

REVIEW ARTICLE
(Part Two of Two)

**Attempting Comprehensive and Comparative Empirical
Research in Second Language Acquisition**

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Second Language Acquisition by Adult Immigrants: A Field Manual,
Edited by Clive Perdue. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1984.

IV. 18 MONTHS INTO THE PROJECT

The Postscript of the Field Manual (FM), Chapter 10, compares the authors' proposals to their actual progress 18 months into the project, when "no new informants were to be started" and when "the data-collection schedule was (made) definitive" (10.1). This is a revealing chapter. (Recall that informants in the main longitudinal group and the control group were to be age 18–30, have no native TL-speaking spouse, have no children of school age being educated in the TL, probably be working class, have day-to-day contacts in the TL, have been in the host country less than one year, have no regular TL instruction, and have the TL as a *second* foreign language.) The results are startling: "with seven out of ten SL-TL pairs, the schedule has proved impossible to keep exactly as had been planned" (10.1).¹ What went wrong?

In addition to the strict entry requirements mentioned above, unforeseen political and social factors eliminated many informants. In France the new government created a new immigration policy which made it difficult to get informants who were in the country for less than one year. Turkish informants in Germany, when they could be found, were mostly in trade schools, being educated in the TL. Immigrants to Sweden usually received

¹SL = source language or native language; TL = target language. The SLs, TLs, and ILs (interlanguages) are discussed in detail in Part I of this review article. Numbers in parentheses with no further qualifications refer to sections of the FM.

regular language instruction. In France, where Spanish was to be one of the SLs, new guest workers from Spain were virtually non-existent, so the researchers turned to political refugees from Latin America. One wonders whether ignoring the differences between guest workers and political refugees reduces the validity of the cross-cultural comparison.

Thus eighteen months into the project with no new informants added and with the ideal seriously disrupted, the basis of comparison was somewhat compromised. Table 1, culled from extended prose in Chapter 10 by D. Milkowski for the 1984 TESOL Summer Institute, clearly shows how difficult it was to establish comparability in the ten real life situations. The authors are painfully aware of this. Section 10.2.1 reports that informants left the project "for reasons ranging from lack of interest to illness, the birth of a child, and, in one case, arrest and imprisonment." An interesting footnote to this section in 10.2.1 describes how "life affects researchers on the project" (e.g. births, accidents, illness, etc.). The footnote ends with the charming sentence: "So far, no project researcher has been arrested."

An examination of Table 1 will demonstrate that in the ESF project they have had to sacrifice some central criteria, especially concerning the restrictions against language teaching (Sweden) and against informants with children at school in the TL. For example, ages of informants may not be comparable because the Turkish informants were too young and the Latin American informants, too old (10.4). Some informants were better educated than the proposal stated they should be. Also, in some cases, interviews occurred less frequently than originally desired (10.3) and, as might have been expected, "authentic" interactions were hard to come by (10.4).

With all these problems, has comparability broken down? No, according to Perdue, since "local comparability" has been accomplished and "large sets of highly comparable data" relevant to the four areas of research (see V below) "are being collected, transcribed, and stored" (1.4). However, we will have to wait for the details of this achievement since, disappointingly, almost no data are presented in the FM. In the long run, to learn the truth of these claims, we must know precisely what Perdue means by the terms "local comparability" and "highly comparable." Their stated research goal—"systematic cross-linguistic analysis" in the IL area is important for understanding universal effects, language transfer effects, fossilization effects, and the implications replicability might have for researchers and

teachers in SLA. But, as contrastive analysis continues to show, what is “the same” across linguistic systems is tricky and *cannot* be presumed. Careful specification of criteria is especially important here. I await these results with interest.

V. FOUR AREAS OF RESEARCH

The linguistic and learning categories to be studied through the five-year ESF project are presented in Chapters 4–7.

V. 1. Understanding, Misunderstanding, and Breakdown

There is no doubt that this area constitutes an important research domain. The English team, led by Tom Jupp, introduced these concerns into the five-country project. Jupp has long worked in the practical area of “Language for Specific Purposes” (LSP), especially in the area of “English for Vocational (or Occupational) Purposes,” and was responsible for introducing the conversational theorist John Gumperz to the investigation of the communication problems of Indians and Pakistanis on the shop floors in British factories. From their work has come the famous BBC film “Crosstalk” (Gumperz, Jupp, and Roberts 1979) which explores these issues by means of insightful role playing (see also Gumperz and Roberts 1978).

