# Watch this Space[1]

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There comes a point in every language teacher's career when practice in the classroom is incongruent with preconceived, sometimes idealistic expectations. This is due in part to the mismatch between those expectations and the psychological realities of second language learning. Moreover, the vagaries of the classroom environment make it all the more difficult to predict how learning will unfold. And yet we continue to teach, all the while striving to refine our intuitive strategies through experience.

We as teachers often follow our intuitions and occasionally subscribe to a set of "best practices," often a set of received ideas that are sometimes incongruent with research interests and findings in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). Why should we teachers tune in to instructed second language acquisition (ISLA)? Keep calm and watch this space; ISLA is finally backfilling the space between the practice of teachers and the ground traversed by the research field. There has been a longstanding gap between research and practice in second language teaching, and although second languages have been taught and learned for hundreds of years, it is only recently that research has begun to inform pedagogical practices.

This is a good time in history for both teachers and ISLA researchers. Although the now seemingly archaic paradigm of Behaviorism ascribed a role for teachers, that role was narrowly defined, perhaps bereft of nuance and complexity; teachers were breakers of habits. The more recent nativist view of language acquisition regarded the role of teachers and L2 instruction as secondary, assuming that language was an innate endowment. Fortunately for teachers, recent theoretical paradigms in SLA, namely Usage-Based or Emergentist theories (UBE), have acknowledged and validated the importance of human interaction in language learning, thereby acknowledging an important role for pedagogical interventions in successful L2 learning.

According to UBE theories, the way language is meaningfully *used* alters the potential for what features get learned and retained (Bybee, 2008, 2013; Eskildsen, 2015). The language structure we develop in our minds represents the sum of our experience in using not just our second language, but in using all our languages. UBE attempts to include in its theoretical purview one's first and second languages, learner-internal constructs such as domain-general learning mechanisms, working memory and attention, as well as learner-external constructs that affect cognition such as the frequency, recency, and context of input features (Ellis, 2006).

Teaching is, in effect, a way of manipulating conditions of language use; why else would we teach if we did not think it had some impact on learning? While this belief is intuitive to most teachers, it is empowering to have growing theoretical and empirical support behind it. ISLA, partially informed by UBE, is helping us make sense of what we have already been doing as teachers and observing in our learners. For example, experience has taught us that for every pedagogical action, there is *not* always an immediate learning response. UBE theories seem well-positioned to plausibly explain this, describing factors underlying inter- and intra-learner differences in development. They are also able to articulate why some linguistic features such as parts of the lexicon and morphosyntax are very learnable and therefore teachable by declarative means, and why other features such as articles and subtler aspects of semantics/pragmatics may

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[1] *Watch this space* is an idiom signaling that future developments are expected, more information will be provided

require vast amounts of exposure to language so that implicit learning mechanisms can do the heavy lifting. They are able to articulate ways of understanding timelines of instructional treatments, which are contingent on learners' stages of development. All of this helps us, as language teachers make decisions about what to teach, when to teach, and what to expect from teaching. More importantly, these theories help teachers to understand teaching as a function of learning, and not the other way around.

There will always be teachers. These are people who have chosen to empower others through insights and abilities that they themselves have come to understand. Where there is no explicit guidance in how this is to be done, teachers are nonetheless compelled to make their own decisions and act. However, when teachers are better informed about the intricacies of learning and teaching and their relationship, they will be empowered. UBE theories and other areas of ISLA make the complexities of second language learning accessible to language teachers, and create a space to better understand and explore the role of a teacher in second language learning. While many of the nuances and complexities of learning have yet to be defined, there is progress from the past, and we therefore are better able to circumscribe the role of the teacher through our growing understanding of ISLA. The space between theory and practice is slowly being filled in. Watch this space.

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