

makes its most worthy contribution, by suggesting some significant re-framing of established politeness and gender theories. *New Zealand Ways of Speaking English*, true to the editors' introductory promise, gathers together representative and current research from New Zealand, across a wide spectrum of linguistic interests, from phonological and syntactic analysis to pragmatic concerns about language in society. With this ambitious agenda, Bell & Holmes succeed in presenting a very readable and relevant book to the academic community in both hemispheres.

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Individual Differences in Second-Language Learning by Peter Skehan. London: Edward Arnold, 1989. 168 pp.

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While not denying the value of attempting to identify universal processes of second-language acquisition, it is likely that teachers are at least as aware of individual differences (IDs) between

language learners as they are of similarities. It is consequently surprising that the study of IDs in a second-language context has not received more than a fraction of the attention afforded to it in mainstream psychology (where numerous specialist journals reflect both an established and thriving research tradition). In addressing this issue, therefore, *Individual Differences in Second-Language Learning (IDSLL)*, by Peter Skehan, is not only of substantial practical relevance, but also marks a timely assertion of the importance of this general area of research.

IDSLL begins with an account of IDs within "contemporary" models. For example, Skehan notes that in the "Monitor Model" (e.g., Krashen, 1982), which assumes comparability of processing between individuals, differences become trivial. (It is, as an aside, remarkable that here, and elsewhere, Krashen's model is still taken seriously; after all, Gregg's (1984) incisive and convincing criticism has not been challenged by anyone, least of all Krashen.)

Although other "models" described in *IDSLL* (e.g., the "Good Language Learner" model and the "Carroll model of school learning") are somewhat more generous in their treatment of individual learners than is Krashen's, Skehan nonetheless observes that no fully developed model of IDs within an L2 context is currently available to guide research. He argues, however, (and this is the central theme of the book) that important findings on the role of IDs in language learning do exist and merit greater prominence.

While the effects of a large number of variables (e.g., motivation, learner strategies, cognitive abilities) are reviewed in *IDSLL*, language aptitude is singled out for particular attention. Skehan concludes an extensive history of aptitude test development by noting the current lack of impact (whether practical or theoretical) of such tests in the second-language field. Since Skehan sees aptitude tests as effective sources for the prediction of learning achievement, he takes the view that such neglect is unjustified and undesirable and asserts that "aptitude is at least as important, and usually more important, than any other variable investigated" (p. 38). This view will not be one that is shared by all researchers, but the evidence in support of it is impressively documented.

Less convinced by L2 findings on motivation, Skehan maintains that the direction of causality is still unclear: does success result in motivation or vice versa--or both? That the question can still be seriously asked says something about how far Skehan considers research to have progressed in this area. Skehan is equally unconvinced of the potential impact of research on

consciously controllable learner strategies in which conflicting results and lack of agreement as to methodology make firm conclusions difficult to derive.

Entire chapters having been devoted in *IDSLL* to reviewing aptitude, motivation, and language learning strategies, it is consequently unsatisfactory to find only a single chapter on "Additional Cognitive and Affective Influences" (i.e., extraversion-introversion, risk-taking, intelligence, field dependence "and other cognitive abilities," and anxiety). However, in assigning this minor role to such variables, Skehan is merely following the example set in other major L2 reviews (e.g., Ellis, 1985). In addition, it must be acknowledged that he at least comments on the majority of L2 studies in these areas and subsequently arrives at the generally accepted conclusion that these variables are of little significance in the language learning equation.

It is, however, possible to adopt an entirely different perspective, at least in regard to the personality variables. It can, for instance, be maintained that the virtual writing off of personality from the L2 research agenda results from heeding non-significant findings related to hypotheses which never merited testing in the first place. The much investigated proposal that extraverts should be more proficient language learners than introverts, for example, is not only extremely naive (in the sense that it directs attention to extraversion characteristics which might facilitate language learning but fails to take account of positive, and equally plausible, introversion behaviors), it also cannot be derived from extant theory or the very extensive experimental literature on these variables. Regrettably, however, the totally predictable failure to support the hypothesis has resulted in there being no papers in major L2 journals on personality for almost a decade. *IDSLL* does, however, come close to identifying naivety of hypothesis derivation as the fundamental source of problems for L2 research in this area, but a more critical approach to the literature would have made such a conclusion inevitable.

In general, what is becoming increasingly clear (and is merely exemplified by the weaker sections of *IDSLL*) is that the failure to critically examine individual studies and their assumptions is an extremely serious problem in second-language literature reviews. Such reviews inevitably only satisfy until specialists encounter their own areas. This might, of course, be expected of wide-ranging reviews, and in many disciplines would not matter. However, in applied linguistics, such books are not merely

textbooks; they are also (unfortunately) accorded authoritative state-of-the-art status.

