere more visible than on the Internet (Kern, in press; Kramersch et al., in press).

Applied Linguistics not only harbors many voices in SLA, it also draws on a variety of social and critical theories that have enriched the field in recent years and that form a bridge between SLA and critical theory. For example, such applied linguists as Bonny Norton Peirce (1995), Ron Scollon and Suzanne Scollon (1995), and Ben Rampton (1995) draw respectively on feminist theory (Weedon, 1987), discourse theory (Goffman, 1981; Gumperz, 1982), and critical theory (Bourdieu, 1991; Giddens, 1984) to understand how users of a FL position themselves vis-à-vis other learners and vis-à-vis native speakers, and how they come to participate as legitimate members in the activities of another community of practice. Their research takes into consideration the total ecological context of language learning (Firth & Wagner, 1997; van Lier, 1994), including issues of power and face in the choice of linguistic structures (R. Scollon & S. Scollon, 1981), and questions of identity, role, and voice in the legitimate use of these structures

(Kramersch, in press). The recent interest among applied linguists (e.g., Kramersch & Lam, 1998; Pavlenko, 1998; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Schumann, 1997; Young, 1999) in the biographical accounts of such illustrious FL learners as Elias Canetti (1977), Eva Hoffman (1989), or Alice Kaplan (1993) suggests that there are aspects of SLA that might best be captured through learners' testimonies and literary memoirs rather than through experimental studies of the traditional psycholinguistic kind (Spolsky, 2000).

#### *At the Interface of Theory and Practice*

Besides the debates that have to do with the interdisciplinary nature of the field, there are other debates that arise from the interface of theory and practice in Applied Linguistics. For example, one of the enduring controversies concerns the notion of *critical age*. What is the best age to learn a FL with any chance of success? The issue of the optimal age, hotly debated in SLA research (Birdsong, 1999; Long, 1990; Singleton, 1995), has contributed to the decrease in the attention devoted to the teaching of pronunciation in language classes, given that after puberty, intensive pronunciation drills might be futile due to the maturational constraints on the acquisition of native-like phonology (Long, 1990). But is native-like pronunciation necessary for communicative competence? Is it even desirable if not accompanied by native-like grammar and vocabulary? Recently, researchers have established a relationship between accent and social and emotional identity in language learning that broadens the debate about age-related constraints in SLA (Schumann, 1997) and sheds new light on the resistance of some FL students to "sound native" in language classes.

The acquisition of other aspects of language is subject to similar debates. Whereas many, like VanPatten (1996), direct their inquiry to the production of grammatical and lexical structures according to the rules of a learner's interlanguage (e.g., R. Ellis, 1997; Lightbown & Spada, 1999; VanPatten, 1996), others question the notion of rule altogether, arguing that learning a language is an associative process of making meaningful connections as one goes along, rather than applying a rule one has been taught deductively or inductively (N. Ellis, 1998; Gasser, 1990; Larsen-Freeman, 1997). Hopper (1988) called the way grammar emerges from the structure of the ongoing discourse "emergent grammar." (For a clear introduction to the connection between interaction and grammar, see Ochs, Schegloff, & Thompson,

1996). Accordingly, some scholars exhort teachers to focus on form-and-meaning (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Long, 1991; Spada, 1997) within communicative tasks (Skehan, 1996), while others, for example, Krashen (1982), maintain a strict dichotomy between acquisition and learning and insist that formal learning will never lead to acquisition, even if it is of the input-processing kind (VanPatten, 1996). Other researchers explore the processes and strategies evidenced by good learners (Naiman, Froehlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1996; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford & Cohen, 1992) and encourage teachers to teach learning and communication strategies as part of a communicative syllabus. But the teachability of these strategies has been put into question (Bialystok, 1990; Vann & Abraham, 1990). Yet others, focussing on social appropriateness in the use of grammar and vocabulary (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Kasper, 1998), have made language pedagogy more sensitive to the need to teach the sociolinguistic aspects of the FL: speech acts, social etiquette, and so on. However, some researchers advise caution: Whereas we can teach verbal etiquette or pragmalinguistic appropriateness in direct and specific ways, we should not teach the native speaker's forms of social and cultural behavior, that is, sociopragmatic competence, in a direct, let alone normative way (House, 1989; Thomas, 1983).

