EDITORIAL

ON SOCIOCOGNITIVE APPROACHES TO SECOND LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

The 'nature-nurture' debate again moves into the spotlight as interest is rekindled in the relationship between human culture and biology (Kennedy, 1999). In the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), this debate has led to a questioning of the dominance of cognitive research and the relevance of such research to socially-oriented language pedagogy. Taking as its springboard a 2008 colloquium which sought to forge a stronger connection between SLA and pedagogy, this Special Issue aims to illuminate approaches to language teaching and learning that cross the nature-nurture divide. To do so, this Special Issue adopts the notion of 'sociocognitive' approaches to SLA and pedagogy (Batstone, 2010).[1] While the process of defining 'sociocognition' and its implications for language pedagogy proceeds (e.g. Kasper and Markee, 2004; Freeman, 2007), there is a tendency to dismiss SLA's 'cognitive' concepts in favour of new 'social' ones (although see Batstone, 2010). However, mere substitution will perpetuate the tendency in recent pedagogical history to 'throw the baby out with the bathwater'.

In this Introduction, I shall argue that sociocognitive pedagogies should critically engage with both 'social' and 'cognitive' constructs in order to create synergies between them. I shall start by sketching the origins of the cognitive-social imbalance in language teaching. Via a review of recent literature on 'bio-social SLA' and its implications for pedagogy, I shall then show how several social and cognitive conceptual pairs are typically placed in opposition. I finally turn to the role of the present volume in negotiating an approach which balances social and cognitive processes.

THE ORIGINS OF PEDAGOGICAL IMBALANCE

An imbalance in contemporary language pedagogy commenced with the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). CLT has engendered a dramatic shift from the promotion of cognitive processes such as the teaching of grammar to social processes, such as interaction in specific settings (e.g. Han, 2002). Reinforcing this 'swing', CLT advocates including Breen (1985, p. 125) maintained that SLA research was irrelevant to pedagogy due to its structural, cognitive orientation:

> Not only is SLA research currently offering us a delimited account of language learning … the mainstream of SLA is also asocial … (it) leads inevitably to a partial account of the language learning process.

While this assessment does not do justice to SLA's contribution to CLT or language teaching generally, dichotomies within SLA have limited its pedagogical 'outreach'. In Ortega's (2005) view, dichotomies such as 'knowledge' versus 'values' have resulted in a preference for knowledge generation over ethical goals, including improvements in school-based language education. Ironically, then, SLA's extensive, pedagogically-oriented research, for example on the role of instruction, tasks, interaction and learner language, has not been translated sufficiently into classroom relevance (cf. Freeman, 2007). Drawing on his own personal experience, Ellis (1997, pp. vii – viii, as cited in Burns, 2005, p. 251) observed how 'knowledge' and 'values' have become dichotomised in the history of SLA:

> As I left the classroom ... I began to treat SLA as an object of enquiry in its own right. That is, I began to pay less attention to how the results of research might aid language pedagogy and more attention to trying to produce good research. .... Increasingly ... I have had to recognise that the gap between what second language acquisition researchers do and what teachers do has grown wider...

A BIO-SOCIAL SLA?

Firth and Wagner's (1997) call for a 'bio-social SLA' appeared to many as a way to improve SLA's ailing relationship with language teaching and a resolution of the dichotomies in SLA. From the perspective of discourse and communication, Firth and Wagner (1997, p. 286) proposed a reconceptualisation of SLA as:

> ... a more theoretically and methodologically balanced enterprise that endeavours to attend to, explicate, and explore, in more equal measures and, where possible, in integrated ways, both the *social* and *cognitive* dimensions of S/FL use and acquisition [Italics in original].

Specifically, Firth and Wagner (1997, p. 286) encouraged three main changes to SLA:

a. a significantly enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use

b. an increased emic (participant-relevant) sensitivity towards fundamental concepts
c. the broadening of the traditional SLA database.

Consistent with the trend in pedagogy, however, the details of Firth and Wagner (1997) reconceptualisation are social rather than 'bio-social' since they replace 'fundamental' cognitive constructs with social ones. In examining SLA research on communication strategies and interaction, Firth and Wagner (1997, p. 290) maintained that, because the learner's communication problems were privileged over their successes, the concept of 'learner' became equated with 'Learner-as-defective communicator'. In its place, research should focus on language 'users', defined as 'the participants (who) conjointly accomplish meaningful communication with the resources ... at their disposal' (Firth and Wagner, 1997, p. 290). Firth and Wagner (1997) also argued against SLA's treatment of the idealised monolingual Native Speaker (NS) as the baseline construct, one which excluded bi- and multi-lingualism and assigned the Non-Native Speaker (NNS) a subordinate position. Instead of NS and NNS (and their equation with members of the North American college population), the paper proposed the study of the multilingual and heterogeneous identities of various languages users. The final 'fundamental concept' to be replaced was 'interlanguage', which Firth and Wagner (1997, pp. 295–296) portrayed as a process of 'striving to reach the "target" competence of an idealised NS'. As an alternative, they proposed 'recipient design', 'forms (which) ... accomplish social and interactional ends' (Firth and Wagner, 1997, p. 293).

