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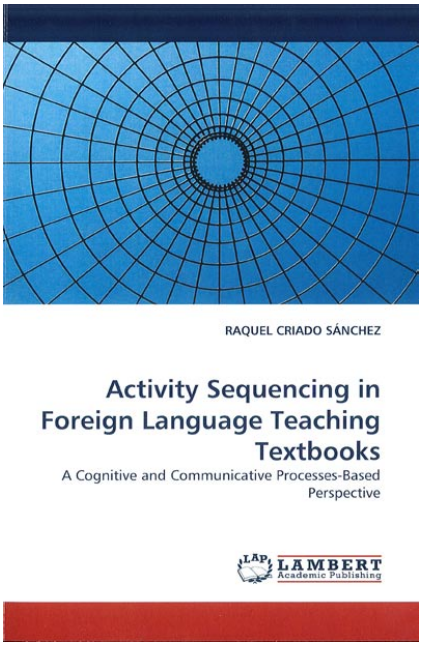
Book Review

Criado Sánchez, Raquel. (2010). *Activity Sequencing in Foreign Language Teaching Textbooks. A Cognitive and Communicative Processes-Based Perspective.* Saarbrücken, Germany: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing AG & Co. KG. Pages: 360. ISBN: 978-3-8383-1728-1

The field of teaching materials is still poorly represented, even though thousands of books and articles are published every year on language teaching and learning. In addition, specific topics such as the one dealt with in this book, *sequencing*, have been practically absent from the academia.



The nature of *sequencing* as applied to language teaching materials is addressed by the author in the first chapters of the book. In the Introduction, she describes the rationale and object of study, together with the area of her research: materials development. The author explicitly focuses on materials development and textbooks, as she seems to assume that they very often represent the core of teachers' resources.

The extension of the term *sequencing* comprises different areas of application, even within the field of language teaching itself, as the author very well illustrates in Chapter 1 from Part I ("Activity Sequencing in Foreign Language Teaching"). *Sequencing* always carries the sense of "arranging in a definite order". Underlying this key meaning is the application of sequencing to materials in a syllabus, tasks in a Task-Based

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curriculum, textbook units, or activities in textbooks units. The last one is the object of analysis in this book. *Sequencing* can be analysed from different perspectives. From a teaching perspective, the order of the activities planned in the textbook affects motivation and variety, which strongly affect learning. From a cognitive perspective, the order of the activities may comply or not with the cognitive processes which govern our minds (a sensitive condition ultimately affecting efficiency in learning). Consequently, both from pedagogical and cognitive points of view activity sequencing deserves our attention.

Indeed, textbooks and teachers must always and necessarily adjust to a specific sequence in the way activities are ordered. The question is whether or not a specific sequencing of activities in a teaching unit is more efficient than other possible sequences. Only empirical research may shed light on this. In the pedagogical tradition, however, the sequencing of activities has been fully subordinated to the premises set out by the current methodological trends. Efficiency of the teaching action as linked to activity sequencing has not been taken into consideration. Still, the sequencing of activities constitutes an autonomous field of research and action; it is governed by its own rules, and it is subject to specific criteria, with a rationale behind it.

In this book, the importance of activity sequencing is clearly highlighted by raising a very important issue –the adequacy of specific sequences of activities when contrasted against the sequence our brain follows when acquiring new knowledge. This means that two dimensions are being studied in this work, the pedagogical and the psycholinguistic ones, which definitely point to a promising and exciting field of research.

The most traditional model of activity sequencing, the P-P-P (Presentation-Practice-Production model of activity sequencing), is thoroughly studied in Chapter 2 ("The P-P-P: A Critical Analysis of the Traditional Activity Sequencing Pattern in Foreign Language Teaching Literature"). The author also describes what she names as the 'contemporary FLT materials version of the P-P-P', a version which is somewhat more flexible and richer in activity typology than the P-P-P found in the Structural-based methods from the 1950s-1960s. Chapter 3 ("Activity sequencing from the perspective of Cognitive Psychology") focuses on the description of Anderson's ACT-R model of skill knowledge acquisition (Anderson 1982, 2005), which is adopted as the cognitive framework of analysis in this book. This model uses two of the most relevant types of knowledge widely accepted by specialists, declarative knowledge or *DEC* (know-what) and procedural knowledge or *PRO* (know-how). The P-P-P model seems to agree with the *DECPRO* sequence to a considerable extent.

Chapter 4 ("Recent proposals for activity sequencing: a critical review") studies several sequencing proposals from both pedagogical and cognitive perspectives. This constitutes a new and enlightening way to approach sequences, among which the CPM

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("Communicative Processes-based model of activity sequencing") is included. In a CPM sequence, the order of events in real communicative situations is pedagogically adapted so that it becomes the skeleton of lesson planning. The CPM constitutes a sound and improved alternative to the P-P-P, as revealed in the quasi-experimental study reported in Chapter 5 ("Hypothesis and Method") and Chapter 6 ("Results and Discussions") under Part II ("The Quasi-Experimental Study").

Any sequencing model affecting teaching and learning (and therefore the P-P-P should be included) will necessarily connect to the sequence in knowledge acquisition our brain is submitted to in formal language learning contexts. Common sense tells us that both models should go together, that is, they should not oppose each other or proceed in opposite or divergent directions. It seems reasonable to assume that the pedagogical sequence applied in textbooks and therefore in the classroom should comply with the built-in sequence governing cognition. This fundamental assumption requires the understanding of the cognitive processes underlying knowledge acquisition in adult formal instruction (whose processes and sequences are different from natural learning). And this fact requires in its turn the understanding of how our brain works. The importance of cognitive processes in instructed second language acquisition leads the author to centre her analysis on *sequencing* as a key variable for achieving higher success in learning. She devises a quasi-experimental study in which the learning efficiency of CPM sequences adapted by herself is contrasted and measured against the sequencing of activities as found in a well-known current ELT textbook, closer to the 'contemporary FLT materials version of the P-P-P'.

A wide range of statistical tests are used to support the method, the analysis of data and results. The results confirm the hypothesis she had formulated: a new and different order in the organization of the activities within a teaching unit –the CPM– holds significant positive weight in the amount of learning achieved. Accordingly, this quasi-experiment constitutes an important landmark in the short history of research on sequencing applied to FLT. The implications for learning, FLT research and practice and future lines of research are clearly outlined in the final chapter of the book, Chapter 7 ("General Conclusions"). Six appendices are also included with information about the different stages of the quasi-experiment.

To conclude, this book has two most remarkable achievements: (i) a principled description and implementation of an empirically-based model of activity sequencing with a sound pedagogical and cognitive foundation, and (ii) its focus on one of the most relevant (and neglected) topics in ELT and, by extension, FLT. The book underlines the fact that pedagogical patterns in the sequencing of teaching materials should be underpinned by a carefully elaborate cognitive base. No doubt, this represents a major challenge for material

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authors and teachers. Any researcher interested in FLT in general and ELT research and practice in particular will find this book a very valuable contribution to the field.

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