Applied linguists who study the nature of the social interactions that learners engage in with the teacher and with other learners as the social mediation of learning through language (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Hall, 1997; Lantolf, in press; Lantolf & Appel, 1994) show the role that the analysis of classroom discourse can play in teacher training. We cannot analyze classroom discourse, they say, without taking into consideration the larger historical, social, and institutional context in which education takes place (Harre & Gillett, 1994; Hymes, 1996; van Lier, 2000). Other issues with immediate relevance to FL study include: motivation to learn and attitude toward the FL and its speakers (Horwitz & Young, 1991; Spolsky, 2000); crosscultural misunderstandings experienced during study abroad (Freed, 1995) or while reading FL texts (Barnett, 1989; Bernhardt, 1991; Kern, 1994, in press; Swaffar, Arens, & Byrnes, 1991); issues of authorship and voice in learning to write in a FL (Kramsch & Lam, 1998; Zamel, 1997); and, issues of contextual variability when testing language performance (McNamara, 1996; Spolsky, 1995).

All the aspects of applied linguistic research mentioned above require different kinds of data,

different tools of analysis, different methods of interpretation. Although they are all of direct relevance to the study of FLs, the direct applicability of their findings to the teaching of specific FLs to local groups of students in local classrooms is subject to controversy (Kramsch, 1995).

This short and selective survey of the issues currently debated by SLA/Applied Linguistics research gives a sense of its exciting diversity, its multifarious interdisciplinarity, and the enormous complexity of its object of study. The greatest source of debate right now among psycholinguists is whether the many empirical studies that have led to several foundational hypotheses about SLA (see R. Ellis, 1994) are pointing to one overarching theory of SLA, or to multiple theories, and whether this is to be welcomed or deplored (see Beretta, 1993). In light of the rich array of perspectives and approaches I have outlined, such a question might be of lesser urgency for the study of FLs in educational settings than for psycholinguistic SLA. The purpose there is not to find the ultimate theory that will explain and predict the acquisition of any nonnative language at any age in any context of use but to illuminate, in all its complexity, the multiple dimensions of the study of one particular language as an alternative to one's own mode of expression, communication, and thought.

Taken to their logical consequence, the findings of such a field of research, which investigates not only the acquisition of "the foreign" but the nature of its practice as well, are bound to ruffle a few feathers among the established disciplines in academia. For that reason, I will now turn to the issues regarding the place and status of SLA/Applied Linguistics in the academic enterprise.

#### INSTITUTIONAL DEBATES ABOUT THE ROLE AND STATUS OF SLA/APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Straddling as it does the theory and the practice of language learning, SLA/Applied Linguistics rarely has an established place within the traditional academic hierarchy. As we have seen, there is some confusion about the academic and scholarly respectability of a field that is often viewed as having to do exclusively with teaching, not research (see note 5). When making decisions about promotion and tenure, department chairs have to distinguish among FL pedagogy/methodology, FL Education, and SLA within the general field of Applied Linguistics and be aware that these subfields may overlap.

However, their main task still remains how to judge the quality of the intellectual work done within each of these fields. In this respect, research in SLA, like research in composition studies, demands to be judged with particular sensitivity to the interdisciplinary nature of the field and to its theoretical and pedagogical imperatives.

Given this interdisciplinarity of the field, it is to be expected that researchers in such established disciplines as linguistics, literature, sociology, and psychology will show some suspicion as to its scholarly validity. Indeed, within FL departments, SLA researchers often feel misunderstood by colleagues in both literary studies and linguistics. Their association with language instruction tends to devalue their field of research a priori in those departments that consider language study to be but the mere acquisition of skills with no intellectual content. Applied linguists investigating SLA find themselves at the confluence of research and teaching, of theory and practice, and this situation can often make them less respected than other colleagues in the same department. (See MLA Commission on Professional Service, 1996.)

In addition, considering the particularly strong national orientation of FL departments in this country, where language teachers often feel closer to their colleagues in literary and cultural studies than to fellow language teachers in other departments, it is not surprising that in some cases the national loyalties of someone who studies language acquisition per se are perceived to be less strong than those of someone who remains within the national boundaries of the department. That issue of allegiance or of common bond may work against the integration of SLA as a field of research within some FL departments. Such "disloyalty" is rarely stated explicitly. But because SLA is often associated with ESL, its researchers may be viewed as being less specifically "Japanese" or "German" and, hence, less fully integrated into a department of East Asian Studies or German.

