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REVIEWS

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RETROSPECTIVE REVIEW ARTICLE: THE GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNER*

BROWN, H. D., *Breaking the Language Barrier: Creating Your Own Pathway to Success*. Yarmouth ME: Intercultural Press, 1991; BROWN, H. D., *A Practical Guide to Language and Learning: A Fifteen-week Program of Strategies for Success*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989; COHEN, A. D., *Language Learning: Insights for Learners, Teachers, and Researchers*. Boston MA: Heinle & Heinle, 1990; NAIMAN, N., FRÖHLICH, H., STERN, H. and TODESCO, A., *The Good Language Learner*. Toronto: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1978; RUBIN, J. and THOMPSON, I., *How to Be a More Successful Language Learner*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle, 1981; SKEHAN, P., *Individual Differences in Second-Language Learning*. London: Edward Arnold, 1989.

"You, the language learner are the most important factor in the language learning process" (Rubin and Thompson, 1982, p. 3).

And so begins our quest for the good language learner (GLL). This most important of factors has certainly aroused interest in recent years as evidenced by the collection of six works that will be considered here.

The phrase "the good language learner" quickly generates a number of questions about the concept underlying the label. In reviewing the collection of books, we will consider the issues addressed by the following questions: is there a single GLL and all others are somehow deficient? Are there necessarily bad language learners? What are the attributes of GLLs? What do we know about the GLL? How does one develop into a GLL? These issues will arise from time to time in the following paragraphs and we will return to these questions in our concluding comments.

*The concept behind Retrospective Review Articles is explained in an editorial preceding the first two such articles in *System* 15(1), 97-98 (1987).

Perhaps the more accurate description of this body of research is the rather dull sounding "individual differences (ID) approach" or the study of "learner variables." All of the works reviewed share a focus on characteristics of the learner, how people differ on those characteristics, and what those variables contribute to the learning context. Discussions of teaching methods, curriculum development, programme evaluation, and so on are treated in a cursory fashion—if at all. A focus on the learner is reasonable and informative in its own right, so long as one remains cognizant of the potentially powerful effects of the context in which the learner functions.

Our plan for reviewing these texts is to begin with the research-oriented works, partially because that is our area of interest. We consider three such works: Naiman, *et al.*'s *The Good Language Learner*, Skehan's *Individual Differences in Second Language Learning* and Cohen's *Language Learning: Insights for Learners, Teachers and Researchers*. We will then proceed to the more practical implications contained in the student-oriented books, Brown's *Breaking the Language Barrier* and *A Practical Guide to Language Learning*, and finally Rubin and Thompson's *How to Be a More Successful Language Learner*. After considering each text individually, contrasts will be highlighted between the works to demonstrate their relative merits and limitations. Finally, we consider the collection as a whole and attempt to draw some conclusions about the GLL and where ID research might be headed.

Perspectives on the GLL

In one of the earliest empirical examinations of the GLL, Naiman *et al.* (1978) set out with the premise that, through an understanding of what language learners are like and how they go about learning a language, it would be possible to improve the quality of language teaching. More specifically, it was believed that by examining what "good" learners do to learn a language it could be determined how to help the "bad" language learners improve their learning. While recognizing the importance of a diversity of variables for language learning outcomes, such as aspects of the learner, teaching methods, the environment, and the language learning process, these researchers focused on how personality, cognitive style, and language learning strategies predict successful language learning.

The monograph describes, in detail, two studies of good language learners. The first involved in-depth interviews with adult learners. In the second study, several high-school students completed a battery of personality, attitude and achievement measures, were observed in their classrooms, and were subsequently interviewed. Through this process, Naiman and colleagues were able to identify five strategies, largely pertaining to the extent of effort and involvement in the learning process, and a number of ID variables (e.g. field independence and attitude) that characterize successful learners. Perhaps the most significant conclusion, however, was that a prototypical GLL is difficult to identify: the difference between good and bad language learners could not be defined solely in terms of strategies without considering other characteristics of the learner and the learning situation.