The ESF project is particularly impressive because the staff has integrated context analysis into their studies of understanding and misunderstanding, something rarely done in SLA research. I have argued (Selinker 1984) that acquisition in technical and academic contexts, what I have called “specific purpose acquisition,” should be examined carefully. The ESF project’s investigation of “work” may pave the way for other researchers interested in the integration of context and communication. In general, though, I have been amazed at how ignorant scholars in IL and LSP usually are of each other’s often *overlapping research areas*.

The authors of the FM correctly point out (1.3.2 and 4.2.1) a central paradox: the language learner needs “to learn in order to communicate and to communicate in order to learn.” The results of this paradox are analyzed into two main problem areas: its effects on attitudes of native speakers of the TL and its effects on the motivation and awareness of the immigrant

ENGLISH — SWEDISH
 PUNJABI — ITALIAN — GERMAN — TURKISH — DUTCH — ARABIC — FRENCH — SPANISH — FINNISH

Control Group

4 men	5 men	3 men	6 men	8 men	5 men	6 men	4 men	6 women	4 men
	1 woman	5 women	3 women	same as above	2 women	6 women	5 women	2 men	3 women
All have manual jobs	All have manual jobs	all ideal age except 3	older than Italians	same as above	same as above	same as above	same as above	same as above	same as above
Residence varies from 17-31 years	Residence from 17-31 years	In Germany 6-21 years	In Germany 10-17 years					2 men	3 men
								4 women	5 women
								all mid-30's	All manual workers
								as cleaners residents	residence 2-4 years

Long-Term Resident Group

4 men	5 men	3 men	6 men	8 men	5 men	6 men	4 men	6 women	4 men
	1 woman	5 women	3 women	same as above	2 women	6 women	5 women	2 men	3 women
All have manual jobs	All have manual jobs	all ideal age except 3	older than Italians	same as above	same as above	same as above	same as above	same as above	same as above
Residence varies from 17-31 years	Residence from 17-31 years	In Germany 6-21 years	In Germany 10-17 years					2 men	3 men
								4 women	5 women
								all mid-30's	All manual workers
								as cleaners residents	residence 2-4 years

learner. Communication must take place in various contexts, and, the FM demonstrates how these two effects are compounded by the social and political backgrounds of natives and immigrants—a traditionally unskilled labor force, socially disadvantaged minority communities, and predisposition on the part of the majority towards racial and social stereotyping. Understanding this background is necessary in order to understand particular NN/N encounters leading to misunderstanding and communicative breakdown. Having communicative attempts continually go wrong affects each part of this crucial paradox in ways not presently understood and thus the empirical research contemplated takes on wide significance. As a beginning, the researchers use the widely-held assumption that:

[the learner]... brings to any (NN/N) interaction the cultural values and conventions gained in primary socialization, and these are likely *initially* to remain dominant. [4.2.1, emphasis added]

The qualifier *initially* implies that cultural values and conventions, in the often hostile social context in which these immigrants find themselves, will give way to other (more TL-like?) values as the learners continue to live in the TL culture. This contradicts their observations on fossilization in the LRG's discussed in Part I of this Review Article. For me, fossilization has always included the rhetorical and other organizational levels of discourse which stem from cultural values and conventions. Their view that differences can seriously affect language transfer throughout a foreign worker's life in the TL country, should preclude the view that, after some initial period, the dominance will decrease. No evidence is presented, but it would be a major contribution if learner values and conventions can be gathered which would shed light on this apparent contradiction.

