

Lightbown, Patsy M. and Nina Spada. (1999) *How Languages Are Learned* (Revised edition). Oxford Handbooks for Language Teachers. Oxford University Press.

Notable quotes:

In the end, what all theories of language acquisition are meant to account for is the working of the human mind. . . . Researchers and educators who are hoping for language acquisition theories which give them insight into language teaching practice are often frustrated by the lack of agreement among the 'experts.' But the complexities of SLA, like those of first language acquisition, represent a puzzle for linguistic, psychological, and neurological scientists which will not soon be solved. . . . Many teachers watch theory development with interest, but must continue to teach and plan lessons and assess students' performance in the absence of a comprehensive theory of second language learning. (pp. 45-46)

There is increasing evidence that learners continue to have difficulty with basic structures of the language in programs which offer no form-focused instruction. . . . [W]e do not find support for the argument that if second language learners are simply exposed to comprehensive input, language acquisition will take care of itself. (p. 150)

Classroom data from a number of studies offer support for the view that form-focused instruction and corrective feedback provided within the context of communicative programs are more effective in promoting second language learning than programs which are limited to virtually exclusive emphasis either on accuracy or on fluency. Thus, we would argue that second language teachers can (and should) provide guided, form-based instruction and corrective feedback in certain circumstances. . . . Many teachers still work in environments where there is an emphasis on accuracy which virtually excludes spontaneous language use in the classroom. At the same time, the introduction of communicative language teaching methods has sometimes resulted in a complete rejection of attention to form and error correction in second language teaching. But it is not necessary to choose between form-based and meaning-based instruction. Rather, the challenge is to find the best balance of these two orientations. Which features of language will respond best to form-focused instruction, and which will be acquired without explicit

focus if learners have adequate exposure to the language? Which learners will respond well to metalinguistic information and which will require some other way of focusing attention on language form? (pp.152-153)

Betty's comments:

More voices in favor of grammar and balance! Grammar-based and communicative approaches are not mutually exclusive. They are mutually supportive. Our job as teachers and materials developers is to find good blends — or as one teacher, Toni Hall, put it, “a hybrid that works.”

I think this is an excellent and important book.

Your thoughts? Share them on [Teacher Talk](#).