


Usage in Second Language Acquisition: Critical Reflections and Future Directions

November 2024 – Volume 28, Number 3

<https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.28111r3>

Usage in Second Language Acquisition: Critical Reflections and Future Directions		
Author:	Kevin McManus (Ed) (2024)	
Publisher:	Routledge	
Pages	ISBN	Price
pp. 198	9781032668468 9781032668055	\$180.00 (Hardback) \$39.99 (Paper)



In Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, the term usage refers generally to a learner’s exposure to language, their production of it, and how they apply it in social interactions and deliberate practice. Though important in SLA research, usage does not have a standardized definition, with usage-based approaches defining it in various ways, and many focusing on a single aspect of language use. As a result, conducting comparisons across studies is challenging, and usage-based pedagogical practices could be misinformed. With a misrepresented concept of usage, second language (L2) educators employing usage-based teaching in the classroom may fail to prepare students for actual situations of L2 use. *Usage in Second Language Acquisition: Critical Reflections and Future Directions (2024)* aims to address this challenge by bringing together existing definitions and theorizations to provide a transparent description of usage and how it relates to L2 development. The editor’s goal is to understand the extent of agreement and disagreement of key theoretical constructs among approaches, to clarify how they are represented differently in literature, and to provide recommendations for future research in linguistics and pedagogy.

Structured in nine chapters, the editor seeks to answer three major questions, 1) What is usage? 2) What is the L2 learning task? and 3) What is the connection between usage and learning? McManus helpfully provides broad definitions in the first chapter and a synthesis of each author’s contribution in the final chapter. Authors in the other chapters consider these three

questions more closely through a unique lens, including corpus linguistics, ethnomethodological conversation analysis, variationist sociolinguistics, dynamic usage-based models, cognitive linguistics, instructed SLA, and skill acquisition theory. Most of the approaches share the understanding that learning occurs by using language, however they differ in the particular aspect of usage and its specific contribution to learning. For example, corpus analysis and variationist approaches emphasize the role of variables and variability, such as contexts, linguistic, and social influences. These variables impact language use differently, causing variability between and within individuals. In contrast, cognitive linguistics, dynamic usage-based, and processing-based instructed SLA prioritize learners' cognitive processing abilities and their relationship with a given situated event, aligned in the view that usage is a dual profile of language use and cognitive engagement. By the end of the book, each of the three initial questions is explored. In response to the first question, McManus defines usage as not simply language use but a construct that involves language, the user, the context, and all the internal and external processes deployed in specific situated events. This definition marks great progress from Langacker's (2016) framework which simply purports that language is made up of units that emerge from instances of language use. To answer the second question of what the L2 learning task is, the authors concur that its goal is to determine the linguistic and non-linguistic resources that can be used for particular social actions as well as when, where, and how to use them to support usage. The answer to the final question regarding the connection between usage and learning is more complex. Due to the unique nature of each usage event that distinguishes all processes and experiences taking place, practice is found to be the fundamental connection between usage and learning. Because the book critically explores many usage-based approaches in SLA to respond to these questions, the conclusions fully encapsulate specific fundamentals of each.

The book's most important contribution is gathering the different definitions of usage across approaches. Through this compilation, we find that instead of contradicting each other, these definitions are complementary. Indirectly, each approach acknowledges specific factors as underlying contributors when defining usage. This shared understanding, while implicit, needs to be made explicit in the field. McManus's final description of usage accomplishes this, emphasizing the importance of intensive and guided rehearsal of linguistic knowledge, a principle that strongly aligns with the concept of Dynamic Strategic Interaction Scenarios (DSIS). Borne of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, DSIS draws upon the learner's independent abilities and what they are able to achieve with assistance (Van Compernelle, 2014) in a simulated interaction, making it highly relevant to L2 teaching. This method is applicable to all modalities of language, and it explores all aspects of usage as defined by the book. By incorporating McManus' clarified understanding of usage into DSIS, ESL teachers can foster effective L2 acquisition among students. Additionally, teacher educators can also use it as dynamic assessment from which they can tailor and refine specific scenarios according to their curriculum goals.

One small weakness of the book is that the content organization varies across chapters. Firstly, some chapters are faithful to the three major questions outlined, while others explore specific concepts behind these questions more extensively. As a result, certain chapters conclude their reflections with less thorough answers compared to others. A fourth question or dedicated section on methodological practicalities for each perspective could have enhanced the book's value to readers. This addition would provide readers with a clear framework that can be used for practical applications in usage-based teaching, learning, and assessment. Secondly, while

the book focuses on theories and cognitive processing, each situated event's context uniquely influences usage and learning. The contributions and potential of the study-abroad context is mentioned, but no further elaboration is offered on its distinction from other outside-classroom contexts and more extensive discussion of its distinct characteristics is warranted.

Given that this book is a part of a rather intensive series, it would be most beneficial for specialist researchers in applied linguistics and SLA. Researchers may find this book a solid foundation to consider more collaborative work that draws from multiple methodological perspectives. L2 educators may also find it helpful as a theoretical guide to conduct language activities in the classroom.

About the Reviewer

Samirah Ujang is a doctoral student in the field of Humanities at Universiti Malaya, Malaysia. She has a Master of Education (TESL) from Universiti Malaysia Sabah and a B.A (Honours) in English in International Communication from International Islamic University Malaysia. She specializes in research in English as a Second Language, applied linguistics, and communication. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-9514-0891>
<22105704@siswa.um.edu.my>

To Cite this Review

Ujang, S. (2024). [Review of the book. (2024), Usage in Second Language Acquisition: Critical Reflections and Future Directions by Kevin McManus (Ed)]. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ)*, 28 (3). <https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.28111r3>

References

- Langacker, R. W. (2016). Working toward a synthesis. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 27(4), 465-477. <https://doi.org/10.1515/cog-2016-0004>
- Van Compernelle, R. (2014). Profiling second language sociolinguistic development through dynamically administered strategic interaction scenarios. *Language & Communication*, 37, 86-99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2014.01.003>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard UP.

Copyright of articles rests with the authors. Please cite TESL-EJ appropriately.