Section 4.2.1 deals with "gatekeeping" and "gatekeeping encounters"—a context in which misunderstandings and breakdowns are often likely to occur. No references are provided, but I believe the concept is derived from the cross-cultural ethnographic work of Fred Erickson (Erickson 1975). When immigrants with little experience in the TL must communicate with an employer, a landlord, a shop owner, or some other gatekeeper, misunderstanding and breakdown could result in early fossilization. There is no detailed discussion, however, of the possible causal relationship of such contexts to early fossilization. Nevertheless, there is a listing (4.2.1) of the cumulative effects of such encounters on native TL-speaking

“gatekeepers,” effects which reinforce negative cultural stereotypes of immigrants. In 4.2.5 an extended example of the misuse of impersonal structures demonstrates how misunderstanding gives the gatekeeper the view that the immigrant does not have certain practical work experience, which he in fact does. Such examples will help researchers in various SLA projects identify characteristics of job transcripts. I applaud the authors for providing us with such extensive discussion. The authors also provide hints on “reality checks” where indepth investigation of a text determines whether the hypotheses made by the researcher are indeed reasonable from the point-of-view of the communicators. This technique is a conscious effort to minimize Western European biases in interpreting learner goals, intentions, understandings, and misunderstandings.

An interesting example (4.2.6) dramatizes the possibility of misunderstanding by the investigator. In a pre-project counselling session recorded by the English team, it was hypothesized that a Punjabi speaker who used “unusually lengthy and awkward pauses” was giving “a concise account of a problem.” Feedback with the subject showed instead that these pauses indicated politeness, and that without wishing to be too demanding, the subject was using native cultural patterns to get the counsellor “to name the precise nature of the problem for him.” The authors summarize this important methodological message (4.2.6) as “avoiding attributing meaning incorrectly.” Though much of the discussion is general, I find that it is useful for students to have a lengthy discussion of key variables in cross-cultural interactions (4.2.7) in one place. The authors summarize their methodological suggestions by recommending that researchers begin with “top down” analyses of the whole conversation and work toward particularities. They point out that the analyst has access to the whole conversation via tape, whereas for the participants, the conversation unfolds bit-by-bit. However, they miss an opportunity to explicitly state that the two positions become closer in playback or review sessions.

An important question that the authors raise, one which has received little attention in the SLA literature, involves:

...the effect that misunderstandings and (in extreme cases) breakdowns in communication may have on the acquisition process. (4.5.1)

They link “emotionally upsetting” misunderstandings to avoidance of interactions with native TL speakers. The authors then claim:

This avoidance will provoke fossilization at a low level of TL competence. (4.5.1)

Perhaps due to multiple authorship, the caution of earlier statements is here abandoned and in its place we see, with no evidence presented, a very strong claim which is immediately contradicted in the following sentence:

On the other hand, such painful experiences could also be seen as a challenge which has to be overcome and might therefore instead act as a spur on the acquisition process. (4.5.1)

I tend to favor a hedged version of the former statement but the text is ambiguous here, causing confusion which is never adequately cleared up. "Avoidance" in the SLA literature (a concept first described in detail by Schachter 1974, though it appears earlier in the error analysis literature, (Coulter 1968)) usually refers to avoidance of structures. Here, it appears the authors are referring to avoidance of N/NN encounters. In their theoretical discussions the authors do not always clarify which they are referring to. I hope that in the reporting of results, this distinction will be made clear.

V. 2. Thematic Structure of Utterances

The FM is concerned here with the problem of how learner syntax is built, especially how, at any given point, the learner uses the syntax at his/her disposal to structure IL utterances. (They wisely intend to relate these concerns, empirically to language and IL specific factors as well as to more generalizable factors in the SLA process.) This work on syntax should be nicely relatable to language and IL-specific factors such as context and discourse. Their discussion begins with a review of sociolinguistic research (Linde and Labov 1975) in the area of systematic variation of syntax according to domains of language use, specifically in the expression of spatial relationships in apartment description. There is also a useful review of some relevant literature concerning "topicality." They use the concept "discourse domains," unfortunately without defining it, and the interested reader may wish to refer to Selinker (1980), Douglas (1984) and Selinker and Douglas (1985).

