

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

20th Anniversary of SSLA

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On April 23rd of this year, at the initiative of the current group of editorial assistants (Elizabeth Grace Winkler, Llorenç Comajoan, and Donald F. Reindl), a symposium was organized on the Bloomington campus of Indiana University to celebrate the 20th anniversary of *SSLA*'s founding. Presentations on the past, present, and future state of research on second language acquisition were presented by Editorial Board and Advisory Committee members Susan Gass, John Schumann, Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig, and Patsy Lightbown. It is noteworthy that this commemorative event, the creation of *SSLA*, would not have taken place without the direct intervention of another group of graduate students, the Indiana University Linguistics Club. Without the IULC producing and disseminating the fledgling publication that was *SSLA* in 1978, the journal would never have made it beyond the drawing board. In this note prefacing the last issue of Volume 20, I would like to narrate the conditions of *SSLA*'s birth and comment on the journal's contribution to second language acquisition research.

Before we wax too self-congratulatory on the commemoration of the 20th year of the founding of *SSLA*, we should bear in mind that the journal that established itself as the first venue for research on any aspect of language acquisition, *Language Learning*, is itself celebrating its 50th year of existence. Not only did our long-established predecessor provide the first forum for serious discussion of issues in the field of language learning viewed very broadly, but it has long remained the most affordable journal in the language sciences. It is interesting that *Language Learning*, like *SSLA*, was at first produced and disseminated by a graduate student group on the campus of a distinguished public university in the Great Lakes region.

I would like to take this occasion to congratulate publicly our fellow editors at *Language Learning*, in particular its Executive Director, the distinguished psycholinguist and psychologist Alex Guiora, who has guided the development of the journal for the last 14 years. I recall with pleasure the many dis-

cussions we had about publication policies of our respective journals when we both served on the Executive Council (Bureau) of the International Association of Applied Linguistics and were often defending the same good causes for the promotion of applied linguistics worldwide.

THE FOUNDING AND EVOLUTION OF *SSLA*

Beginning in 1972, as a follow-up to interactions at one of the international congresses sponsored by AILA, the International Association of Applied Linguistics, S. Pit Corder of the University of Edinburgh and Eddy Roulet of the University of Neuchâtel organized an annual colloquium on applied linguistics. These meetings, sponsored by the Swiss National Fund for Scientific Research, provided a forum for discussion of current issues in applied linguistics focusing on language learning and related areas of the language sciences among Western European applied linguists. The Neuchâtel Colloquia differed from the typical pattern of North American scholarly meetings in that they did not involve the formal presentation of papers. Instead, they took the form of seminars at which about a dozen invited participants discussed, in a relaxed atmosphere, working papers on a selected topic submitted in advance. In late May of 1974, I happened to be in Western Europe when the Neuchâtel Colloquium took place, and I was invited to present a paper on variation and SLA. Because I regularly went to France at that time of the year, I became one of the regular participants. In subsequent years, other American colleagues found their way to Neuchâtel, among them Evelyn Hatch and Elizabeth Traugott.

A problem arose concerning the publication of the proceedings of the colloquia. The first three or four had been published under various auspices in different European venues rather than in a particular series that would be readily identifiable and, thus, guarantee the broad dissemination that the rather innovative views on applied linguistics and language learning presented at Neuchâtel deserved. It occurred to me that the IULC could reach a broad international audience at a relatively low cost and in a rapid manner. In the sixties and seventies, the IULC published several influential articles and monographs on generative-transformational grammar, which ensured its publications' wide dissemination in the United States. Also, its international reach became evident to me when, in a stroll near the Sorbonne in Paris, I came upon a bookstore displaying a large sign stating: "Nous distribuons les publications du Indiana University Linguistics Club!" (We distribute the publications of the Indiana University Linguistics Club). The first three issues of *SSLA* contained papers from the Neuchâtel Symposia, and the fourth, published under the auspices of the IULC, combined unsolicited submissions to the journal and papers presented at the Fifth International Congress of Linguists in Montreal (1978).

