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Discursive Practice in Language Learning and Teaching, Richard F. Young. Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, UK (2009). xii + 267pp

The field of SLA has been developing exuberantly in recent times and in many ways it has been transformed by thinking that is now well-known as sociocultural theory. Nevertheless, both unwaveringly committed cognitive and adamant sociocultural SLA researchers have been trying to shed light on a better explanation for the language learning mechanism. Sociocultural researchers, in particular, are more interested in the role of social context in this process. As Ortega notes in her *Foreword* to this book, Young correctly points out the importance of context and identifies a relative *lacuna* regarding a clearly accepted way of describing context. Against such a background, Young's monograph is timely and will make an important contribution to creating understanding between the two starkly different camps in the SLA research community.

Discursive Practice is motivated expressly by questions that the author has formulated for organizing his treatment of the subject matter under discussion: What does Practice Theory tell us about the practical construction of talk-in-interaction? What does linguistic theory tell us about participants' employment of verbal, non-verbal, and instructional resources in talk-in-interaction? These questions are the heart and soul of this work where competing and complementary SLA-related theories are presented in relation to their relevance to explaining language learning, teaching and testing as a context-specific activity.

Chapter 1 foregrounds readers well with a neat introduction to the main thesis of the book, namely, what discursive practice is in relation to Practice Theory. A rationale and a methodology for considering talk-in-interaction as discursive practice are delineated. In fact, it is Young's succinct presentation of the concept of discursive practice that paves the way for an easy reading of the succeeding six chapters. Young makes it explicit that the mission of this book is to establish a contextually-relevant concept of Practice Theory. Indeed, a Practice Theory in relation to language learning and teaching, as Young expounds, is one that involves language, and it is what he calls *discursive practice*. Practice is "performance in context" using language (p. 2).

I was immediately attracted to Young's sweeping summative presentation of a divided SLA research field in Chapter 2, "Foundations for the Study of Practice", the first chapter that really delves into the thesis in some depth. Young highlights the dichotomy in the field of SLA research which hinges on whether research should consider context in language learning or not. He critically reviews much of this theoretical debate both in its

historical context and diachronically. In Young's view, language learning and teaching as a cross-cultural enterprise cannot afford to ignore a variable as important as context. Based on this understanding, Young proceeds to review two theories of semiotics, with Saussure and Peirce being the two representatives. Young draws on Wittgenstein, Austin and Searle for theoretical groundings when he next moves to language games and activity types. It is from this chapter onwards that he adds relevant datasets to illustrate the theories he has adopted and the context of situation he addresses. Central to this chapter is his explication of Practice Theory and discursive practice, where he proposes that Practice Theory be inclusive of event and context of situation as well as verbal and non-verbal semiotic systems.

As Young forcefully argues, "all talk happens somewhere, at some time, and is produced somehow by somebody for some purpose, and the approach that practice theorists have taken is that talk and its context are inseparable" (p. 49), so Chapter 3 focuses on investigating context. Drawing on Bakhtin's work on sentences and utterances, Young discusses context in relation to the five questions, "Where?", "How?", "When?", "Who?" and "Why?". His exploration into context leads him to address the broad questions he poses in Chapter 1. He successfully shows how participants in the studies reviewed have made use of resources, including verbal and non-verbal semiotic systems in speech and writing, to contextualize talk, and how contexts are enlivened by talk. Chapter 4 surveys discursive resources with some in-depth analyses in the hope that "the stuff of talk and embodied action reflect and construct context" (p. 130). This is no small feat, as Young has planned to include Systemic Functional Grammar, ethnomethodological Conversation Analysis and embodied action, although it is manifest that Practice Theory goes beyond the primary focus on the language of scholars on whose work Young draws for insights. These two chapters lay a foundation for a practice approach to language learning, teaching and testing which are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Young comes to the core of the book, "Language Learning and Discursive Practice", in Chapter 5. Three questions which serve to organize Chapter 6, "What is learned?", "Who is learning?", and "Who is participating in the learning?", are answered, backed up by two theories, Language Socialization and Situated Learning. The concept of community of practice, which has gained popularity in the field of applied linguistics in the past decade, has also been revisited by virtue of its relevance to the theory he extrapolates. With a focus on language learning and testing, Young maintains his argument by looking at how a practice approach can account for learning, given that in Practice Theory, classrooms are sites for pedagogical practices and students are expected to learn how to participate in those practices in a learning community. Not surprisingly, Young stresses important influences on pedagogical and testing practice such as ideologies, identities, societal politics and institutional power. Readers who may feel a bit lost after the 200-plus pages of the book will definitely regain confidence in Chapter 7, "Prospects for Practice", where Young presents a concise recapitulation of the studies he has reviewed and the related concepts in relation to language learning, teaching and testing.