They then focus on early learner utterances which they relate to the "pragmatic mode," the hypothesis being that such early utterances are structured primarily according to pragmatic principles. They state that the semantics of early IL utterances are often "vague" to native speakers (both

everyday interactants and analysts) of the TL. What they do not appear to consider is that such semantics are almost surely *not* vague to the IL speaker him/her-self. The description of this possibility is one of the strengths of the IL notion, but further empirical work (most probably through SL translation) is needed to determine the veracity of this view. If true, how then does acquisition of semantics proceed when early fossilization allows the immigrant to use only restricted means to express more and more information to native speakers of the TL? (See Part I of this review article for a discussion of Klein's (1984) view of the advantages of fossilized IL systems.) This is an area in which we have only begun to scratch the surface.

Finally, in this relatively brief chapter (5), the authors provide (5.2.1) a working hypothesis of the characteristics of the pragmatic mode relevant to early IL: a) in word order, old information appears first; b) prominent intonation marks new information; c) no use of grammatical morphology (I would prefer they said little use); and d) "loose conjugation." (I am not clear as to what (d) is.) They are concerned of course with how universal material interacts with pressures of language transfer.² If the researchers can only get around the difficult problem of determining what is "old" and what is "new" *to the language user*, then precise and useful information should follow from this phase of the study.

Their discussion involves what is called "early transparency," where a one-to-one mapping of such semantic concepts as temporality, modality, conditionality, negation and quantification is predicted. Once again careful empirical description would be an important contribution. They provide a useful example (5.2.1) of an adult IL speaker of German (SL, Spanish) studied prior to the project who used the following "basic 2-place structure" in his utterances with corresponding intonation: *place 1: rising intonation—pause—place 2: falling intonation*. *Place 1* could be either the subject about which the learner was going to speak or a spatio-temporal marker for a *Place 2* concept. Interestingly, the learner sometimes added modality to this 2-place structure by prefixing it with a modal adverb. The authors try to determine the factors that govern this early pragmatic-based system.

²This interaction of universals and language transfer is an important current theoretical concern. It was expressed in detailed discussion recently in terms of universal grammar at an important working conference, chaired by Suzanne Flynn and Wayne O'Neil, on "Linguistic Theory and Second Language Acquisition" held at MIT, 25-27 October, 1985.

What are the semantic relationships that hold between the elements composing each “place”? And, what factors will govern how this system evolves, when it does? All useful questions. Earlier pre-project work had shown that it is difficult to assign clear syntactic labels such as nouns and verbs to forms in early learner utterances. How and why, do recognizable verbs first appear, if they do? In such a pragmatic-based system, where referential materials are often discussed, one obvious area for study is anaphora. How is early anaphora expressed in terms of the *Place 1-Place 2* structure? Does it evolve, and if so how? Do some learners eventually get “to more correct use of TL possibility”? (5.2.2). Once again, we await empirical evidence.

V. 3. Processes in the Developing Vocabulary

Many questions remain in this important, but not very well researched area. One could imagine studying an apparently fossilized learner who is striving hard to figure out how to develop his/her vocabulary. One could also imagine studying the semantics of an IL lexicon which is clearly developing. The latter is primarily what the authors have in mind (6.1.1) though they do discuss the former. Although we know little about either, based on pre-project work, several processes are suggested (6.1.4): a “filling” process, whereby a “subordinate” word (in terms of TL semantics) is extended to mean a class of terms, (e.g., “cow” for “farm animal”); a “differentiating” process, in which a general verb like *kommen* is differentiated into more precise TL verbs; and, the process of “lexical transfer” from the NL. When a learner is stuck, several communication strategies were also noted (*ibid*) in pre-project work such as paraphrasing, gestures, and code switching. These strategies are well known and the authors’ cite the work of Faerch and Kasper (1980). They go beyond previous work in relating vocabulary acquisition to a domain theory. That is, for each domain of usage they intend to study, they will list inferred strategies. They point out the obvious:

Our informants’ lexicon will exhibit a concentration of items in some domains and paucity in others. (6.2.1)

If IL learning works as much according to discourse domains as I now suspect (cf. references cited above) underlying strategies should also vary according to domains. I anticipate that the project will illuminate this area. However, since the earliest IL work, it has proven difficult to disentangle

communication from learning strategies. I am not certain that this problem has been pointed out clearly enough to project workers. The domain of the learners, where language contact actually takes place, strongly affects whether the learner lexicon is “differentiated” in the above sense or not. Detailed evidence regarding this model would add strength to any contextually-based theory of IL learning and would help us understand even further the notion of “context” in SLA.