Although it must be recognized that the study was exploratory, a number of problems limit the more specific conclusions that can be drawn from the results. Some problems are a function of

the time in which the study took place, such as the use of univariate statistics. It is likely that, if the study were replicated today, more rigorous statistical procedures would be employed. Other problems are more limiting. For example, the sampling of adult learners was generally restricted to well-travelled, highly educated individuals who may not be typical of learners in general. Given this distinctive sample, the findings associated with these students may not necessarily provide the researcher or teacher with useful information to help learners who have less education or who are less experienced travellers.

Perhaps the major criticism of the interview study is the lack of a substantial comparison group of "bad" language learners. It would be easier to determine what makes the "good" learner "good" if one could, at the same time, confidently establish what makes the "bad" learner "bad". From that information, one could better determine whether certain strategies are ultimately hurtful to second language learning, or if good language learners know better how to use strategies in a complementary or compensatory manner [see the discussion of Brown (1989) below], or if good language learning is simply the degree to which one employs strategies, almost any strategy. Despite the criticisms, the study endures as a provocative, in-depth analysis of the language learner; the case studies are one of the more intriguing aspects of the study because of the detail provided. The value of the study is acknowledged in the tradition of research that it helped to inspire, a tradition discussed at length in the following work.

Individual differences in second language learning by Skehan (1989) is an exceptional summary of the work that has been done on the role of ID variables in the language learning process. On the first page of the text, Skehan comments that a robust ID research tradition is lacking in the second language area; he goes a long way toward establishing one. This text would not likely be useful for students, would possibly be useful for teachers with a strong leaning toward conducting research, and is most appropriately directed toward those conducting research or who have some experience with experimental and correlational methods. It should be noted that the second chapter deals with methodological and statistical issues but likely provides insufficient grounding to initiate the reader who lacks expertise in this area. There is little need for this chapter anyway because Skehan skilfully reviews and interprets research results for the reader.

The first chapter presents the basic theoretical foundations and provides a good introduction to the issues raised later in the book. Skehan reviews four types of research models, including the theory-then-research vs research-then-theory approaches, using the GLL as an example of the latter approach. Skehan also comments on the interactional perspective, which combines instructional and learner variables, and disjunctive models, which postulate different routes to the same end point. As noted below, these latter two types of models may have considerable appeal for current conceptualizations of the GLL because they promise to deal with the complex and compensatory nature of learner variables.

Having acknowledged the contributions of John Carroll and Robert Gardner in developing the ID area, it is not surprising that Aptitude and Motivation make up the first two content chapters. Of all the variables considered in the text, Skehan does the best review of the

research on language aptitude, using a critical but constructive style. Several of the arguments that have been marshalled over the years against the aptitude concept are effectively dismantled by Skehan. This text also offers a good review of Gardner's socio-educational model and the extensive work that it has generated. John Oller's widely cited criticisms of Gardner's model are reviewed and debunked. It is interesting that Skehan takes up the motivation-as-cause vs motivation-as-effect argument and concludes that the literature tends to support the motivation-as-cause perspective. However, it is surprising that Skehan does not draw the conclusion that motivation is part of a continuous process. In essence, the issue is not whether motivation causes achievement but when is motivation a cause and when is it an effect. In addition to Gardner's work, alternative motivational orientations are described based on research done in other cultural contexts, as offered by Richard Clément and others. The extant research on both aptitude and motivation are well presented, and the conclusions stand up well today.

The three following chapters deal with language learning strategies, additional cognitive and affective variables, and aptitude-treatment interactions. On the topic of strategies, Skehan concludes that they are in the embryonic stage of development and calls for studies that actually have been conducted in the last few years (i.e. after publication of Skehan's book). Recently, there has been a profusion of research into language learning strategies and Skehan's chapter is likely out of date already, simply because of the explosion of research. Other cognitive and affective variables are considered; introversion, risk-taking, intelligence, field independence, and anxiety are each treated in turn. Of these variables, the most change has occurred in the state of knowledge about language anxiety. Like strategies, the information in Skehan's text may be outdated because recent work has further developed the construct and its methodology well beyond what was available to Skehan, even a few years ago. With respect to aptitude-treatment interactions, Skehan offers three conclusions: these studies are extremely interesting, these studies tend to be poorly done, and finally that there has been "abysmally little research of this sort" (p. 134). These conclusions might be offered with equal confidence today.