Thus, while Firth and Wagner (1997, 2007) aimed to overcome false contrasts within SLA, primarily between 'use' and 'acquisition', they invented new ones.

KEY PEDAGOGICAL CONCEPTS (AND CONTRASTS) IN SLA'S 'SOCIAL TURN'

In the surge of research which assumed Firth and Wagner's (1997) agenda, some examination of the 'bio-social' debate's implications for pedagogy has occurred. Generally, this work has followed Firth and Wagner's (1997) 'holistic' assumptions regarding sociocognition, namely that 'the social and cognitive are inseparable' (Batstone, 2010, p. 3). Thus, while they employ various methodologies including Conversation Analysis, many studies adopt the socio-cultural premise that 'all the higher functions originate in actual relations between human individuals' (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Belz, 2002 p. 57).

In extending Firth and Wagner's (1997) agenda, this research has suggested a range of ways to capture the social dimension of classroom SLA. Mondada and Pekarek-Doehler (2004) found 'co-construction' of the social context as their French learners jointly engaged in 'social interaction' to understand a grammar lesson. By tracing an ESL student's movement from peripheral to central participation in writing conferences, Young and Miller (2004 p. 519) located the language user as a 'co-participant' in the learning process and defined learning as 'changing participation'. Additionally, Belz (2002) observed how her German students in a US university demonstrated 'multicompetence' through their multilingual 'language play'. According to Lantolf and Johnson (2007), a conceptual approach should be taken to lessons in Spanish verbal aspect since meaning is 'the expression of deeply embedded concepts'. Even from a less pedagogical perspective, Kramsch and Whiteside's (2007 p. 913) study of a multilingual business exchange prompted their redefinition of interlanguage as 'a language that unfolds not only in the mind but also in the body of a learner'. Thus, from this research perspective SLA, including classroom SLA, is 'situated practice' (Mondada and Pekarek-Doehler, 2004, p. 591).

All these studies follow Firth and Wagner (1997) in contrasting holistic assumptions regarding sociocognition with the 'analytic' view that the social and the cognitive 'can usefully be teased apart at a theoretical level' (Batstone, 2010, p. 3). In arguing for 'co-construction' and 'social interaction', Mondada and Pekarek-Doehler (2004) reject the separate existence of contextual factors (e.g. setting) and the cognitivist notion of interaction as a 'frame within which developmental processes can take place'. While demonstrating the user as a co-participant and learning in terms of participation, Young and Miller (2004, p. 519) demote the role of 'the mind/brain of the individual learner'. Belz (2002) counterposes the 'multicompetence' of her students with SLA's 'mentalistic' notion of Native and Non-Native Speakers and monolingual bias. Lantolf and Johnson (2007) contrast grammatical meaning with form. While less oppositional than the others, Kramsch and Whiteside (2007) downplay the cognitive dimension of interlanguage at the expense of the social.

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF SOCIOCOGNITIVE APPROACHES TO PEDAGOGY

While the 'social turn' offers to bridge SLA and pedagogy, the tendency to substitute cognitive ideas with social ones diminishes the possibility of a sociocognitive pedagogy to which both 'analytic' and 'holistic' approaches contribute. Nevertheless, a range of

research and the contributions to this volume suggest that a more balanced notion is both necessary and possible.

In reference to the wider debate about learning, Sfard (1998) puts a case for an innovative synergy between the poles in the debate, what she terms the 'acquisition' and 'participation' metaphors for learning. She counsels against the danger of choosing one since both have their benefits and pitfalls. 'Participation' ushers in 'community building' but cannot account for the 'transfer' of knowledge from situation to situation. 'Acquisition' ushers in 'individual enrichment' but is less able to capture social relations.