A further potential obstacle to the integration of SLA research into FL departments is the traditional organization of a department's scholarship into centuries (e.g., 18th or 20th century literature) rather than, for example, according to literary or discourse forms, or textual practices embedded in their contexts of production and reception. The social science tradition of SLA research and the psychological bent of FL education do not fit in well with the historical tradition of literary studies and the sociological bias of critical theory. The link between them can be

provided by research in Stylistics that investigates how literary and nonliterary texts, as social and historical artifacts, are understood to convey the meanings they do.

To these manifestations of institutional power and hierarchy within FL departments, one would have to add the conflicting interests that SLA researchers and practitioners often find themselves called upon to serve. Language teaching has shown itself to be particularly vulnerable to the political, commercial, and corporate interests of political advocacy groups, textbook publishing industries, and software distributors. The close relationship between research and teaching practice makes such a vulnerability inevitable. Critical Applied Linguistics can play a role within FL departments in raising the awareness of teachers and researchers with regard to the intersection of language and social power.<sup>9</sup> Despite these obstacles to institutional integration and these threats to the intellectual integrity and academic autonomy of the field, Applied Linguistics as a course of study is becoming an attractive alternative to literary/cultural studies, especially for those graduate students who love the language, but do not want to become literary scholars. These students find in Applied Linguistics the combined social sciences and humanities research traditions, the sense of educational mission, and the empirical research methodology that they often miss in pure humanistic scholarship. In addition, they find a focus on the FL itself in all its multifarious manifestations. Indeed, an increasing number of language program coordinators have degrees in various domains of Applied Linguistics, occupy tenure track positions, and are granted tenure in those fields, even though their academic and intellectual legitimacy still has to be argued in comparison with that of colleagues in literary/cultural studies or in theoretical linguistics. These applied linguists are called upon to assist in the professional development of their own teaching assistants (TAs), and of those in other FL departments as well. In this case, they prove to be a resource for the campus at large. In the next section, I will examine the various models that are offered for the study of Applied Linguistics at the graduate level.

#### INSTITUTIONAL MODELS AND FUTURE OPTIONS FOR THE STUDY OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Under the current disciplinary shifts that are leading more and more faculty to have connections to both a FL department and to any number

of crossdisciplinary research endeavors, and under the current employment shortage for Ph.D.s in literary and cultural studies, many language departments are trying to reinvent themselves (Berman, 1994). They find that their *language programs* have become increasingly important both because of the growing demand for FL instruction ("MLA's Fall 1998 Survey," 1999) and because the FL is ultimately the very *raison d'être* of a FL department. They are keen on validating Applied Linguistics as a field of study in its own right.

Graduate programs in FL Education, SLA, and general Applied Linguistics take many shapes and are housed in various academic units (see Wesche, 1998, for a recent directory of programs in the United States and Canada). They can be found under the rubrics *Linguistics* (e.g., Georgetown University, Michigan State University, University of Oregon), *Applied Linguistics* (e.g., Boston University, University of Northern Arizona, UCLA, University of Pittsburgh, University of Texas-Austin), *Second Language Acquisition* (e.g., Carnegie Mellon University, Pennsylvania State University, UC Davis, University of Hawaii) or *Second Language Acquisition and Teaching* (SLATE at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, SLAT at the University of Arizona), *Foreign Language Education* (e.g., Ohio State University), TESOL or ESL (e.g., Indiana University), or *Educational Linguistics* (e.g., Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania, UC Berkeley, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education). These programs offer either full M.A.s, Ph.D.s, and Ed.D.s, or a variety of doctoral minors (e.g., Indiana University), concentrations (e.g., Pennsylvania State University), specializations (e.g., University of Texas-Austin), certificates of Advanced Study (e.g., University of Illinois) or designated emphases (e.g., UC Davis) for Ph.D.s in other fields. They are housed in departments of Linguistics or Applied Linguistics, departments of Modern Languages, Graduate Schools of Education, English or TESOL departments, or they can be affiliated with supradepartmental SLA institutes (e.g., UC Davis). Besides general Applied Linguistics programs, Areal Linguistics, such as Hispanic or Slavic Linguistics, can be found in single foreign language departments. Only three doctoral programs currently offer a Ph.D. in Second Language Acquisition: University of Arizona, Carnegie Mellon University, and University of Hawaii at Manoa. Three Ph.D. programs in SLA are currently under development at the University of Iowa, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Wisconsin.