In the final chapter on conclusions and implications, 14 conclusions are offered based on the work reviewed in the text. On balance, these are fair and accurate assessments but they do reflect somewhat of a bias toward explanations based on aptitude and against those based on the "additional" affective variables such as anxiety and personality factors. This chapter is highly recommended to researchers, as is the entire text. Skehan has done a good job of being comprehensive in reviewing the literature. In contrast, the following work has taken a much more narrow focus considering learning strategies that can be applied to second language acquisition.

Cohen's (1990) *Language Learning: Insights for Learners, Teachers, and Researchers* is consistent with the conclusion of the original GLL study (Naiman *et al.*, 1978) which recommended shifting attention away from good and bad learners to the circumstances under which strategies may be more or less successful. Cohen's discussion of language learning strategies suggests that, by understanding the fundamental cognitive processes involved in learning in general, one can facilitate the process of language learning in particular.

Although Cohen claims that his book is suitable for an audience of learners, teachers, and researchers, he maintains that the constituency best served would be language teachers. However, throughout the book the reader is assumed to be a learner (the book addresses them personally as "you"). It is our opinion that this text may be too detailed to maintain the interest of all but the most pensive learner. Moreover, the research treated does not encompass a wide variety of authors and approaches, thus limiting the interest of researchers. Nonetheless, Cohen presents a reasonably comprehensive application of the principles of cognitive psychology to the study of language learning.

The structure of the book consists of two broad sections (excluding the introduction and conclusion). Chapters 2–6 illustrate the variety of cognitive strategies available to the learner that can improve memory, attention, reading, comprehension, and writing skills. While most of these strategies are sound, some may be impractical and hence of limited utility. For example, Cohen recommends that an effective manner to improve writing style is to have one's text reformulated by a native speaker. As effective as it might be, this strategy would likely take a great deal of the student's time and may also be an unrealistic imposition on the native speaker. Thus, only the most ardent language learner might be expected to employ all of the strategies proposed by Cohen.

Chapters 7 and 8 describe the research upon which the recommended strategies are based. The research cited is largely carried out by Cohen and his colleagues, and supplemented by an annotated bibliography for further reading. Although many of the studies have a provocative design, they are often limited by the sample size and the lack of methodological rigour that can be applied in a classroom (field) setting. Without attention to these concerns, for example through triangulation of research methods, it is difficult to assess the meaning of trends in the data, with or without statistical methods. Moreover, the importance of the findings could be better illustrated if they were integrated with what has been determined through research by other authors. Nonetheless, as was noted above, the design and results of several of the studies are intriguing and warrant further investigation.

On the basis of the research findings, Cohen argues that it is possible for teachers to assist learners in becoming more aware of their cognitive learning processes and thus exercise control or choice over them. With this knowledge, then, one could potentially become a better, more autonomous language learner. Moreover, greater learner autonomy would enhance the teacher's role as a facilitator of the learning process in addition to instructor of the specifics of the target language. Thus, Cohen's principal contribution is in applying general learning principles to the language learning context, enhancing our understanding of what makes some people more efficient than others. Unfortunately, as far as the research-oriented works are concerned, this one is the most limited in scope.

Our discussion of learner-centred books begins with Brown's (1991) *Breaking the Language Barrier* which is intended for students of a second language, but may also be read by teachers with considerable profit. The tone of the book is very positive, encouraging students and easing their anxieties by providing numerous anecdotes and sensible interpretations of available research. This book emphasizes individualized pathways to learning, that each learner is unique and no single formula for success exists. In some ways this may be the

antithesis of searching for THE GLL but it aligns well with Skehan's call for disjunctive models and Cohen's arguments concerning the search for optimal strategies for each student.

Brown's first two chapters deal with language acquisition by children and how adults can abstract some of those principles for their own use. In these chapters, Brown introduces a powerful theme that pervades the book: because of its strong survival value, a language is learned efficiently, almost unconsciously, when there is an urgency about using that language for communication. In many schools, students are defensive about learning and are strongly motivated to avoid failure rather than secure the rewards of authentic communication. Brown argues that adults, in essence, try to learn backward, focusing first on the grammar, then contrived communication, and finally authentic social communication. Children proceed in reverse with far better results because of a sense of communicative urgency within their social/familial context.

