

'pedagogic task design". For this to become a reality, teachers also need to be factored in as readers.

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### **Second Language Learning in a Foreign Language Environment: A Pragma-Discoursal Account**

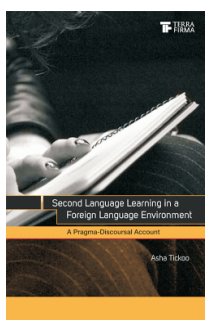
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Asha Tickoo (2016).

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**Reviewed by: Iqbal Judge**

This erudite book opens with a deceptively simple introduction in which the author puts forth the prospect of treating prose compositions as “unique modes of packaging” which present differences in information structure/design that resultantly produce varied pragma-discoursal effects. In this compilation of nine well-researched papers published in international journals from 2001 onwards, Asha Tickoo, explores a gamut of composing skills such as indefinite reference framing, marking of temporal passage and the structure of enumeration, that often present a challenge to the EFL learner.



In keeping with the title, six out of the nine papers comprise studies conducted on L1 users of Cantonese and Vietnamese, ranging from Form 3 level (age 12) to University. The subject of the seventh paper however, is L1 users of Spanish, Mandarin and Swedish. The eighth and ninth papers are more general in scope, being discussions on the design principle and message “undercoding” strategies that come into play in the composition tasks of high-intermediate level EFL learners. The pedagogical implications that emerge from the findings of the research undertaken have been further discussed in each paper.

In the first paper, the author focuses on the use of indefinite reference framing in narrative prose pieces. The hypothesis for this is that while ESL learners can successfully frame direct reference, they are unable to effectively execute indirect reference based on shared knowledge and economy principles. This hypothesis is based on an analysis of prose essays of 60 Cantonese speaking freshmen studying humanities at a university in Hong Kong. Most of these students studied English as a foreign language from age 3 or 4 to age 12, following which they received almost all of their education in English. They were asked to summarize *The Dream*, a short story by Somerset Maugham. Tickoo studied the learners' attempts at first-time reference with regard to the principal protagonist of Maugham's story. The findings showed that in the presentation of new referents, 87 per cent were judged to be “unacceptable” by users of standard academic English. Tickoo suggests that

classroom instruction should draw attention to the difference between focal and non-focal indefinite specific referring expressions, as well as features of saliency.

In her second paper, Tickoo posits that for Cantonese ESL learners, the acquisition of past tense is at variance from the universalist hypothesis which states that past tense is acquired in developmental stages, with event-like verbs marked for tense acquired before the correct usage of less event-like verbs. As with the first paper, this too presents a carefully detailed, microscopic analysis of students' writings. She suggests the transference from Chinese, in which the perfective participle “le” is used to signal foregrounded situations in a narrative as a possible reason for the grounding-sensitive selective marking of the English past tense by these students. Hence, for the ESOL teacher the message is that the learners' L1 should not be ignored when attempting to understand their needs.

The use of “then/after that” and the structure of enumeration are subjected to similar meticulous observation and analysis in the following two papers. While in the former paper, Tickoo considers Vietnamese learners enrolled in a pre-academic writing program in a US community college, in the latter paper she looks at English major students studying at a university in Hong Kong. In both groups however, learners have had many years of “passive” exposure to English through lectures and textbooks at school. The topic of the writings given are simple and personal such as “my first date”, “my

favourite park”, etc. The learners' use of “then/after that” has been analysed for its appropriateness of use. The propositional, semantic, syntactic and lexico-syntactic constraints on English enumeration that emerge from the analysis point to the need for an overt, explicit instruction on the two modes of information incrementation.

Carrying forward the analysis of written discourse and inter-sentential relations further, Tickoo investigates learners' use of the encapsulating sentence and the prospected sentence in her fifth paper. Explicating the difference between the two with the help of lucid examples, she points out how the encapsulating sentence retains the ideational component of its preceding text, while the prospected sentence increments the text without retaining the preceding ideational component. It is the encapsulating sentence which presents a greater challenge to the learner, for s/he has to know how to effectively split the ideational whole into units that are informationally appropriate for evoking a preceding text using suitable lexicalization. Tickoo presents evidence of the problems that learners experience in the fragmentation of ideational information through examples of “preferred textualisation” to illustrate the difference between the two texts. She reasons that learners experience difficulty in framing appropriate encapsulating sentences. This is because having “properly mastered” incrementation by the prospected sentence, the overt retention of a preceding text becomes problematic for them, being diametrically opposed to the earlier learnt discursual behaviour.

In her sixth paper, Tickoo investigates variable temporal passage in storytelling. She compares the data culled from the analysis of the prose essays of 60 Cantonese speaking freshmen studying humanities at a university in Hong Kong from the first paper and a detailed analysis of Maugham's original story with some extracts from Hardy's *Tess of the D'urbervilles*. According to her, it is the presence of the pattern of alternating peaks and troughs formed by a succession of foregrounded event clauses and backgrounded non-event clauses that gives a narrative the recognizable quality of a story, distinct from the mere re-telling found in students' writings. Tickoo's findings shed light on the rhetorical structure of the story genre, though she is careful to admit that her database is rather limited and needs to be investigated in more detail and depth before definite conclusions can be drawn.

In the seventh paper, Tickoo examines variance from established norms of micro-developmental features of "narratives in support of end-state statements" of EFL students. Such narratives outline successive chronologically sequenced events from the past right up to the present. Being extensively used in report and research writing, such narratives are of importance to ESL learners who are pursuing academic goals.

Building up from the theoretical underpinnings of oral narratives given by sociolinguists Labov and Waletzky, Tickoo delineates the macro-design and developmental design features of narrative-in-support of an end-state statement through a short sample essay. She further compares it with a similar attempt at writing by an L1

user of Spanish. Her findings show that while students may succeed in conforming to the macro-design features, their use of the individual, micro-developmental features is less effective. Thus, this is an area that requires targeted pedagogic intervention and support.

In her last paper, Tickoo demonstrates the use of "undercoding" as a viable and comparatively less challenging strategy used by EFL learners in effecting information packaging conventions, particularly in the context of the features discussed in the preceding papers. In fact, Tickoo suggests that FL learners apply this strategy when framing indefinite reference by marking inter-sentential relations and signalling genre much more than proficient users of the language would do.

Overall, the book is remarkable for its scientific, in-depth analyses and scholarly references to related research. It moves far ahead of the more common "error analysis" that language teachers would be familiar with. Though its sustained use of "technical" terminology and exploration of the more adventurous, uncharted seas of language acquisition might be challenging for the uninitiated, it is valuable for its insights. It also serves as a benchmark for good research, standing out luminously distinct from the damaging plethora of cut-copy-paste that often plagues academia today.

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