Other topics handled here include “linguistic awareness,” “modality,” and “formulaic expressions.” The discussion, although very general, is adequate. They intend to do qualitative computerized studies of the context of particular lexical items in order to determine the size of an informant’s lexicon at a given time, to determine type/token ratios and to construct an IL concordance. I know of no such IL data available at the present time. Structurally speaking, they state a fact that should concern all SLA researchers and consumers of this research:

A complete model flexible enough to allow for the description of structural changes of the vocabulary and the development of the meaning of specific lexical items cannot be proposed at this stage. (6.3)

Their suggestion, based on pre-project and early project research, is that isolated items are often ambiguous in early learner IL and, thus, “the entire utterance” and a substantial amount of context need to be taken into account in order to analyze learner lexical items adequately. Such early learner IL’s have utterances:

in which meanings, normally expressed by one word in standard speech, are spread piecemeal so to speak over the entire utterance, including non-verbal behaviour. (6.3)

This concept is compatible with other studies and with work done on pidgin languages (Corder 1981, *passim*). Some interesting examples in NN-German are presented at the end of 6.3 which show that intended meaning can only be clarified by studying the context of the utterance, though how much context is “enough” is not discussed.

V. 4. Reference to People, Time and Space

Given their general perspective, it is logical to find the following focus in the FM: how does the learner use the devices at his/her disposal to refer to people, space and time, and how are these forms acquired and developed?

(7.1.1). The authors present the hypothesis, based on pre-project work, that the learner's "propensity" (here, motivation to participate in N/NN interactions) and speed of acquisition of the means to refer to people, place and time are initially high, but rapidly decrease as communicative needs are met. In the early stages of learning they state, "only a small selection of the means the TL offers" is acquired, "but if optimally used, this selection may be sufficient for (the learner's) immediate communication needs." Once again, meeting communication needs could result in early fossilization.

Several extended examples (7.4.2.3) are presented which show discourse principles at work in creating early IL utterances in the absence of inflectional morphology. Also in sections 7.4.2.1 and 7.4.2.2, adverbials, which early IL varieties often depend on, are discussed at some length. I found it interesting to learn that the transition from an IL stage with "no-tense-marking" to one with "tense-marking" is often characterized in IL German by "specific use of some adverbs"; translation equivalents of "already" and "finished" as an adverb. I know of no work showing that this parallels anything in IL English.

Referring to spatial concepts, the researchers intend to study three domains (7.3.1): perceptual space, geographic space, and abstract space (i.e., spatial relationships between abstract entities). References to person, personal pronouns, case markings, generics, proper names and lexical noun phrases are also items to be studied (7.2). Here, too, the discussion although general, is quite adequate.

VI. DATA COLLECTION AND PREPARATION OF DATA FOR ANALYSIS

This involves some very long discussions (Section 2.5, the ends of Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7; all of Chapter 8 and *passim*). In some ways, I find it the most useful material in the FM for graduate education. They address some of the most important problems of empirical research, presenting detailed suggestions for refining and revising hypotheses, following the traditional maxim that "data are always ambiguous." I have already discussed some of them above as "reality checks," and will get to more below. They thoroughly understand the distinction between "primary data," (i.e., the actual communicative encounters) and "secondary data," (i.e., what participants in those encounters indicate in playback sessions was going on in terms of intentions, goals, and (mis)-understandings).

Primary data, no matter how extensive the texts are, does *not* reveal (2.5.1.6) all that a learner knows regarding the current state of the IL system. The conclusion I have drawn is that all SLA texts must, in some way, be interpreted for the analyst by the participants studied. We must become clever at teasing out the essence of communicative interactions *from the point of view of the participants*. This is especially true in such domains of the ESF project as work and gatekeeping situations, where intentions and goals are important to participants, where hidden agendas may be paramount, and where outcome may not always be clear to outsiders and in fact may be disputed by the participants in playback sessions.