The next chapter describes some of the general learning principles that govern language acquisition, such as reinforcement and punishment. Along with learning, Brown addresses the broader issue of IQ and concludes that general IQ is not important for second language learning but that a "language learning IQ" is; a valuable point but severely overplayed in the chapter. Finally, communicative urgency is discussed as a natural memory aid, allowing students to practice what they need most and to forget what they rarely need to use—sort of a Darwinian approach to vocabulary.

The next chapter, "Strategies for success," reports on several streams of research, traditional topics in the ID area. The right brain/left brain distinction is resurrected and Brown suggests that students use the left brain for logical deduction of rules too much and need to develop the more intuitive right brain as a necessary supplement. Brown also states that adults tend to be overly field-independent (insensitive to language contexts) while children benefit from field dependence. However, in the end, the emphasis is on how field dependence and independence work best together. Tolerance for ambiguity is another of the ID variables considered and again the middle ground is advocated. As an example of the diversity of approaches, Brown describes how the well-known composer Leonard Bernstein was successful at finding the appropriate strategy for a given context, a flexibility that Brown strongly advocates.

Broader social and educational issues are addressed at various points throughout the text. Brown uses the idea of "joining the language club" to demonstrate the social/cultural benefits of group membership, with language as the key entrance requirement. Brown reviews trends in some of the most popular educational methods: grammar-translation, audiolingual, home study, Berlitz, suggestopedia, community language learning, the silent way, total immersion, and computerized instruction. By now the reader must be ready to guess that an eclectic approach is recommended.

Brown's forte is demonstrating the necessity of turning a potential negative into a positive. For example, students are shown the instructional value of making mistakes, even to the point of referring to "the joy of goofing" (p. 109). Anxiety is introduced in a similar manner, suggesting that a little anxiety is helpful. Introverted students are encouraged to use fully their introspective nature to abstract rules but are encouraged to develop a more sociable

orientation-extroverts are given the opposite encouragement. These discussions reinforce a common theme in these works, that THE GLL does not exist, rather GLLs use their strengths and compensate for their limitations.

The final chapter involves self-testing with accepted measures of relevant constructs considered throughout the book, including extroversion, ambiguity tolerance, left/right brain preference, visual vs auditory learning, and finally a language puzzle. The reader is encouraged to take the tests and then consider their interpretations and relevance to language training. This is an excellent idea. Further, the information given about the tests is reasonable, geared toward the learner with no background in psychology, and appropriate cautions are provided. Brown concludes with a 12-step program emphasizing the usefulness of keeping a language diary for further analysis in terms of the topics covered in the book.

This book manages to be very uplifting and motivating without preaching. It has a quality of seasoned reasonableness, a balanced approach, and gently prods the learner with encouragement by consistently turning the negative into the positive. The academics of it are quite acceptable, better than his other book (discussed below). Brown offers 55 footnotes, most of them directing interested readers to relevant research. This work advocates a philosophy of language learning and serves as a practical guide as well.

A second book by Brown (1989), *A Practical Guide to Language Learning: a Fifteen-week Program of Strategies for Success*, addresses itself to beginning language students. It is the type of book that can be recommended to students before entering their first language class. This self-help book makes an excellent companion to Brown's (1991) text by suggesting a 15-week program of more than 70 weekly language learning strategies/exercises. There are enough humorous anecdotes and personal stories to make the book interesting, easy reading with a powerful message. This book covers an impressive range of individual difference variables, including cultural stereotypes, norms, aptitude, IQ, cognitive style, personality variables (e.g. introversion), tolerance for ambiguity, risk-taking, anxiety, and self-confidence. These variables are discussed with the beginning student in mind.

Consistent with Brown's other book under consideration here, the most often recommended strategy is a language learning journal or diary; almost half of the weekly exercises involve the journal. Additional exercises emphasize interacting with other learners and obtaining authentic input. These strategies give the impression of being based on solid research. Unfortunately, Brown does not take great pains to cite this literature. The advantage of this approach is that the reader is not given too much extra information (unfamiliar names, numerous footnotes, etc.) that would make the orientation less self-help and more academic. The disadvantage of this tactic is that it is not possible to evaluate the strength of the research on which the claims are based.