This is demonstrated by the fact that dissertations are often framed through consulting such reviews, and it is normally only after an area is identified that students read the actual studies. The assumption is that the reviewer of the literature will have read the original work (or at least a reliable source on it), and that what is reported impartially but critically describes the findings. By that, I mean no more than that if findings are reported it should be possible to assume they merit reporting (and are not artifacts of methodology flaws, unprincipled data-dredging, and the like).

Books such as *IDSLL* do not guarantee this. Nor can they. Worthwhile review is not only extremely time consuming, but no single scholar can have expertise in more than a fraction of the areas of knowledge forming a discipline (even one as young as applied linguistics).

This point can be illustrated with a single example. Skehan, having cited an investigation showing no positive correlation between extraversion and language achievement, then weighs that finding against that of another study:

On the other hand, Rossier (1976) found a positive relationship between extroversion and oral fluency . . . but this relationship did not hold up for other proficiency tests.
(p. 102) (No further details are given.)

In this statement there is no indication that Rossier's finding might be embedded in a terminally weak study which does not merit such citation; such a conclusion is, however, the inevitable consequence of critical review. Clearly, this point needs to be convincingly demonstrated if it is to sound other than an uncharitable alternative opinion. Therefore, unusual as it may be to place a review within a review, the seriousness of the issue necessitates taking a more detailed look at the Rossier study.

Firstly, from an initial random sample of 96 twelfth grade students in two schools, 49 dropped out before the study even started and 3 more were simply added to make the n size 50. As extravert students are more likely to volunteer to participate in research than introverts (Cowles & David, 1987), and as Rossier lost more than half of his initial sample before he started, the resulting sample was not only greatly smaller than originally intended, it also can no longer be described as random. Secondly, the assessment of oral fluency (and the three other criteria:

pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary) was merely estimated by 3 "experienced" teachers from tape recordings (which were used because "It proved to be impossible to bring the judges and the students together for the interview purpose" [Rossier, 1976, p. 68]). The difficulties of defining "fluency" and divorcing it from factors such as pronunciation were tackled in the following way: "The investigator briefed the judges to ensure uniformity of criteria for the judging of each of the components" (p. 69).

Thirdly, the Eysenck Personality Inventory scale which was used had not at that time been factorially validated in Spanish, much less in the 8 countries from which subjects were drawn (Eysenck not only states that it is "imperative that all items be tested for appropriateness before inclusion in any foreign scoring key," she also describes the dangers of "spurious results" if this is not done [Eysenck, 1983, p. 381])

What of the results? Preliminary correlations showed there was "no significant correlation between the total oral language production of ex-ESL students in their final semester in high school and their ratings on the Extraversion-Introversion Scale of the Eysenck Personality Inventory" (Rossier, 1975, p. 74). Furthermore, "There is no significant correlation between the scores of each of the four components of oral language production of ex-ESL students in their final semester in high school and their rating on the E-I scale of the EPI" (p. 74).

Subsequently, after the "major research hypothesis" had "failed to show significant correlation between extraversion-introversion and oral language production," Rossier resorted to partial correlations controlling for single variables. Even then, "none of the correlations were high enough to reach significance" (p. 81). It was only after extensive data dredging of partial correlations with control of multiple variables that Rossier arrived at his much quoted finding of a relationship between extraversion and "fluency."

The analysis is a lengthy one, but it is necessary if we are to be able to say something about the credibility of *IDSLL* (at least with respect to the reporting of this particular study and, if you will, more generally). Unfortunately, as the example illustrates, inadvertent deception is likely to be a prominent feature of reviews which fail to provide information of this sort. Clearly, the individual reader is done no service when a review does not provide the essential detail with which it is possible to distinguish competent from incompetent research. Likewise, the discipline is done a severe disservice by the

reviewer who gives equal weight to relatively sound experimentation and that which is massively flawed. That the practice is endemic in second-language reviews is no reason for our continuing to accept it.

None of this is to say that *IDSLL* is not in many ways a good book. It is clear, often incisive, and demonstrates a considerable depth and breadth of knowledge. It is also, in a number of areas, extremely impressive. The chapter on methodological considerations contains excellent introductions to such matters as questionnaire construction, factor analysis, and regression analysis; the chapter on language aptitude is also extremely detailed and convincing; the chapter calling for more studies of interactions is most welcome, and even in the areas criticized above, this is still probably the best available introduction to the field. However, in attempting too much, much is lost.

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