The interest expressed by SLA researchers in the fledgling publication, which appeared in mimeographed, camera-ready typography and set in the rather inconvenient 8½" × 11" format, encouraged us to transform *SSLA* into a

proper journal. In 1981, thanks to the joint support of the Center for English Language Training (CELT) directed by Harry Gradman, who served as the first Associate Editor of *SSLA*, and the Committee for Research and Development in Language Instruction (CREDLI), which I chaired, *SSLA* underwent a metamorphosis: It took on the now-familiar red cover and its dimensions shrank to the typical journal format. However, *SSLA* maintained its broad international purview. The first issue of Volume 3 contained a selection of pedagogically oriented articles by American, British, French, and German authors presented at a European-American seminar sponsored by the MLA. The second issue of that volume had a strong German flavor with reports of research on *Gastarbeiterdeutsch* by Meisel and Clahsen, Dittmar, and Pfaff, complemented by more general articles by Selinker, Cohen and Apeh, Hüllen, and Wode. Significant additions were a review section that has grown progressively more extensive and, from Volume 4 to Volume 8, short reports of experimental studies labeled "Research Notes," edited by Michael Long and Robin Scarcella.

Assuming all aspects of the editing, production, and dissemination of Volumes 3–6 of *SSLA* put great pressure on the limited staff of CREDLI. Thus, the decision by Cambridge University Press (CUP) to add *SSLA* to its large collection of journals devoted to the language sciences was most welcome because it enabled me to focus on strictly editorial tasks and increase the number of published articles. The granting of two half-time editorial-assistant positions by the office of Kenneth R. Gros Louis, Executive Vice President and Chancellor on the Bloomington campus, made more efficient handling of submissions and better communication with authors and reviewers possible. For example, *SSLA* became one of the first journals to make available to reviewers all evaluations of submissions that they had been asked to evaluate. Additionally, having CUP handle all aspects of the production and the dissemination of the journal made it possible to add a third issue to each volume and, most importantly, more than doubled the circulation. Later, to avoid the accumulation of a backlog of articles resulting from a steadily increasing flow of high-quality submissions, *SSLA* moved to quarterly status, with the designation of the second volume as a thematic one treating areas of topical interest to SLA researchers. Although a thematic volume is entrusted to a guest editor, the journal's rigorous evaluation process still applies.

A major reorganization of the editorial structure of the journal accompanied the transition from Indiana University to CUP aegis. A small Editorial Board serves to orient editorial policies and is centrally involved in the screening of submissions and proposals for thematic issues. A larger Advisory Board provides general counsel while doing major service in the evaluation process. In 1988, Susan Gass was named Review Editor and assumed full responsibility for the book reviews and notices, whose number and range made them a salient feature of the journal. Her important contribution to the high esteem that *SSLA* enjoys as one of the leading international venues for research in applied linguistics was recognized by her appointment to Associate Editor.

SSLA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SLA RESEARCH

In 20 years of existence, *SSLA* has never deviated from an ecumenical editorial policy. In fact, its emergence as the channel for the dissemination of the proceedings of the Neuchâtel Colloquia predestined it to be an outlet for research on second and foreign language learning based on a broad range of theoretical views and methodological approaches. The founders of this forum, S. Pit Corder, then at the University of Edinburgh, and the local host, Eddy Roulet, viewed applied linguistics not as a narrow application of linguistics, let alone a particular theory of linguistics to language teaching, but as the intersection of a broad array of language sciences: psycholinguistics, ethnolinguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse, and conversational analysis, to mention only a few, as well as various practical activities involving language use such as language teaching, language planning, and standardization. The European linguists invited to Neuchâtel represented a variety of theoretical viewpoints, some of which were unknown in the United States (e.g., enunciative theory and skill theory).

SSLA's birth in 1978 coincided with the emergence of a central, theoretically oriented core in applied linguistics that extended in three directions. First, it rejected the notion of language transfer based on contrastive analysis in favor of the notion of interlanguage or approximative systems. This view recognized the primacy of general principles grounded in universals of language that guide the restructuring of input data on the part of learners. It also created links between SLA and second language learning, on the one hand, and the expanding field of pidgin and creole studies, on the other. As workers in the field shifted their attention from formal classroom language learning on the part of adolescents and young adults to the acquisition of language by adults in more natural settings, they began to explore the phenomena that arise as a consequence of language contact. A good example was John Schumann's seminal longitudinal study of a case of low-level acquisition of English, that of the 30-year-old immigrant Alberto. From this perspective, pidginization and creolization appear as extreme cases of linguistic restructuring arising from language contact. *SSLA* contributed significantly to this new way of looking at language acquisition, for its first issue featured two oft-cited articles on simplification in restructuring: Pit Corder's "'Simple codes' and the source of the second language learner's initial heuristic hypothesis" and Henry Widdowson's "The significance of simplification." In the latter seminal article, Widdowson showed that simplification, as performed by natural learners, does not operate at the level of linguistic competence as narrowly defined by Chomsky but is determined by communicative needs. This accounts for the mismatch between the simplified pedagogical progressions found in textbooks and the learners' simplifications as reflected by their "errors" and approximative systems.