On balance, the advice given seems to be quite sound. Again, the overarching principle advocated here is that individuals must understand themselves, exploit their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses. For example, extroverts are encouraged to keep making social contacts but are reminded not to neglect the thoughtful, introspective processes that would lead them to abstract the rules of the language. Introverts are given the opposite

advice—capitalize on your tendencies to be introspective but sometimes take the initiative socially, forget the rules, and try to communicate. For variables that are more naturally conceived on a continuum, like risk-taking, readers are advised to find the middle ground, not too much and not too little. Of course, each student may define those terms differently, but that is not necessarily a problem because there is not one absolute, ideal level to be advocated for everyone. Instead, Brown exhorts readers to find their natural tendencies and then nudge themselves in the opposite direction. The text does not judge the “best” strategies but rather advocates flexibility.

As researchers, it is somewhat frustrating not to have references to evaluate the strength of the claims. Similarly, Brown does not attempt to rank the variables in terms of the size of their effects. The text also does not comment on the strength of confidence in the research but rather presents almost every conclusion with equal confidence. Some readers might be put off by this approach, especially those who seek critiques of the type provided by Skehan. Finally, it is not possible to evaluate the entire 15-week program because no evidence is cited for it as a unit. However, it should be re-stated that each of the conclusions are solid in themselves so it is likely that the program, or at least major elements of it, would find support if put to the test.

This particular text is a reasonable one and would likely represent a useful practical guide for beginning language learners who feel isolated, unmotivated, and unsuccessful. The primary flaw is the lack of supporting evidence given to the many assertions and evidence supporting the effectiveness of the more than 70 weekly exercises.

Another book well suited to the beginning, and perhaps intimidated, language learner is the brief pocket book by Rubin and Thompson (1980), *How to Be a More Successful Language Learner*. This is a fine introduction to the process of learning a second language and the use of language learning strategies, particularly for the novice learner. Moreover, its refreshing, pragmatic, and down-to-earth style is well suited for this audience.

This book is divided into three parts: Learning about language and language learning, Language learning strategies, and Aids for the language learner. The first section introduces the learner to the process of learning another language by discussing a number of factors that might explain successful language learning, such as age, intelligence, attitudes, extroversion, inhibition, tolerance of ambiguity, learning style, risk-taking, eye-ear learning, stereotypes, ethnocentrism, and past experiences. Unlike some other books reviewed here, Rubin and Thompson (like Brown) underscore that learning a second language involves more than developing academic skills. Since language learning is a communicative process, one must be prepared to develop skills necessary for appropriate and effective interaction with others. Moreover, since this interaction involves members from another ethnic community, one must also pay attention to the influence of factors, such as stereotypes and ethnocentrism, that may play a role in intergroup communication. This extension of the range of issues to be considered would seem a more valid and comprehensive analysis of what must be tackled to be a good (i.e. successful) language learner.

The second section briefly describes 14 strategies. Rather than being specific learning exercises, these strategies represent larger, meta-cognitive admonitions, such as “learn to make

intelligent guesses", "learn to live with uncertainty" and "let context help you". No attempt is made to classify these strategies into some hierarchical structure or systematically link them. At best, the effect is that the strategies read a little like a recipe book or shopping list; at worst they read like somebody's platitudes. Many of these strategies will be obvious to the advanced learner and offer little inspiration for the researcher or the teacher. They may, however, verbalize important principles for the beginning learner, who could then use them to regulate the learning process. As well, the third section, which discusses the various uses of textbooks, dictionaries, teachers and other learning resources, may be of greatest use for orientating the newly initiated learner.

One stimulating point made by Rubin and Thompson, which is important for our consideration of the GLL, is that different language learners may have many different reasons for learning a second language. Although the authors maintain that generally language learning includes mastering the variety of cognitive/academic and intercultural communication skills, in addition to developing certain personal characteristics, they also emphasize that successful second language learning depends upon the student's goals in learning the language. In many instances, for example, it is sufficient to develop only reading comprehension in the second language. This frank acknowledgement of the variety among learners' goals and strategies is part of what makes this an enjoyable book to read. It is also an excellent way of thinking about the GLL.