Sfard's (1998) points concerning the value of the acquisition metaphor resonate at a time when it is being pushed sideways by participation. As Gass (2004) argues, although context is clearly vital to acquisition and is a component of SLA research, it is not always crucial. She illustrates by citing Gass, Mackey and Feldman-Ross (2003), who found that a grammatical feature (third singular person –s on English present tense verbs) was acquired in the same way in both a laboratory and a classroom context. In other words, among other things, cognitive research is needed to account for the generalisation of knowledge, a crucial capacity in any pedagogy (cf., Larsen-Freeman, 2004). Illustrating from classroom tasks, Batstone (2010) outlines how language teaching can integrate both analytic and holistic approaches. One way to extend such a strategy would be to follow Larsen-Freeman's (2007) suggestion to select research questions which could provide answers to concerns on both sides of SLA's cognitive-social divide.

The contribution of SLA to language pedagogy is the concern which unifies the five papers presented in this volume. They each provide a complex picture of the interdependence between the social and cognitive aspects in the teaching/learning process. Tan, Wigglesworth and Storch adopt a socio-cultural model to compare pair interactions in face-to-face and computer-mediated communication. Tognini, Philp and Oliver blend socio-cultural and cognitive perspectives to investigate first and second language use in primary and secondary LOTE (Languages Other Than English) classrooms. Within a cognitive interaction framework, Oliver and Grote explore the role of social context and age in ESL classroom interactions. While also cognitively-oriented, Zhang and Widyastuti examine the acquisition of morphology within the social context of a family. Finally, Dyson shows how interlanguage captures language development on the learner's terms, while noting the need to link learner language with its social context.

These studies suggest ways in which synergies rather than contrasts can be created between cognitive and social approaches. As Figure 25.1 presents, they allow us to imagine that the contrasts we have seen thus far can be viewed as continua consisting of concep-

tual pairs. To illustrate their relevance to pedagogy, these pairs are grouped in terms of whether they refer to participants, curriculum or methodology.

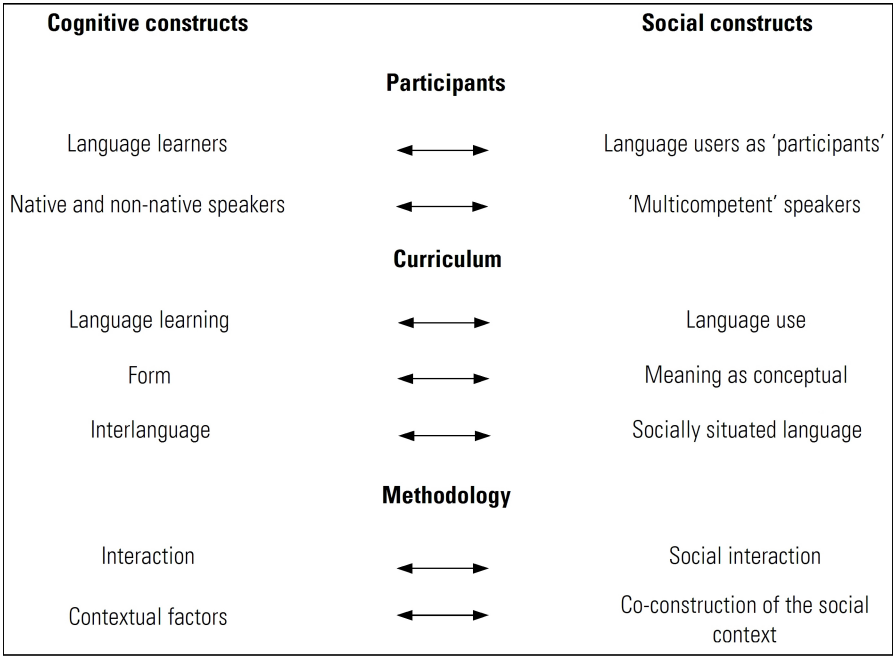

Figure 25.1 Sociocognitive continua in language teaching/learning

SOCIOCOGNITIVE CONTINUA: THE PERSPECTIVES OF THIS VOLUME

Although not always the main focus of the papers, this volume shows some meaningful ways in which these pairs are being explored in current research. The following questions will hopefully aid the reader's evaluation of the papers as contributions to sociocognitive pedagogy.

WHO ARE OUR STUDENTS: LANGUAGE LEARNERS OR LANGUAGE USERS?

Although assumptions regarding the relationship between learning and use of language vary, these articles examine both learners and users as well as considering a much wider

variety of roles than usual in SLA studies, including Kindergarten, primary and secondary school students. Hence, we find a greater participant-relevant awareness and richer database. Even so, the nomenclature of 'learner' continues. While this undoubtedly occurs because of the educational setting, these papers suggest the validity of this term in such contexts, if not always outside them.

