



# The Journal of Asia TEFL

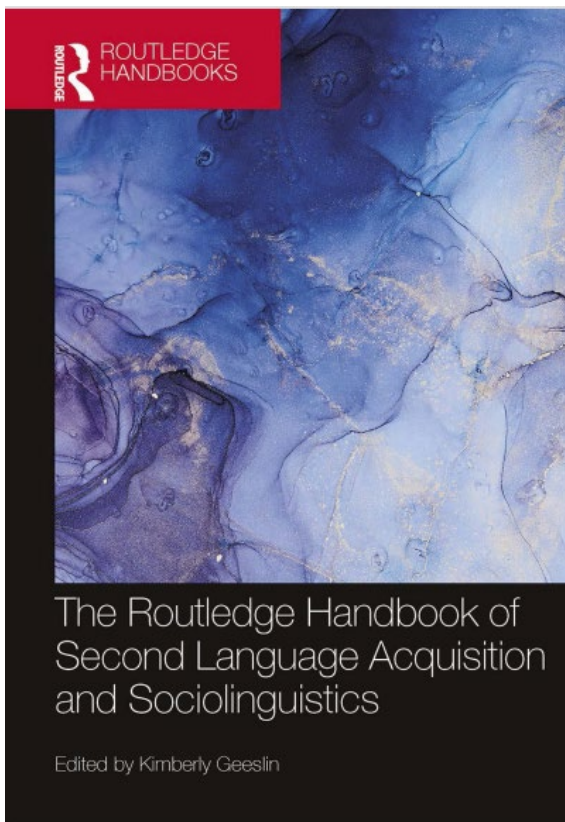
<http://journal.asiatefl.org/>

e-ISSN 2466-1511 © 2004 AsiaTEFL.org. All rights reserved.



## Book Review

**The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Sociolinguistics**, edited by Kimberly Geeslin, Routledge, 2022, 464 pp., \$250 (Hardback), ISBN: 9780367861636



Most second language learners need assistance from individuals who are more knowledgeable about the second language in order to acquire the target language and to use and retain linguistic knowledge and skills. The absence of other people in social and educational environments, according to Tarone (2008), can lead to a partial understanding of L2 learning. Sociolinguists, therefore, postulate that the presence of other individuals is significant in assisting with L2 learning. In this regard, empirical studies on the connection between social interactions and the use of L2 have been deemed to be valuable across different L2 contexts. The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Sociolinguistics, edited by Kimberly Geeslin, is a welcome collection of such works. The book also offers a thorough overview of how the field has developed over the course of 50 years and how it may grow in the future.

This book is designed for experienced academics interested in critically analyzing the novelties and shortcomings of concepts, methods, and tools in SLA and sociolinguistics, as well as beginning researchers trying to get a foothold in the field. The book may also be useful for teachers because there are several case studies for classroom techniques. Moreover, the book

contains studies carried out in a wide range of Asian countries or regions, such as Indonesia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, which could be interesting for readers from Asia looking for unique practices from contexts close to their own.

The book is organized into five sections, each with about six chapters. Each chapter follows a structure that includes an introduction, historical perspectives, critical issues and topics, current contributions and research, primary research methods, recommendations for practice, future directions, references, and additional reading.

The first section's title is "Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations in the Study of Second Language Acquisitions and Sociolinguistics." The contributing authors outlined the key ideas, relevant problems, and challenges as well as provided recommendations for how sociolinguistic insights could be incorporated into



teacher preparation, curriculum development, and language teaching. Van Compernelle's chapter, for instance, advocates for the use of computer-mediated communication in schools for sociocultural theory implementation in order to record developmental processes through time, instead of merely focusing on the outcomes.

"Sociolinguistics Factors and Their Role in Second Language Acquisition" is the title of the second section, which addresses the fundamental understanding of sociolinguistics; issues such as social networks, regional variation, salience, style and (in)formality, and foreign accent are each given a chapter. For instance, in the chapter by Schmidt, Linford, and Fafulas, the authors note that additional research is needed on variables including language contact, proficiency, and attitudes toward regional dialects, which may play a role in acquisition.

