

What does this book offer an audience primarily interested in second language acquisition? Chiefly, it offers an interpretation of phenomena in discourse which I believe our field traditionally has viewed rather differently. *Talking Voices* suggests new empirical questions in the analysis of NNS talk and writing. At the mention of "repetition," for example, I typically thought of comprehension checks or other remedial work. However, non-native speakers may also use repetition to create involvement. Defined as strategies that compel the listener to take an active part in conversation and to help shape the discourse of the speaker, involvement strategies can be found in NNS talk. Knox (in press), for example, identified such a poetic use of repetition in the conversations of learners of English as a second language of low-intermediate proficiency.

Just as learners use repetition, they may also use other strategies that Tannen discusses. Particularly striking to me was Tannen's discussion of reported conversation as creative construction, which brought to mind a story that an advanced student of ESL told me during a conversation driving home after class. As the young woman talked about a movie she had seen, I was struck by the fact that she was reporting the dialogue from the movie as direct speech. I remember thinking that it was odd that such an advanced learner would not use indirect speech. Tannen's analysis of direct speech as an involvement strategy suggests that as an admittedly critical listener I may have missed something important—this speaker may have been attempting to draw me into her story.

Work like Tannen's reminds us how complex conversational interactions are and how much more complicated they can be when learners engage native speakers or other learners. Readers involved in the analysis of discourse, whether interlanguage discourse or native language discourse, will find much of interest in *Talking Voices*.

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METALINGUISTIC PERFORMANCE AND INTERLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE.

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David Birdsong's recent challenge to cognitive- and theoretical linguistic-based SLA is thought-provoking and widely researched. He strongly argues that access to competence through

metalinguistic performance is at least as problematic as linguistic performance itself. However, he acknowledges the need to continue using such evidence, but with improved experimental procedures and “convergent evidence” from a “diversified data base” (p. 208).

He builds his case in two sections, the first dealing with variability in metalinguistic capabilities. In Chapter 1 he discusses the research from developmental and cross-cultural perspectives, stating the need to investigate and identify the range of metalinguistic abilities to be found both across and within speakers. To such empirical considerations he adds the theoretical issues of defining both basic and derived categories of these capabilities. In Chapter 2 he provides evidence for multiple underlying metalinguistic competences and for the improvement of metalinguistic skills with experience. He presents the Bialystok-Ryan (1985) model of language proficiency as a flawed yet well motivated approach to the task of identifying requisite skills, these varying along the orthogonal dimensions of analyzed knowledge, relating to the essential linguistic structure, and cognitive control, relating to the processing mechanism. In Chapter 3 Birdsong discusses grammatical judgment in its putative role of providing access to linguistic competence, which is not uniformly developed across the speech community. Moreover, he challenges the empirical underpinnings of theoretical linguistics, reiterating the problem of whether a sentence is generated by the grammar or whether a range of extragrammatical factors affect its acceptability. In sum, he invites his readers to question the validity of metalinguistic performance data to support a theory of competence and prepares them to consider in the next section the even “trick[er] enterprise” (p. 87) of using judgment data to reveal late learners’ underlying linguistic knowledge.

In Chapter 4 he raises the central problem of accounting for incomplete SLA by adults given access to UG and takes issue with alternative interpretations of the UG hypothesis, namely explanations involving the defective nature of the accessing mechanism and the mediation of UG to constrain the range of possible grammars. The interpretation of data in support of UG theory in SLA depends on such factors as literacy-mediated judgment, response bias, and error detection. Although I am familiar with response bias from my own work, I found Birdsong’s extensive discussion of the topic difficult to follow. Signal detection theory has been applied to the problem of distinguishing a preference for positive or negative response from the actual detection of a stimulus (Green & Swets, 1966; Grier, 1971; Macmillan & Kaplan, 1985). As long as appropriate tests are conducted, response bias need not be a major problem in evaluating the results of UG-based research. In Chapter 5 Birdsong discusses negative evidence using Pinker’s (1987) criteria for determining its influence in SLA and claiming the variability of feedback types, situation, and individual learners. He refutes the role of negative evidence from the information-processing perspective, showing that learners usually confirm rather than disconfirm their hypotheses, vary in their ability to reject incorrect hypotheses, and organize their L2 schemata differently. In Chapter 6 he shows how changes in his own work would avoid certain pitfalls in SLA research.

One might critically examine this book at two levels: the strength of his case and, in a larger sense, its overall impact on the practice of SLA research. His basic argument is strong:

[A]cceptability judgments are the empirical domain of theoretical accounts of competence. Yet they are demonstrably variable and arguably unreliable, . . . [and so] should not be equated with linguistic competence. Moreover, the hypocrisy of rejecting linguistic performance data as too noisy to study, while embracing metalinguistic performance data as proper input to theory, should be apparent to any thoughtful linguist. (p. 72)

To be sure, methodological improvements can be made in designing instruments—adequate operationalization of theoretical constructs as concrete variables, greater control of test item elements, and the repetition of item types; eliciting judgments (Birdsong & Kassen, 1988); and

interpreting results—use of more and better statistical procedures and controlling for response bias (Johnson, 1988). However, Birdsong takes the position that “an understanding of the psychology of relevant L2 performance” as the “essential element in progress in SLA research” is the larger issue (personal communication).

Birdsong's book engages me most at the level of impact. Because his arguments against the availability of interlinguistic competence to assessment are so compelling, continued research in the area despite efforts to control the variables could be attacked as futile. Moreover, when “performance” and “competence” data do not converge (see Hilles, in press, and Platt, 1989, respectively), we still must decide which type of data is more credible, given methodological vigilance. This timely book reflects its gifted author's own ambivalent status vis-à-vis the best approaches to SLA research. However, at this crucial point in our collective search for viable SLA paradigms, it grounds us in the relevant questions.

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LINGUISTIC THEORY IN AMERICA (2nd ed.). *Frederick J. Newmeyer*. New York: Academic Press, 1986. Pp. v + 280.

This is the second edition of a now justly famous book about the development of generative syntactic theory in the United States during the past 30 years, best known as the Chomskyan revolution. It is primarily a history of ideas, but it is also a history of personalities, institutions, and the social dynamics that have shaped the field. Whatever the topic, it is readable, entertaining, and highly recommended. If you are interested in generative grammar and are confused about the players, this is the scorecard.