WHO ARE OUR STUDENTS: NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS OR MULTICOMPETENT SPEAKERS?

Here, again, the papers emphasise diversity rather than uniformity with participants from diverse language backgrounds learning various L2's (Chinese, English, French and Italian). Language use is the particular focus of Tognini et al., who, interestingly, account for classroom L1 and L2 use in terms of 'multi-purposes' rather than 'multicompetence'. The papers also feature a sociocognitive approach in their tendency to describe language backgrounds and proficiency in neutral ways rather than as NS or NNS. Yet, in theoretically divergent papers (Oliver and Grote; Tan et al.), the much-criticised terms NS and NNS appear. One is led to conclude that they are 'shortcuts' for describing proficiency. If this is the case, it is heartening that Oliver and Grote show some empirical basis for the distinction.

WHAT ARE WE TEACHING: LANGUAGE LEARNING OR LANGUAGE USE?

All papers assume a nexus between language use and learning, although only Tan et al. consider that language use (or rather collaborative talk) is language learning. There is also a general interest in the point at which use becomes (or seems to become) learning. Methods vary from presenting excerpts of transcribed tasks (e.g. Tognini et al.) to locating the emergence (or onset) of grammar (e.g. Zhang and Widyastuti).

WHAT ARE WE TEACHING: FORM OR MEANING?

Considering the synergy observed in relation to learning and usage, the contributors' attention to both form and meaning is expected. In the two studies which focus on usage and the exchange of meaning (Tognini et al.; Tan et al.), form appears as a minor component. Even so, there is a tendency to use traditional linguistic categories when it comes to the description of learning. These categories form a nice bridge to the two studies (Dyson; Zhang and Widyastuti) focusing on the acquisition of grammatical form.

WHAT ARE WE TEACHING: INTER/LEARNER LANGUAGE OR SITUATED LANGUAGE?

Despite the consensus that 'language-as-object' is a legitimate component of pedagogy, views differ on whether the learners' internal development is paramount or whether language should be 'socially-situated'. For instance, both Dyson and Zhang and Widyastuti describe trajectories in which learner and target forms evolve, although they both seek to re-connect these trajectories with the social context. In contrast, Tan et al. explore the 'situated' nature of their learners' language.

HOW ARE WE TEACHING: (INPUT AND) INTERACTION OR SOCIAL INTERACTION?

Interaction is a good example of Larsen-Freeman's (2007) suggestion to pose a common question. The answer in this case is encouraging. Working within diverse theoretical frameworks, three contributions point to the value of pair interaction. From an (input and) interaction perspective, Oliver and Grote reveal the greater value of pairs compared to teacher-fronted classes in promoting recasts of learner errors. Adding the co-construction of meaning to cognitive views on interaction, Tognini et al. note the utility of peer interaction in both the L1 and L2. Finally, believing that learning is spurred on by collaborative talk and reflection upon it, Tan et al. show how learner pairs differ in their dyadic interaction.

HOW ARE WE TEACHING: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS OR CO-CONSTRUCTION OF CONTEXT?

In exploring the role of social context, these contributions negotiate new ways to specify the acquisition-environment interface. In examining the influence of two 'tools' of interaction (face-to-face and computer-mediated interaction) on pair interaction, Tan et al. find interesting differences in how learner pairs employ these modes. From a more analytic perspective, Oliver and Grote and Tognini et al. consider how aspects of the classroom context, such as tasks, impact upon language acquisition and use. While Zhang and Widyastuti show that the same acquisition sequences occur in diverse settings, they also consider how setting explains different rates of development.

CONCLUSION

To move beyond dichotomous views of SLA, Ortega (2005, p. 436) urges research in which:

> ... an open number of options is available for investigating linguistic, cognitive, social-affective, and critical dimensions of L2 learning and teaching.

Via such research, the shape of a balanced approach to language pedagogy may also appear. It is my hope that the present volume contributes to such a balance.

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ENDNOTES

1 A variety of terms are employed to describe this debate, namely 'bio-social' (alternatively 'biosocial' or 'biocultural') and 'sociocognitive' (alternatively 'cognitive social' or 'social cognitive'). I have adopted 'sociocognitive' since, according to Batstone (2010), it is capable of including the holistic and analytic approaches represented in this volume. 'Bio-social', however, has certain advantages. Firstly, it is brief and catchy, which is perhaps why Firth and Wagner (1997) employed it. Additionally, it focuses on the living structure and processes of human language (via the prefix 'bio-'). SLA researchers wishing to emphasise this quality may be attracted to 'bio-social' as an alternative to 'sociocognitive'.

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