Immediate attention of those who are conducting research, teaching, and studying in the field of sociolinguistics and those who have a special interest in qualitative research.

The book’s nine chapters present a systematic overview of principal qualitative research methods in sociolinguistic: (a) development of research questions, (b) field methods, (c) analytical methods, and (d) writing. Chapter 1 (“Introduction”) introduces the book’s primary themes and presents the major tasks faced by sociolinguists. Chapter 2 (“Methodology in Historical Context”) describes the field and analytical methods used in dialectology, structuralist descriptive linguistics, and historical/comparative linguistics, three of the precursors to contemporary sociolinguistics. Methods discussed include selection of the field location, sampling of informants, ways to ask questions, the interplay between preplanned rigor and spontaneous creativity in fieldwork, elicitation techniques, discovery procedures, and comparative methods. Chapter 3 (“Think about Methodology”) provides the answers to some general questions about methodology: What is research? What are data? What does “empirical” mean? What makes a good research question? What is “qualitative” research? Chapter 4 (“Some Legal and Ethical Issues”) discusses issues that need to be considered and solved before any sort of research is undertaken. These issues include informed consent, funding, the use of students as fieldworkers, the use of research results, and the fuzzy boundary between descriptive and critical work. Chapter 5 (“Standards of Evidence: How Do You Know When You’re Right?”) explains standards of evidence and exploits plausible understandings of the concepts of validity and reliability in qualitative research. Chapter 6 (“Thinking: Introspection and Intuition”) explicates the functions and uses of intuition and introspection in sociolinguistic research and offers some tips on guarding against their abuses. Chapter 7 (“Looking: Participant Observation”) sketches the interlocking processes of doing and analyzing ethnographic fieldwork with a focus in particular on the ethnography of communication. Chapter 8 (“Reading and Listening: Discourse Analysis”) demonstrates how discourse analysis is used as a methodology in sociolinguistic studies. Chapter 9 (“Writing”) presents some options for writing about qualitative research and gives hints on how to avoid some pitfalls in reporting the final results.

Two of the principal virtues of this book are its conciseness and explicitness. It is quite an achievement to cover such a broad topic in 164 pages and to do it so well. In addition, various qualitative methods are clearly defined, presented, and described. Another strength of the book is its use of vivid and convincing examples to illustrate the use of specific qualitative methods. Many of those well-chosen examples are derived either from well-known studies or from the author’s own research projects. Also impressive are suggestions for further reading and ideas for discussion presented at the end of each chapter. These suggestions, in connection with the use of boxed samples, hints, and explanations, can greatly help instruction and learning by highlighting important points and by providing starting points for student research projects.

Apart from these merits, some minor blemishes can also be noted. One is that the look, feel, and layout of this volume do not give the impression of a textbook even though the author has every intention of making it a textbook or a supplementary textbook. The format adheres more closely to the genre of a normal scholarly book. Another regret is that this book has a number of editing errors. Several simple mistakes can be found that should have been caught during the editing phase. The third possible improvement lies in the depth and breadth of the treatment of qualitative methods. Some useful topics appear to be neglected in the book. These include, for instance, questionnaires, the emotional dimension of the researcher, focus groups, and the use of computers in qualitative research.

Despite its minor flaws, this book will make a significant contribution to the literature of sociolinguistics and methodology. As the only book on qualitative research methods in sociolinguistics, this volume is not only a master reference for students, practitioners, and researchers in sociolinguistics but also a valuable resource for anyone who intends to conduct serious research with the use of qualitative methods.

YONG LANG
University of Texas–Pan American


Second language acquisition (SLA) theory has far outsourced empirical verification of how learners actually use talk to learn a new language. This
book performs the important function of beginning to fill in that gap by showing the value of using conversation analysis as a methodological resource for SLA studies, with the ultimate goal of making important contributions to theories of language teaching as well as language learning.

Conversation Analysis is part of a SLA series devoted to specific data collection methods or instruments. This volume describes the methodology of conversation analysis in detail, discusses its relevance for current theories of SLA, and uses two examples of conversation analysis to demonstrate how learners succeed or fail at learning the meaning of a word or words in conversational context.

The book is divided into three parts consisting of a total of eight chapters. In part 1, the author introduces the reader to the range of issues that are central to the book. In chapter 1 he defines the field of SLA studies and reviews three major hypotheses in the SLA literature: the discourse hypothesis, the social interaction hypothesis, and the interaction hypothesis. Particularly interesting for language teachers is the discussion of the social interaction theories that underlie task-based and small-group teaching approaches. In chapter 2 he provides the history of conversation analysis and describes its focus on the “organizational structure of mundane, ordinary conversation, which may be defined as the kind of casual, social talk that routinely occurs between friends and acquaintances, either face-to-face or on the telephone” (p. 24). He argues the merits of the qualitative research aspect of conversation analysis, demonstrating that experimental, quantitatively oriented methodology loses important details of individual behavior. The case is made for the use of highly detailed transcripts for capturing naturally occurring data and the undesirability of using sampling procedures that may exclude vital details from the analysis. Chapter 3 concludes part 1 by outlining the practical aspects of recording, transcribing, and analyzing data.

