



Key Questions in Second Language Acquisition (2020)

VanPatten, Bill; Smith, Megan; Benati, Alessandro G.

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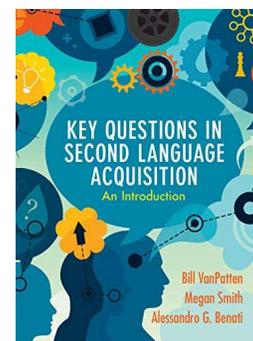
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Key Questions in Second Language Acquisition, which is designed very similar to Benati's *Key Questions in Language Teaching* (2020), is composed of eight chapters. The book seems to be an expanded and interactive version of *Key Terms in SLA* by Vanpatten and Benati (2010). You may find the glossary and subject index at the end of the 219 pages book. Each chapter has a reference list and a summary. The book was largely devoted to answering theoretical questions regarding SLA through empirical answers with the purpose of embodying ambiguous questions for the students with little background in linguistics. In order to achieve this, the authors provide evidence-based real-life examples and explanations. The authors are aware that students have difficulty in understanding linguistic jargon; therefore, the language of the book is plain and obvious, which makes the book reader-friendly and easy to follow. The order of chapters, from the history of acquisition to personal differences in SLA, enables students to build up newly-learned knowledge neatly. The book successfully elicits ambiguous issues for students through breaking down the linguistic issues and then answering each landmark question. This book is a welcome contribution to the existing body of research into SLA studies aiming to improve students' theoretical knowledge of language acquisition through empirical explanations. Inside a continuum of research, evaluation, and theorizing in SLA studies, this book offers authentic descriptions of highly theoretical conventions largely remained ambiguous for students thus far.

Chapter one informs readers about the history of L1 and L2 acquisition, and then tells the differences between them on the course of language acquisition. The chapter aims to construct basic background knowledge of linguistics through dialogues and citations from prominent research. The chapter seemed somewhat dis-organised due to touching many points at a time. The authors expected to introduce students as many linguistic concepts as possible while overloading the chapter. Chapter two emphasises the developmental stages of language acquisition by introducing well-established concepts in SLA such as morpheme orders, developmental sequences, and so on. The chapter aims to teach the order of language learning and the acquisition of formal features of language. The chapter does not simply explain the concepts but includes comments from the authors about the relationship between language development and linguistic concepts in the literature. The chapter achieves to provide basic knowledge, yet when the rich reservoir of SLA was taken into account, the chapter could divide the learning theories into nativist, learning, and interactionist theories so that the students might be aware of three main categories of language acquisition. Chapter three was dedicated totally

to two linguistic features of *input* and *output*. It is striking that the chapter remembers to include the terms of intake and uptake although no subtitle was spared for them. Chapter four was allocated to cognitive issues and initial stages of language learning. The Universal Grammar, over which most students are at loggerheads due to its complexity, is simplified, and also L1 interference is introduced, which is of use because the students will no doubt go on hearing these terms frequently in the forthcoming periods. Chapter five speaks to an issue that has been ignored by many researchers so far. The chapter starts with the question of *Can L2 learners become nativelike?* and endeavours to answer the question by bringing three acquisition hypotheses into the forefront: the fundamental difference hypothesis, the critical period hypothesis, and representational deficit hypothesis. The authors support the idea that having native-like fluency even after the critical period is possible if the effect of two hypotheses – namely full access and the interface hypothesis- on the SLA period is nullified. Chapter six questions the efficiency of explicit teaching by comparing and contrasting various claims. Concisely, the authors conclude that formal instruction does not appear to be effective on language acquisition, and underline the importance of implicit learning; however, the literature of teaching includes some established studies that support formal education for language learners (see Perez-Vidal, 2014). Similar to Chapter six, Chapter seven focuses on the role of explicit teaching in SLA and its possible impact on implicit learning. For the authors, explicit learning may be influential in activating implicit learning; though, they range against explicit learning. The last chapter investigates individual differences between L1 and L2 acquisition and the authors pay attention to the importance of individual differences in L1 particularly for vocabulary and syntactic knowledge. For them the developmental stages of L1 and L2, in terms of individual differences, are alike. The scope of personality features in language learning is too large to fit into a single chapter, and aware of this the chapter avoids going deeper into the issue, and aims to concisely introduce students the issue of individuality in language learning.

This book is a contributing source for students to introduce basic SLA features. One useful feature of the book, similar to Benati's book (2020) is that the chapters follow a line from theoretical knowledge to practical implementations, which allows readers to get background knowledge on language methodologies before real-life practices through dialogues. Each chapter ends with a recapitulating of the chapter, which contributes readers to organise newly-learned issues in mind. Furthermore, following up activities that exist at the end of each chapter may be of help to reveal whether the readers have grasped what has been told in the chapters. Besides, the book successfully creates real-life situations through mutual conversations in order to simplify theoretical SLA terms for undergraduate students. Thought-provoking questions placed carefully inside the chapters under the subtitles of *Consider this* may contribute to increasing student awareness concerning the discussed points. More, a few prominent academic studies are presented under the titles of *exemplary studies*, which seems to increase students' existing in-field-knowledge regarding SLA. However, there is still some room for minor critical remarks; for example, a chapter could be allocated for updated SLA theories that emerged as of 2000s. Another point that the book falls short is that the decision reached in Chapter five could be supported by more studies because there are a great many of studies that investigated the issue.

These minor caveats should not detract from the positive contribution that this book makes to the SLA studies. While many books fall short in constructing a bridge between theoretical information and practical implementations, this book accomplished to merge theoretical information and practical implementations. Inside a continuum of SLA books, students with little linguistic background may benefit the plain language of the book when the convoluted language of other SLA books is considered. Instructors are recommended to include this book

in their book suggestion lists for their students to promote students' basic knowledge on SLA. Final words, I hope the author will regard my reservations as a welcome addition for the next editions of this valuable book.

References

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