Comparisons among the works

For the purposes of comparison, we will maintain the distinction between the research- and learner-oriented books. Among the research-oriented works, Naiman *et al.*'s (1978) monograph is most important for its historical contribution to developing interest in the ID research tradition. By no means was this the first study to tackle the topic; people like Carroll, Schumann, Lambert, and Gardner made significant prior contributions. But the Naiman *et al.* volume drew from that previous work, broadened the perspective on the GLL, and made its own contribution to the development of the ID tradition. That tradition is well synthesized in Skehan's book. Skehan does more than simply report the results of studies, he comments on the field as a whole and the philosophical traditions from which the research develops. Unfortunately, Cohen's work does not acknowledge this vast body of evidence. In fact, Cohen does not even cite the work of Carroll, Schumann, Lambert, nor Gardner, which must be considered a significant omission. However, Cohen does attempt to bridge the gap between research and practice to a greater extent than does Skehan.

With respect to the learner-oriented works, all three could be recommended with confidence. Brown's (1991) *Breaking the Language Barrier* is the strongest work in illustrating the nature and complexity of GLLs. It draws upon the research literature to a greater extent than do the other two books in this category but does not report extensively on specific language learning strategies. Both Brown's (1989) *Practical Guide to Language Learning* and Rubin and Thompson's (1982) *How to Be a More Successful Language Learner* do an admirable job of illustrating the specific strategies that learners can employ but neither cites research to support their claims (for example, neither book has included a list of references nor a subject index).

In their discussion of strategies for language learning, each of these six works is something like a cookbook for language learning. There is a major omission from the recipes: none of the authors is able to provide the units of measure. Do you need a kilogram of extroversion or will a pound suffice? Granted, something approaching a recipe could only be made on the individual learner level but there is a certain amount of frustration in reading that everything is helpful without prioritizing the information. This is most notable in the learner-oriented texts.

Each of the books emphasize learning how to learn languages, rather than learning a particular language per se. Thus, the entire collection demonstrates the necessity of accounting for individual differences in describing the language learning process. The three research-oriented volumes indicate that considerable interest exists in this area. The three learner-oriented books demonstrate the practical application and usefulness of that research. Unfortunately, those who might benefit most from this literature, the beginning language learner, may not discover it until it is too late to help them. Therefore, awareness of themes contained in this collection on the part of language teachers and a willingness on their part to teach the application of these principles might go a long way toward making language learning easier for the individual student. A similar challenge can be issued to researchers to help determine the relative effectiveness of the pragmatic strategies; especially useful would be studies of the effects of particular strategies with specific types of learners in a given context.

In the end, the major commonality in this collection of rather diverse works is a consistent focus, in one way or another, on language learning strategies. At a conceptual level, however, it may not be clear that the strategies suggested in these books are language learning strategies, or simply general learning strategies. Therefore, we must consider the question of whether it is sufficient to regard language learning as simply one form of learning in general. Certainly, Cohen's discussion would suggest that the GLL may be the one who is most aware of the learning process in general, and such knowledge may be applied to language acquisition. If language learning is merely a specific instance of general learning, then why all the fuss about language learning strategies?

Based on this collection, a case can be made for the uniqueness of the language learning process. What might clearly distinguish language learning from learning other skills are the communicative and intercultural aspects. Both Brown (1991) and Rubin and Thompson (1982) imply that there is something qualitatively different about being a successful language learner, and this is especially evident in their discussion of the process of communication and intergroup contact. In language learning, students learn new ways of communicating, the most basic tools for establishing meaning and making social contact, rather than simply acquiring a body of knowledge. In addition to learning how to master new vocabulary, to read well, to listen attentively and to speak properly, the learner must also learn communicative strategies to manage the discourse process, emotional strategies to deal with the uncertainty, ambiguity and anxiety, and intercultural strategies so as not to offend. As noted by Brown (1991), language is our fundamental means of presenting ourselves to the rest of the world. It is our contention that language learning is qualitatively different from other types of learning and therefore a certain number of strategies will be unique to the language learning context. Thus, the GLL may not be the strongest academic but would likely be the one most interested in communicating.

Conclusions

The literature on the GLL is well reflected in the current collection. The texts blend the interests of researchers, teachers and students, and taken together each work supports the others very well. Let us conclude with some answers to the questions posed at the beginning of our review and end with some indication of what the future might hold.