In addition to these American models for the study of Applied Linguistics/SLA, it is important to point out that SLA as a field of research for the learning of specific national languages is also carried out at various universities abroad where those languages are taught as L2s, for instance, the *DaF* mentioned in job advertisement 4.<sup>10</sup> Both in the United States and abroad, researchers and scholars in Applied Linguistics make their work known through a variety of professional journals and professional meetings.

The question remains as to whether Applied Linguistics as an interdisciplinary field should have an academic territory of its own within FL departments or whether it should establish itself outside the departmental structure in centers, institutes, or programs. At a recent symposium of the International Association of Applied Linguistics (AILA), Barbara Seidlhofer (1999) viewed the field of Applied Linguistics as a nonterritorial field, precisely because it mediates between teaching and research. This opinion seems to support the status of Applied Linguistics as an interdepartmental minor, certificate, or designated emphasis in doctoral programs that have territorially established fields. In departments with more flexible territorial boundaries, it is conceivable that applied linguistic research may be given a legitimate place alongside literary, cultural, or linguistic studies.

Whether it is located in the core or at the periphery of a department's research agenda, the presence of Applied Linguistics as a research field can serve to highlight three aspects of the study of *language* that are not usually the object of critical reflection, in either the language program, or the literature or linguistics curriculum. Promoting such a critical reflection could lead to a change in the practice of FL study in FL departments. It could align the FL program better with recent theory in literary and cultural studies.

#### *Language as Foreign Sociocultural Practice*

What makes FL study unique among the subjects taught in an academic curriculum is that its object or purpose is itself located outside the American linguistic and cultural norm. Its epistemological benefits derive from casting an outsider's glance on the familiar reality taught in American academia and, conversely, from putting oneself in the shoes of speakers of other languages and attempting to see their cultural reality through their eyes. SLA research of a psycho- or sociolinguistic kind, which focuses on

how language expresses and embodies cultural reality (Kramersch, 1998), has a natural place in FL departments.

#### *Language as Historical Practice*

The politics of language teaching (e.g., the shifts in enrollments due to geopolitical factors, the relationship of language teachers to the target country's political regime, the prestige differential among languages, and the academic pecking order between literature and language) have been shaped by the historical outcomes of military conflicts, colonial wars, ethnic conflicts and tensions, and by the economic conditions that have grown out of such tensions (Pennycook, 1998). Language teaching should be seen as the creation of a historical text with its own contextualization practices and prior texts. For example, the traditional teaching methods course, which gives TAs basic information on pedagogic methods and activities, can be supplemented by a course on Critical Applied Linguistics regarding national language policies and institutional practices. Such a course can situate the study of standard national languages, such as French, Italian, Spanish, and Japanese, within the current debates surrounding feminist and postcolonial theory in cultural studies (von Hoene, 1995). It can contextualize the study of FLs by making students aware of the political and historical context in which these languages have been codified and standardized, the avatars of their study in the United States, their links to the patterns of immigration to the United States, and the consequences of these immigrations for U.S. foreign policy. It can also place FL study within the context of the overwhelming predominance of English in U.S-American academia.

#### *Language as Social Semiotic Practice*

Beyond the cultural and the historical practices, there is currently a renewed interest in imaginative forms of language play and ritual in Applied Linguistics. The enthusiasm for the "authentic" and the "purposeful" is now joined by an interest in the pleasure of playful form and fictional style (Kramersch, 1994; G. Cook, 1997, 2000). Applied linguistic research can focus language study on the universe of signs in which it is embedded—signs that are only partially verbal, and increasingly visual, acoustic, gestural, or electronic. In particular, computer technology offers new ways of representing and mediating language and its associated cultural capital. In FL

programs, the study of the acquisition of style and discourse can serve to highlight the fact that language not only expresses but also creates new and unexpected realities.