Young has adopted social theory and anthropology as the two pillars of his knowledge base and has successfully advanced a Practice Theory in language learning, teaching and testing on this basis. This achievement meets a much awaited aspiration for a field which has been so divided. Given that Practice Theory seeks to explain "genesis, reproduction, and change of social and cultural realities such as gender, class, ethnicity" (p. 231), it is natural that it should serve to reconcile a seemingly irreconcilable dichotomy between human agency and social structure. Young is to be congratulated for having managed to put together major recent developments in SLA cogently and systematically. *Discursive Practice* is both a synergetic recollection as well as a critical reflection of these developments. One of its unique features is that datasets in Arabic, Chinese, German, Portuguese, Japanese and English, among others, are included. This is an advantage over those studies that rely only on monolingual data. Indeed, as Young intends, Practice Theory is an exploration of wider issues. It is not a theory purely about the relationship between language and context of situation, but because of the power of the theory in explaining how individuals act in social situations and because of the role of language in social interaction, Practice Theory is intended to be one that can find application in the analysis of any talk-in-interaction.

Since Practice Theory views practice as taking language as essential and does not exclude factors such as the complexity of context, it contrasts with traditional linguistic approaches to language structure and meaning which often treat language as context-free, occurring "nowhere, nowhen, and produced by nobody" (p. 12). This is exactly because, as Young argues, social expectations are possible reflections of choice of language, and thus

self-identity is playfully explored. Throughout the book Young addresses these issues carefully and coherently. Fluently written and systematically presented, *Discursive Practice* is not only a must for researchers and graduate students who are interested in sociocultural theory in SLA, language education and anthropology, but also for those who are serious in their pursuit of a better understanding of an intricate and complex endeavour such as language learning and teaching. Despite the occasional technical and theoretical challenges for readers, especially SFG in Chapter 4, I anticipate that a wider SLA research community will be ready to take good stock of Practice Theory.

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Language Learning Strategies in Independent Settings, Stella Hurd, Tim Lewis (Eds.). Multilingual Matters, Bristol, England (2008). 320 pp

This is a dense and often valuable book for teachers, researchers and course writers who are interested in learner strategies, not only as support for language learning in general but more specifically as facilitating learner autonomy and self-regulation. The term “independent settings” refers to many different forms of and structures for language learning that are not mediated by regular face-to-face contact with a teacher, that is, not classroom-based language learning contexts. As such, this volume can be viewed as a companion to the principally classroom-based review of research in learner strategies edited by Cohen and Macaro (2007). More precisely, 10 of the 21 international author-contributors to this book work in foreign language education at the Open University (OU) in England. The OU is a distance learning institution where on-line, often innovative, courses can be followed by anyone who enrolls. There are numerous flexible pathways, for instance, to achieve a certificate, diploma, undergraduate or graduate degree from the OU in French. The two editors, Hurd and Lewis, are language lecturers at the OU with extensive experience in the creation of on-line language teaching programmes as well as researching language learning strategies and learner autonomy. This edited collection emerged from an international conference held in 2003 at OU headquarters in Milton Keynes, England, where the focus was on conceptualising language learning strategies and investigating their integration in independent learning contexts.

The book is organised into three parts entitled: “Language Learning Strategies: Theory, Research and Practice”, “Strategies for Skills Development in Independent Language Learning” and “Strategies for Learner Self-Management”. Individual chapters are around 20 pages long including references. There are 16 chapters in the book and the strongest are by authors (not only from the OU) who have had professional experience with distance and technology-based foreign language learning courses and have engaged in researching learners in independent settings, in addition to focussing on strategies. The empirical findings reported in many of the chapters often reflect distance-learner voices about strategies and strategy instruction concomitant with learning a language.

After a useful introduction where the editors provide the key foci of the book, the individual learner, independent language learning (ILL) contexts and learning strategies, Part 1 opens with a chapter by Cynthia White from New Zealand, who has written widely on distance learning. White situates these foci firmly in the “notions of independence, autonomy and control in learning experiences” (p. 3). As do all authors in the book, White reviews pertinent literature and at the end calls for further research into how learners engage