THEORIES OF SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNING. *Barry McLaughlin.* London: Edward Arnold, 1987, Pp. viii + 184. £6.95.

During the last 10 years, the number of studies in the field of second language acquisition research has increased to such an extent that even experts in the field will find it hard to get an overview. McLaughlin's book is a successful attempt to cut through the thicket. It combines the presentation of major theories with critical remarks on their scientific value. At the same time the author provides suggestions as to the most productive directions for empirical research and hypothesis development. The book contains an extensive up-to-date bibliography which also takes notice of major second language acquisition (SLA) research conducted in Europe, a region sometimes overlooked by U.S. researchers. McLaughlin's main addressee is obviously the practitioner who sometimes falls victim to theorists claiming that their hypotheses have been fully substantiated by empirical research. For her or him, the author provides a guide to theoretical thinking.

In his introductory chapter McLaughlin describes the nature of scientific theories and lists minimal criteria which every theory must meet. These in turn serve as a guideline for the critical evaluation of the actual SLA theories in the following chapters. Chapter 2 contains severe criticism of Krashen's Monitor Model. The other theories are seen in a milder light. Chapter 3 presents a discussion of interlanguage theory. Chapter 4 deals with the theory of linguistic universals (Greenberg/Chomsky). Chapter 5 discusses the sociolinguistically oriented approach which sees pidginization and acculturation as the central mechanisms in SLA. The author himself expressly favors cognitive theory, which he discusses in Chapter 6. The final chapter contains a conclusion and suggestions for possible applications of SLA theories in foreign language teaching.

According to McLaughlin a conglomerate of hypotheses can only be called a theory if it follows basic principles such as precision in defining terms, explanatory power, coherence, falsifiability, and generality. All of the theories which the author presents exhibit deficits with regard to one principle or another. However, Krashen's Monitor Theory, the most ambitious theory of second language acquisition, fails on all accounts. Nevertheless, the reason why so much space is devoted to this approach is again connected with the intended readership. Krashen's theory is widely accepted by practitioners, mainly in the United States, as *the* explanation of second language learning. It has some commonsense solutions for teaching problems, and most of Krashen's prescriptions for teaching are no doubt a move in the right direction. It is the theoretical claims that McLaughlin attacks. He shows that Krashen's hypotheses are only appealing if one looks at them very superficially. A closer look shows the deficiencies: the terms lack precise definitions. Some central ones seem to derive from linguistic theories, but Krashen takes over merely the terminology, not the concepts as a whole. McLaughlin also points to the weak empirical basis of Krashen's claims, which, above all, do not lead to clear predictions.

The other theories treated in the book cannot be attributed to one single researcher. They are often not homogeneous and are difficult to demarcate. This is especially true for interlanguage theory. It is in fact surprising that McLaughlin labels the interlanguage approach a theory, especially as he argues that interlanguage is a term used by researchers with different theoretical backgrounds. All hypotheses within the interlanguage framework share the common assumption that learner language is systematic and can be described like any other natural language. The hypotheses, however, differ in the way they explain the structural characteristics of interlanguages. Some allow for functional explanations; others are closer to the theory of universal grammar or to sociolinguistic approaches. This renders evaluation a difficult task.

McLaughlin merely criticizes the restriction to individual structural levels and the lack of clear predictions.

The theory of universal grammar (Chomsky) is in fact the only homogeneous theory treated in the book. The restriction to language-intrinsic processes together with the sole interest in a limited range of mainly syntactic phenomena are the main drawbacks of universal grammar (UG) theory, according to McLaughlin. A further problem with the UG approach is that it leaves too convenient a way out of any dilemma with data explanation. If the data do not fit, problems can be explained away with reference to system-external factors. Thus, the theory is difficult to test empirically. Nevertheless, for McLaughlin, markedness theory within the UG framework offers useful predictions for the role of the L1 in second language acquisition and can thus lead to a new evaluation of contrastive analysis.

Acculturation/pidginization theory again is not uniform. Researchers share the assumption that processes in pidginization, creolization, and second language acquisition are similar, but they disagree with regard to causal explanations of acquisitional processes. They either look for sociopsychological explanations (Schumann) or again refer to system-internal factors (Anderson, Bickerton). For McLaughlin it is too premature or almost impossible to disentangle the different phenomena, i.e., innate linguistic constraints, general learning strategies, problem-solving routines, and social factors. Above all, he questions the usefulness of the pidginization paradigm, as it is not clear what the theory is expected to predict. Obviously there is not enough information yet to say whether the theory is falsifiable or not.

Cognitive theory is the author's favorite. It is not genuinely linguistic, as it derives from contemporary cognitive psychology. It sees second language learning as the acquisition of a complex cognitive skill through the automatization and restructuring of mental representations. McLaughlin recognizes that cognitive theory on its own is not an overall explanation of second language acquisition. It must be combined with other linguistic theories, and its further development calls for an interdisciplinary approach.

The last chapter is directly addressed to the practitioner. McLaughlin shows that even the teacher's endeavors are theory-dependent. The question, however, remains as to which theory will in the end lead to successful teaching. An answer to this question is not foreseen in the near future.

The book offers an excellent review of recent developments and important discussions in SLA research. To fully appreciate McLaughlin's criticism of explanatory attempts, it is necessary to be familiar with the basics in the field. It is not necessarily an introductory book to the problems and questions of second language acquisition as a whole. It definitely belongs in the hands of all teachers of foreign languages, as it clearly shows that there are answers to their questions, but that these answers are far from being definite and final. This is in fact the reason why McLaughlin finally fails to establish a link between theoretical thinking and language teaching. The book could also encourage teachers to join theorists, present their own problems, and add their practical experience to ideas which are sometimes very far removed from reality. The book could thus help to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

The author is partisan but fair in his criticism. This makes the book attractive reading. There is nothing more boring to read than overviews which do not take sides. To my mind, McLaughlin should have made the conflict existing between cognitive, sociolinguistic and purely linguistic theories more obvious. To a large extent these approaches are not compatible, but rather alternative theories with different views on language which try to explain the same phenomena in different ways. I consider the competition between functional and formal approaches, in fact, the main inspiration for future SLA research.

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Thomas Vogel
Kiel University