#### CONCLUSION

Within Applied Linguistics, SLA research is an interdisciplinary field that mediates between the theory and practice of language study. Indeed, it might be called a theory of the practice of language acquisition and use. The theory of language study makes explicit or implicit claims as to how languages can or should be taught in classrooms. The practice of language study reveals models of action that serve to confirm or disconfirm the theory. Present efforts to validate Applied Linguistics and, in particular, its subfield SLA as the site of professional and intellectual inquiry (as seen in the job advertisements reviewed at the beginning of this article) focus on different aspects of the language learning and teaching enterprise in FL departments: linguistic and psychological validity, educational reliability, pedagogical effectiveness, and social and institutional opportunities and constraints. Because it is a field that investigates the relationship between language forms and language use and between various discourses from the conversational to the literary, Applied Linguistics has the potential to play a unifying role in a traditional departmental structure that still too often remains, to borrow a phrase coined by Daniel Coste (1980, p. 250), "une patrie désunie en deuil de la langue" (a divided homeland in search of language).

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Although this definition of SLA stems from a researcher associated with a particular Ph.D. program, the program itself offers multiple strands of SLA, some

more psycholinguistic, some more sociolinguistic and sociocultural in orientation.

<sup>2</sup> Cited here with permission from Richard Tucker, Chair of Modern Languages at Carnegie Mellon University.

<sup>3</sup> Cited here with permission from the committee.

<sup>4</sup> I do not wish to imply that all SLA research conducted in Graduate Schools of Education deals with SLA in institutional settings. Much of the work done in Schools of Education also examines other aspects of language acquisition and use, such as L1 or L2 acquisition in natural settings, the pragmatics of communication in everyday life, and language policy and planning.

<sup>5</sup> One anonymous reviewer questioned whether Foreign Language Methodology, as described here, should be considered an SLA-related field, as it did not seem to raise intellectual issues, but more procedural ones. This is a hard question to answer. VanPatten (1999) views language teaching as "a subset of SLA (or a field derived from SLA)" because, he says, "it contributes to SLA theory construction" (p. 51). He further distinguishes language teaching and pedagogy: "The latter is not a research or theory-building endeavor and does not require scholarship in SLA or language teaching" (p. 51). I do not perceive the boundaries as clearly delineated as VanPatten does. Language methodology, depending on whether it partakes more of *teaching*, as the continued empirical and theoretical investigation of the transmission of knowledge, or more of *pedagogy*, as the constant improvement of instructional delivery, may be viewed either as intellectual or as professional work (MLA Commission on Professional Service, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> The politics of academia often introduce hidden hierarchies in a field with such porous boundaries as those found in Applied Linguistics. Some institutions are reluctant to call their program *Applied Linguistics*, fearing the negative connotations associated with the adjective *applied*, and prefer the name *Second Language Acquisition*, instead. Others, concerned that the term *education* might be perceived in the United States as less prestigious than *acquisition*, or that *foreign* as in *foreign languages* might raise political red flags, also prefer the phrase *Second Language Acquisition*. Hence we see the proliferation of the term *Second Language Acquisition* to cover many areas of research that are, in fact, subsumed under Applied Linguistics.

<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to James P. Lantolf for reminding me that some teachers, who have little time to read SLA research, may pay attention less to the findings themselves than to what researchers tell them these findings mean. Similarly, textbook publishers, eager to be up to date, may do no more than appropriate the latest findings rather than examine them critically.

<sup>8</sup> The reader will no doubt detect in this article the voice of the author herself, whose original training in language, literature, and cultural studies, and subsequent research in the discourse aspects of SLA give this article its own particular flavor.

<sup>9</sup> It has often been remarked that language awareness is not sufficient to bring about social change. But as Lemke (1995) points out, language awareness com-

bined with the insertion of an element external to the system, such as that brought about by language play, sojourns abroad, or visitors from abroad, can bring unpredictability into the system and hence destabilize it.

<sup>10</sup> For example, in German-speaking countries, *Zweit-sprachenerwerb* or *Sprachlehr- und lernforschung* is studied in graduate programs at the universities of Hamburg, Bochum, Gießen, Bielefeld, Jena, Munich, Vienna, in departments of *Sprachlehr- und lernforschung* or *Deutsch als Fremdsprache (DaF)*. In France, *la didactique des langues* or *linguistique appliquée* can be studied on the graduate level at such universities as Paris III, Paris VIII, Lyon, Bordeaux, and Le Mans in departments of linguistics or *Français langue étrangère (Fle)*. In Spain, the *Didáctica del Español como lengua extranjera (ELE)* can be studied at the graduate level at the universities of Barcelona, Salamanca, Alcalá de Henares and Complutense de Madrid. Graduates from such programs are likely to be attracted by job openings in FL departments in the United States.

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*A Century of Language Teaching and Research: Looking Back and Looking Ahead*  
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