One very useful discussion involves the notion of “comparability” of data across the five teams. The problems with carrying this out were discussed above, as was the importance of nonetheless trying to do comparative studies in SLA. But note here that the authors of the FM present criteria (8.1.e) to be met if the data are to be considered comparable: the amount of data collected by all five country groups must be the same in each group; the elicitation techniques must be as similar as possible; the ways in which data are selected for analysis and stored must be as similar as possible, as must the transcription system. For the latter, a particularly clear and detailed discussion is provided in 8.7. Problems with the other criteria are discussed in some detail. In eliciting conversation, for example, in order to be sure that “different types of verbal interaction” (8.3.1) (what other researchers might call “genre”) are elicited in each interaction, they provide a list: dialogues, narratives, descriptions and argumentative sequences. The physical location where these conversations are held could prove to be problematic. They recommend (8.3.2.1) the informant’s house if the informant is an adult and the social role is relatively clear (i.e., the informant is the host). As for younger people, the home in these immigrant communities may not be ideal:

- a) because there are normally too many people present (parents, brothers and sisters), and
 - b) because they often cannot express their opinions freely in the presence of their parents.
- (8.3.2.1)

I value such discussion. The researcher who is unfamiliar with a particular setting will often commit a beginner’s mistake which may potentially vitiate whatever data has been collected. Pre-session discussions do in fact help avoid this problem.

Detailed and useful discussion is presented in the FM about the right time for an interview, the right combination of interviewers, methods of dealing with cultural constraints (8.3.2.1), how to guide the conversation (8.3.2.2), and topics that should be discussed in the interview (8.3.3). The authors also suggest how to control data and how to construct experiments (2.5.2, 8.3.1, and 8.3.4). It is a truism for experienced researchers, but often a surprise for neophytes, that on-going “natural” conversation does not ordinarily give the analyst enough exemplars of the particular structure desired. Thus, a number of techniques are suggested to guide the interview without disrupting the on-going flow of conversation. Some are as follows (8.3.4.2): repetition and *ad hoc* translation, apartment descriptions and route directions, verbalization of pictures and picture sequences, and particular games (e.g., “twenty questions”). With the exception of the first, these techniques might not easily fit into everyday conversation.

The researchers intend to separate (8.2.2) data from “authentic” encounters, representative of the immigrant’s everyday life, and “project-specific” data. They wish to have a balance between the two, but this has proved impossible to attain in practice. They define two types of encounters (8.2.3.2): “short encounters” consisting mainly of conversations and the experiments described above (8.3) and “long encounters” of about two hours which will be video recorded and which will involve playback sessions (called “self-confrontation”) and some play-acting.

The most interesting technique I have seen in SLA research involves playback sessions (secondary data) of original video sessions (primary data). Playback or review sessions of video data recorded on audio provide data that are just not otherwise available. I have found the version called “grounded ethnography” to be the most useful and I refer the reader to two seminal papers: Frankel and Beckman (1982) and Frankel (1984).

The goal of the playback process proposed in the FM is to get:

... the informant’s reactions to the *detail* of the communicative interaction—was there a misunderstanding here? was something said inappropriately? etc. ... (8.4.4, emphasis in original)

They correctly point out that gathering such information “needs at least some preparation on the part of the researcher.” They stress (8.4.4.4) that it is a poor procedure to play isolated utterances to the informant because of the importance of context. They recommend a once-through playing without interruption to get the informant used to seeing him/herself on

video tape. Then they recommend a second pass, which is audio-taped. The informant stops the tape to comment on “anything of note.” Frankel provides (ibid) the following instructions: “stop the tape where you see something interesting, important, unusual or surprising.” He reports that in authentic interactions between doctors and patients, there is a large degree of agreement (sometimes over 90%) regarding when to stop the tape. But doctors see different things happening at these critical junctures than do patients. It would be interesting to see if similar results are gained in the ESF authentic vs. project-specific data sessions. However, the ESF project may not have relevant data because researchers unfortunately do not intend to have authentic (as opposed to project worker) native speakers of the TL performing playback tasks.