In part 2, the author develops a model of interactional competence and shows how speakers’ practices vary in ordinary conversation, traditional classrooms, and nontraditional classrooms. Chapter 4 focuses on the sequential organization that characterizes these three speech exchange systems and demonstrates how talk differs in equal and unequal power structures. Chapter 5 examines the structure of talk-in-interaction related to turn-taking in both equal and unequal power situations. It is the author’s view that the closer the structural organization of a turn-taking system is to that of ordinary conversation, the more syntactically rich it is and therefore the more valuable for second language learning. An excellent summary at the end of this chapter contrasts turn-taking practices in conversation and language classroom talk. Chapter 6 reviews how repair in different speech exchange systems is analyzed from a sequential perspective. An evaluation of a social psychological model of repair is followed by insights gained from a conversation-analytic model of repair.

Part 3 is perhaps the most interesting section of the book, as two extended examples of conversation analysis portray how learners use sequential, turn-taking, and repair organizations as potential resources for language learning. In chapter 7, detailed conversation analysis is used to demonstrate whether, when, and how an ESL learner and her fellow speakers orient to the structure of talk-in-interaction as a resource for understanding and acquiring the word “coral.” The author notes, however, that more empirical studies are needed to test further this methodology for SLA studies. Chapter 8 uses the same methodology to investigate the conversational behaviors of a group of students enrolled at the same university and engaged in similar classroom tasks, but this time the author shows how another learner fails to understand and learn the meaning of the phrase “We cannot get by Auschwitz” (in this context, the difficulty of German reunification because of Germany’s Nazi past). Through conversation analysis, the author demonstrates that the learner experiences not so much a linguistic problem as a gap in understanding the larger discoursal and cultural significance of words.

Markee concludes the book by proposing that conversation analysis is not a theory of SLA but rather an alternate way to confirm the social interaction hypothesis. Appendices include a list of transcription conventions and the transcripts for the “coral” and “Auschwitz” experiments.

One of the strengths of this book is that the “Conclusions” section of each chapter not only summarizes and highlights the main points covered but also previews the content of the following chapter. Another positive aspect is that the author connects the bases of his theoretical argument to practical implications for language teaching whenever possible.

Overall, the book is well written and accomplishes its goal of illustrating how conversation analysis can be used as a methodological resource for SLA studies. This book is recommended for those interested in conducting research into how
language is spoken and how learners learn from speaking language. It is especially useful for language teachers who want to explore issues related to teaching approaches that rely on small-group interaction.

LINDA L. HARLOW
The Ohio State University


Applying theory learned in their graduate programs to the language classroom is challenging for new graduates who may lack teaching experience and the foresight to problematize primary sources of research from a teaching perspective. Vocabulary in Language Teaching aims to equip such practitioners with the necessary background knowledge from which informed decisions can be made regarding the appropriateness of various vocabulary-teaching techniques. Another stated objective is to prepare the reader for more advanced writings.

Targeting a broad audience of anyone interested in teaching vocabulary well, the author assumes readers have only partial knowledge of linguistics. For this reason, the book is probably most helpful to new teachers of English as a second language and to anyone with low-proficiency students. After a brief introduction into the field and history of teaching vocabulary, the relationship of words to meaning, grammar, corpora, discourse, and acquisition are detailed in separate chapters. The last two chapters apply the book’s content to relevant teaching concerns, such as essential word families for beginners and purposeful assessment techniques. The author’s comprehensible writing style is congruent with the needs of the target audience by providing pertinent content reinforced with specific examples, caveats, and research findings. Each chapter contains a summary, exercises for expansion (for teachers to formulate their own views), and references for further reading. Each of the five core chapters also includes an “Applications to Teaching” section. Any gaps in readers’ knowledge of vocabulary studies will be filled with useful tidbits about first- and second-language speakers, such as the number of repetitions required before a word is learned, how eye movements while reading relate to teaching, word frequencies in spoken versus written English, and the average vocabulary needed for receptive and productive English. Despite seeming straightforward, these points highlight the multidimensionality of words and likely buttress readers’ pedagogical decisions.

Two particularly informative chapters are “The Use of Corpora in Vocabulary Studies” and “Vocabulary Acquisition.” Newcomers to the field of computer-assisted language learning will enjoy the connections made between collocations and the strengths and weaknesses of the latest corpora databases (the most current databases now exceed hundreds of millions of words, yet are biased toward written discourse). The discussions relating corpora to lexical density and frequency lists provoke readers to pose research questions and discover the potential for classroom application. However, the author leaves unanswered the question of whether teachers should spend class time on collocations. In the “Vocabulary Acquisition” section, the author emphasizes the importance of making informed pedagogical choices to facilitate students’ memory of lexical items. Teachers should consider attrition rates and transferring data from short- to long-term memory. To make informed decisions regarding which vocabulary-learning strategies to endorse, teachers could consider the differences between good and poor learners, gaining learners’ cooperation, and proficiency.

These chapters (and the others as well) may lead overworked teachers to question the practicality of spending extra time to prepare vocabulary exercises, especially if one is part of an institution where teaching vocabulary is considered a rudimentary task best left to students as homework. In fact, the series editor, Jack Richards, prefaces the book by noting that many graduate programs overlook vocabulary teaching in their required curriculum. Yet, the author is curiously silent on this important issue. The author certainly tries to accommodate his main points to a variety of contexts and teachers, but the underlying presumption is the same for all: Institutions support teaching vocabulary. As a leading researcher in the field, the author’s assertions of the significance of vocabulary teaching would be welcomed in future editions by educators at cross-purposes with the programs in which they teach.

A point the author does disclose in his preface is that the book may contain a personal bias toward his own research. Indeed, the disproportionate size of his reference section implies this