The second direction taken in the study of language learning in the 1970s was the extension of its scope beyond narrowly defined linguistic competence. Following Dell Hymes's groundbreaking work, applied linguists began

to study the acquisition of the rules of language—that is, the acquisition of communicative competence. More attention was given to the interplay between the social context in which acquisition of language takes place and the nature of acquisition. Not only did applied linguists observe and analyze learner errors as indications of restructuring, but they also began to study the effect of these errors on communication. The first issue of *SSLA* contained an article by Stig Johansson of Lund University, Sweden, entitled “Problems in studying the communicative effect of learner’s errors.” In the second issue of Volume 1, Daniel Coste, the leading French applied linguist at that time, criticized the restricted nature of the types of communicative situations under which second language learning was observed (“Quelques remarques sur la notion de situation en linguistique appliquée à la didactique des langues”).

Daniel Coste was also the author of the French version of the Threshold Level, a project by the Council of Europe to set goals of foreign language teaching in terms of the ability to carry out language functions and perform certain speech acts. Herein lies the third direction of studies of language acquisition adumbrated in the early issues of *SSLA*: the extension of analysis of language learning beyond the sentence to include discourse and phenomena that, at that time, had been considered extralinguistic. I am referring, of course, to pragmatics.

THE SCOPE OF *SSLA*

It is interesting to chart the evolution of *SSLA*’s editorial policy as reflected by the formal statement in the “Information to Readers.” In the first issue, we stressed the broadening of the study of language acquisition beyond linguistic competence:

Studies in Second Language Acquisition (SSLA) addresses itself to the study of the process of acquisition of a second language and the relationship between the development of linguistic competence and communicative competence in a second language.

In a later formulation, we stress the interdisciplinary nature of our view of the discipline, and we remind our readers that foreign language learning is not excluded:

Studies in Second Language Acquisition is devoted to problems and issues in second language and foreign language learning, defined broadly to include problems of language contact—interference, transfer, pidginization. Although preference is given to theoretically oriented papers and reports of empirical research, discussions of pedagogical issues will be considered if they refer to major theoretical issues in the field.

Beginning with Volume 20, we project a more welcoming attitude toward pedagogically oriented applied linguistic research:

Theoretically based articles reporting research studies are preferred. However, empirical investigations of the interface between SLA and language pedagogy, such as classroom interaction or the effects of instruction, will also be considered.

Most of the applied linguists who gathered around the table of the seminar room of the Department of Linguistics at the University of Neuchâtel to brainstorm on the development of their discipline, present author included, started their careers as foreign language teachers. For example, Pit Corder, certainly the most influential applied linguist of the 1970s, began as a teacher of English for the British Council in Jamaica. Speaking of interlanguage theory in his article in *SSLA* 1:2 (“Pure and applied research in linguistics: Is the difference merely one of motivation?”), he declared that “the motivation for the investigation is clearly and unequivocally applied, the desire to obtain a better understanding of a particular phenomenon in order to do a particular practical task more efficiently” (pp. 87–88).

Interlanguage theory, which was at the center of discussions at the Neuchâtel Colloquia and, consequently, in the founding issues of *SSLA*, has indeed shaped the development of the practical art that is second and foreign language teaching. G. Richard Tucker, who has served continuously on the Editorial Board or Advisory Committee for the 20 years of the journal’s existence, identified five contemporary pedagogical principles that are derived ultimately from the seminal concepts of interlanguage and approximative systems that *SSLA* disseminated (“Reflections on the stories teachers tell” in Douglas K. Hartman, ed. *Stories Teachers Tell: Reflecting on Professional Practice*, Northeast Conference Reports 1998. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company, pp. 216–221):

1. The learner-centered classroom.
2. Encouraging learners to use developing language skills for engaging in personally meaningful activities.
3. Focus on content rather than on form.
4. Cooperative learning, in which teachers use creatively more fluent and competent learners as models for less experienced and proficient learners.
5. Recognizing the wide range of individual differences among learners deriving from different life experiences, learning styles and strategies, motivation, etc.