The third section, entitled "Tools for Research on Second Language Sociolinguistics" covers a number of methodological techniques for gathering and analyzing data in SLA sociolinguistic research. It provides both an in-depth, targeted discussion of selected methodological tools and a critical examination of their relative advantages and disadvantages. For instance, in Chapter 16, some of the popular methodological tools include semi-directed sociolinguistic interviews combined with reading comprehension tasks, written contextualized tasks such as filling-in-the-blank activities in dialogues, longitudinal data or cross-sectional corpora, and learners' self-reflections and statistical software utilization. They also suggest using statistical software products to run statistical calculations such as t-tests, ANOVA, or different regression models for the quantitative analyses.

The fourth section is named "Learner Populations and Learning Contexts", which examines the intersections between diverse theoretical and practical approaches to the social aspects of language learning. Discussions on how different learning contexts with different participants, such as study abroad participants, classroom participants, heritage language learners and general additional language learners, are presented in an attempt to promote the reclamation of indigenous languages. Particularly, the chapter by Starr explains how efforts to revive indigenous languages have continuously been linked to benefits including improved health, strengthened family and community relationships, and other revitalizations.

The final section, namely, "Language-Specific Research on Second Language Sociolinguistics" is a critical synthesis of the social dimensions of second language acquisition. Through case studies, the chapters dispute the unintended consequence that second-language sociolinguistics research is largely pertinent to just one dominant language. Moreover, the focus is not on the language but on the linguistic and paralinguistic elements of the target language from the point of view of the learners. For instance, Edwards illustrates how phonological, morphophonemic, syntactic and discourse-pragmatic, and attitudes are accountable for learners' agency and identity across research articles.

Although this book is great overall, there are at least four areas that can be improved. First, it is this reader's impression that the five sections could be re-ordered to be more comprehensible. For instance, the third and fourth sections could be switched so that readers can first comprehend learning populations and contexts in Section 4 before learning about tools for studying sociolinguistics in Section 3 and being given case studies in Section 5. With the current arrangement, there appears to be a slight bump between these sections.

Second, the book has not discussed the potential of human-computer interaction in sociolinguistics. The rising popularity of learners' social interactions on virtual platforms has been covered in various chapters (Chapters 8, 9, 12, and 29). However, the sociolinguistics scope is limited to direct human-to-human interaction and does not explore the potential role of advanced technology such as chatbots that may accommodate this interaction. The question of human and computer interaction is not being discussed. It might sound like a stretch, but is it? A digital personal assistant powered by artificial intelligence has been on the market for decades and has been a popular language learning partner in this modern era (e.g., Duolingo, Andy, MondlyAR, etc.). May (1991) posits that the computer may no longer be restricted as a means or a medium, but rather as an active dialogue partner who offers feedback and builds a social environment with its users. Therefore, given how technology has been marching forward, it is perhaps appropriate to explore its potential adequately.

Third, the part under each chapter called "suggestions for further reading" is considered not effective because it does not provide any information on why the list of literature may be important to the readers. It would be much

better if each piece of recommended readings could be annotated with details such as what readers can expect from the reading. In addition, moving this part before the references would result in a more coherent structure.

Last but not least, the inclusion of the most recent "contributions and research" in each chapter seems to overlap with Section Three, which is specifically designed to examine choices for research methodologies and tools for sociolinguistics and SLA. As a result, the readers may find them to be repetitive. A simple solution is to merge the information.

Aside from the aforementioned issues, this book is exceptional since it combines two fields namely SLA and sociolinguistics and offers in-depth insights as well as provides abundant supporting case studies. Despite the complexity and breadth resulting from combining two fields, the book is written in a clear and concise manner, guiding readers to understand the roles of sociolinguistics in SLA. A thorough introduction to the theories and concepts in sociolinguistics was given to readers before they encounter these concepts being applied in the case studies. Additionally, it does a fantastic job of explaining basic to complex sociolinguistic concepts so that readers at all knowledge levels and professional backgrounds—including teachers, researchers, and graduate students—can explore ideas that may be new to them. To conclude, I believe this is a good book with cutting-edge information about SLA and sociolinguistics.

### References

- May, L. (1991). Sociolinguistic research on human-computer interaction: A perspective from anthropology. *Social Science Computer Review*, 9(4), 529-540.
- Tarone, E. (2008). A variationist perspective on the interaction approach. In A. Mackey & C. Polio (Eds.), *Multiple perspectives on interaction in SLA*. Routledge.

**Andrias Susanto**  
Iowa State University, USA  
andrias@iastate.edu

*(Received September 8, 2022; Revised December 20, 2022; Accepted January 18, 2023)*