The authors of the FM see the playback sessions as having three purposes (8.4.4.2). Their first objective is “insuring mutual understanding,” meaning that the analysts correctly understand what the informant has intended. This step is essential for tracing the semantic processes underlying the learner’s developing (and non-developing) lexicon. Second, they want to know the “informant’s attitude to language” because that attitude to the TL will affect the communication strategies used and perhaps the speed and structure of the acquisition process. They will speak to the learners about the language itself, especially what they notice about TL utterances. The authors hypothesize that the acquisition of “metalinguage” seriously affects the acquisition of language. Third, playback sessions will give them additional text, a type of text in which the informant may pay greater attention to the form of utterances. Surprisingly Tarone (1980, 1982, 1983) is not referenced here for they mention attention to form and its importance to acquisition, as well as the possibility of style-shifting, all topics Tarone has brought to our attention. In writing this review article. I find that I wish to fault them more and more strongly for such omissions. Nevertheless, their discussion of the “self-confrontation” procedure is worth reading in detail, especially for the neophyte researcher in SLA.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the FM is a positive achievement. *In its potential*, this is perhaps the most important project I have examined in SLA in the past five years. But the potential has to be realized in terms of the results of the total

project. One cannot entirely be sure of that potential since very little data has been made available to date. In fact, one disappointing feature of the FM is its lack of immigrant SLA data: only snippets of data are presented throughout (*passim*). This should be rectified as the project continues. There are several final points to be made.

First, I expect that one large benefit from this project will be the description of detailed empirical constraints on the construction of theory in SLA. We should thus be able to come closer to what Perdue called for at the 1984 Edinburgh Interlanguage Seminar (in honor of the retirement of S. Pit Corder): descriptions of *interlanguage universals* in terms of units that apply to all ILs (Davies and Corder 1984). Second, I feel that the FM reexamines our methodology; the way we do research and even the questions we ask. Careful, detailed planning is generally *not* part of the way SLA researchers carry out their tasks, though of course there are exceptions. There is an attempt in the FM at a comprehensiveness in planning not usually seen in SLA studies. I feel that this is the beginning of an “empirical maturity,” which one sees in other fields, especially in those technical fields studied in “language for specific purposes.” Third, the researchers involved in the project demonstrate the courage to attack new types of comprehensive intellectual work as well as the courage to proceed in the face of adversity. As the *Postscript* makes clear, in linguistic research with a number of people in different settings, careful planning is easily thwarted. Life, work and home commitments of informants (and analysts) do get in the way. Immigration trends can and do change. Political climates, laws, etc. are all subject to change. What colleagues new to the research process often have a hard time learning is that it is difficult to control variables and that this difficulty *is* the norm. The FM conveniently details “second best” solutions in each case, which in turn shows the value of careful planning in the first place.

Fourth, there is a comparative effort of a serious kind here that is easy to dismiss because of real-world political and economic problems. Because of the lack of replication in SLA and in applied linguistics in general, the attempt at serious comparative studies should give us some idea of when replication is a reasonable endeavor and when it is not. Thus, the effort to clearly set out the methodology of this comparative project is worthwhile for it helps our understanding of the whole SLA endeavor, especially of what may and may not be replicable in the long run, in principle.

Fifth, the FM can also provide a model for other comparative projects. R. Vanikar (P.C.) and B. Kumaravadivelu (P.C.) have independently

pointed out that one such project could begin to sort out the rich and complex language and IL situations in modern India. We should be open to other comparative projects and try to convince funding agencies of their value, when, for example, we are asked by representatives of these agencies questions such as: "What are the important trends in your field?"

However, I do have criticism. Some SLA researchers feel that they are in danger of "drowning in their own data." I have such fears about the ESF project. One way out of this problem might be the production of *IL books of texts*. For some reason, this time-honored tradition in descriptive linguistics has been absent from the SLA field. Many of the best descriptive and theoretical linguists do *not* gather their own data, but work from books of texts. We are all not equally good at the same things, of course, and not every SLA researcher should be put into the position of having to gather original texts. From what I can tell, the authors of the FM are in a unique position which would enable them to provide interesting books of comparative texts in several ILs with appropriate glasses and contextual background, since they are collecting such large amounts of comparative data. I urge them to consider meeting this need.

Finally, this book deserves careful study. In the final analysis, I like the FM for the potentially rich heritage this well-planned, comprehensive, and comparative project could, and I predict will, leave us with as we continue the effort to carry out and understand empirical research in SLA.

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