Although it is a distinctly scientific journal, it is fair to assert that, for the past 20 years, *SSLA* has, in no small way, contributed to one of the important missions of applied linguists—namely, guiding adolescents and young adults to acquire the ability to communicate in a language other than their mother tongue.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

I find great personal satisfaction in describing the contribution that the journal has made to the professional training of more than a dozen graduate stu-

dents contemplating careers in applied linguistics. Some readers of *SSLA* might be familiar with a national initiative labeled “Preparing the Future Professorate,” which was designed to provide graduate students with experiences that model activities in which they will have to engage once they become full-time professors. In a sense, we at *SSLA* anticipated this movement by nearly 20 years by giving senior graduate students hands-on experience with one of the major responsibilities of professors in research universities: evaluating research. Since Volume 7 (1985), when *SSLA* came under the aegis of Cambridge University Press, the major functions of the editorial assistants have not consisted principally of proofreading and other tedious managerial tasks, but preliminary evaluation, engaging in a continuous interaction with authors and reviewers, and form correction. To place the contributions of editorial assistants in proper perspective, it will be useful to describe *SSLA*’s three-phase editorial process.

First, manuscripts undergo an in-house review conducted mainly by the editorial assistants. The submissions that proceed beyond this phase (about half) are evaluated by four specialized experts, on the average. It is a rare manuscript that will transit through this phase without requiring revision. After revision, successful submissions are reviewed by two readers, one of whom was involved in the first-stage evaluation. This complex process challenges the skills of the individual editorial assistant, who must follow each article from stage to stage, summarizing and commenting on reviewer reports at our weekly staff meetings.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There remains for me the pleasant task of expressing my gratitude to those who have helped found *SSLA* and steered it to its position as one of the leading international venues for research on second language acquisition:

To Harry Gradman, who served as the first Associate Editor and helped assure the transition from its rudimentary mimeographed local product to a proper journal.

To the various editorial assistants without whose staunch loyalty and burning commitment a 20-year sustained production would not have been possible: David Boe, Llorenç Comajoan, Pamela Dorn, Cheryl Engber, Annette B. Fromm, Martin J. Mallone, Tina Gikas O’Donnell, Deborah Piston-Hatlen, Charles Pooser, Donald F. Reindl, Charles Schroen, David Slayden, Terese Thonus, Shona Whyte, Molly Wieland, Laurel Willingham-McLain, and Elizabeth Grace Winkler.

To the members of the various Editorial Boards and Advisory Committees, I would like to stress that the purpose of two bodies is not to endow the journal with scholarly respectability, although its members have always been eminent and productive SLA researchers and applied linguists. The members of the Board and the Committee play an integral role in shaping the theoretical and methodological orientations taken by the journal and serving as expert

readers. I would like to extend particular thanks to Susan Gass, who has served 16 years, including 12 as Associate Editor and Review Editor. How she manages to persuade, cajole, and terrorize colleagues to undertake reviews and, more importantly, to deliver them on time is a well-kept secret. What is clear is that she has made our review section a signal feature of the journal and the best of any venue in our field.

To the dozens of expert readers who have generously given their time and expended great efforts to evaluate submissions within the tight time constraints that fast turnaround requires; in the final analysis, they are the guarantors of the scientific quality of the journal.

To Kenneth R. Gros Louis, Academic Vice President and Chancellor of Bloomington campus, who served as the channel for the very concrete support provided by Indiana University, without which founding and sustaining *SSLA* would not have been possible.

To Barbara Colson, both as head of the Journals Division in 1985 and more recently as Director of the North American Branch of Cambridge University Press, in whom we have always found a sympathetic manager with a discreet and flexible style and whose support of the journal has been unwavering.

To Susan Quinn, the superbly efficient CREDLI Office Coordinator, for unburdening us of administrative and logistical detail.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to personally thank my patient wife, Hilde, without whose constant support I would not have been able to add the editorship of *SSLA* to my other professional and academic endeavors.