Is there a single GLL? In some ways the phrase "the good language learner" incorrectly implies that there is only one type of GLL. As evidenced by some of the work reviewed here, the search for the prototype likely will be abandoned, and may already have been. That is, it is sufficient to search for "a" GLL rather than "the" GLL.

Are there bad language learners? Perhaps a GLL implies the existence of a bad language learner. Certainly some students feel incapable of learning a second language and they can experience severe problems in their attempt to do so. However, based on the work reviewed here, it appears that terms such as "good" and "bad" are relatively uninformative, evaluative judgements. It seems much more productive to think in terms of successful strategies for certain types of people in certain contexts rather than simply in terms of purely successful or unsuccessful people. Each learner's success depends on a constellation of interdependent factors (personality, intelligence, aptitude, anxiety, etc.) which, individually are shared with others, but collectively are unique to each person. This provides no guarantee that successful methods will be portable from person to person. It also provides quite an interesting topic for further study.

Who is the GLL? This question provided the impetus for Naiman *et al.*'s work but seems to have been abandoned in recent years. The current assumption is that almost anybody has the potential to be a GLL, provided the student learns to tap his/her strengths and compensate for his/her weaknesses. It is difficult to imagine that someone who has learned one language would be unable to learn another. Thus, every person has the potential to be successful, but in no way is success ensured.

What do we know about the GLL? Rather than attempting to present the conclusions that these six books have reached, let us simply refer interested readers to the volume that is most relevant to their needs. Naiman *et al.* can be given credit for helping to stimulate research in this area. Their study certainly had its flaws and might not stand up to more rigorous standards currently employed but its conclusions, methods and descriptions are very interesting, especially in their historical context. Brown's texts and the Rubin and Thompson book are filled with reasonable, practical recommendations based on the empirical literature but do not present that literature to a great extent. Those interested in a summary of available research need look no farther than the review by Skehan who demonstrates in a comprehensive, detailed, and critical manner the ID literature. Unfortunately, the overview by Cohen is not as broad-based but it contributes a discussion of the application of general learning principles to second language learning which may interest some readers. While specific conclusions are beyond the scope of this retrospective review, we can state generally that GLLs are able to adapt to the learning situation, exploit their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses, use a number of language learning strategies, and are likely interested in the communicative value of language learning.

How does one become a GLL? Brown's books clearly advocate the kind of complex, compensatory models preferred by Skehan, and therefore seem to be the most appropriate guides for students who wish to improve their language learning skills. Rubin and Thompson list a cookbook full of good ideas but lack the balance evident in Brown's works. Many of the specific strategies offered by Cohen and Naiman *et al.* can be supported by research in linguistics and cognitive psychology, but their practicality and usefulness need to be ascertained. Finally, Skehan's work does not address this issue to an appreciable degree.

Where is theory and research on the GLL going? It is with some trepidation that we try to predict the future. Perhaps the future lies in disjunctive models that capture the compensatory relations among learner variables rather than advocacy of one end of a single dimension (e.g. low anxiety). Such models, if they can gain acceptance, may better account for the phenomena under study. Certainly learners come to a language with a complete package of attitudes, motivations, aptitudes, anxieties, and learning strategies, and it is quite likely that no one combination is best for all purposes. It would seem that a comprehensive model of language learning must account for this.

This is certainly not meant to sound a death knell for the univariate study investigating the effects of a single variable. Such studies are vital and necessary to build the knowledge base, one piece at a time. Future studies may approach the GLL with an increased sensitivity to various learner contexts and goals by studying diverse groups of language learners. These studies may then provide the fuel to propel even more comprehensive models. The ability of those models to account for the discrete facts and potentially conflicting conclusions presented by narrowly focused studies will be their ultimate test and contribution.

We have learned much about the GLL. Fortunately, there is much left to learn.

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DAVIES, ALAN, *The Native Speaker in Applied Linguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991, x + 181 pp., £14.95.

A book on the native speaker brings into focus a host of basic theoretical and empirical questions in linguistics which have only been touched upon in the literature so far, and a more elaborate and systematic treatment of the issues involved is long overdue. Alan Davies' book on *The Native Speaker in Applied Linguistics* is therefore a most welcome contribution to the