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Plenary Speech

Saying what we mean: Making a case for 'language acquisition' to become 'language development'

Diane Larsen-Freeman University of Michigan
dianelf@umich.edu

As applied linguists know very well, how we use language both constructs and reflects our understanding. It is therefore important that we use terms that do justice to our concerns. In this presentation, I suggest that a more apt designation than MULTILINGUAL *or* SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION (SLA) *is* MULTILINGUAL *or* SECOND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT (SLD). *I give a number of reasons for why I think SLD is more appropriate. Some of the reasons that I point to are well known. Others are more current, resting on a view of language from a complex systems perspective. Such a perspective rejects the commodification of language implied by the term 'acquisition', instead imbuing language with a more dynamic quality, implied by the term 'development', because it sees language as an ever-developing resource. It also acknowledges the mutable and interdependent norms of bilinguals and multilinguals. In addition, this perspective respects the fact that from a target-language vantage point, regress in learner performance is as characteristic of development as progress. Finally, and most appropriately for AILA 2011, the term* SECOND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT *fits well with the theme of the congress – harmony in diversity – because it recognizes that there is no common endpoint at which all learners arrive. For, after all, learners actively transform their linguistic world; they do not merely conform to it.*

1. Introduction

Modern-day interest in second language acquisition (SLA) began over forty years ago. A lot has been learned in these four decades. However, it may be time to re-examine its founding premise, specifically, that what is of scholarly concern is the ACQUISITION of second languages. As applied linguists know very well, how we use language both constructs and reflects our understanding, also potentially transforming it. For this reason, it is important that we use terms that do justice to our concerns as applied linguists. In this plenary, I suggest that a more apt designation for SLA is MULTILINGUAL or SECOND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT (SLD). I adopt the lens of Complexity Theory (CT) to give twelve reasons why I think SLD is a

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better way to conceptualize this academic area. Although, admittedly, some of the reasons are overlapping, I maintain that it makes a big difference to our understanding when we use 'development' rather than 'acquisition'. I will conclude by saying what the implications are for this understanding in research and teaching.

So, to begin: we applied linguists, of all people, know that how we use language makes a difference. It makes a difference in how we conceive objects of interest. I coined the term GRAMMARING, for instance, to challenge the notion of grammar as a static system with a finite number of rules. The term LEXICO-GRAMMAR (which I first encountered in the work of Michael Halliday) is a portmanteau that suggests that it is unproductive to separate lexicon from grammar. Although Halliday used the term before the advent of computer-assisted corpus analysis, corpus linguistics has certainly demonstrated the fact that grammar and the lexicon are intertwined in the production of phrasal units. When English speakers use separate lexical items in speaking of language and culture, instead of LANGACULTURE as Michael Agar (1995) proposes, we imply that each is different, overlooking the links between the two that cognitive linguists argue are there to be made. Further, Tecumseh Fitch (2011: 141) speculates that because English lacks a word for A DRIVE TO SHARE OUR THOUGHT WITH OTHERS, 'perhaps this propensity to talk has escaped detailed consideration in the literature on language evolution' (written by English speakers). Fortunately, German has the perfect term (*Mitteilungsbedürfnis*), which refers specifically to verbal communication and the basic human drive to talk and share thoughts and feelings with others (cf. Schumann's 'interactional instinct'). I could go on, but I hope I have made my point. It may seem like a simple substitution to use DEVELOPMENT in place of ACQUISITION, but there are important consequences. Language does not just reflect thought, it construes it, and with different construals, new awarenesses arise.

Before I elaborate on the theme of my central message, though, I would like to relate a brief anecdote. I do so in recognition of the fact that I may be one of the few people here who knows why the term SLA was not used right at the beginning of its short life, even though we had a model in 'first language acquisition'. I conducted an informal genealogy of the term SLA to see if I could determine when it was first used. I wasn't entirely successful in pinpointing its first use, but I did learn that the early articles that most people consider seminal, 'The significance of learners' errors' (Corder 1967) and 'Interlanguage' (Selinker 1972), did not contain the term. Corder and Selinker used 'second language learning', as did Cook in 1969, although in the same article Cook used FIRST language acquisition. Later, of course, Krashen (1982) contrasted 'second language acquisition' with 'second language learning', but that was for a different purpose. So although we had an analogue in first language acquisition, when the term 'acquisition' was initially used to refer to second languages, it was not SLA. The term used was 'L2 acquisition', and of course this term retains a currency today.

It was likely that SLA was not used originally, in North America at least, because around the same time that studies of SLA were taking off, there was an urban militant group which went by the name Simbionese Liberation Army (SLA) and which was active between 1973 and 1975 in the United States. Notorious for their bank robberies and their kidnapping of media heiress Patty Hearst, 'SLA' appeared in the newspaper headlines for months. Clearly, 'SLA' was not a good acronym with which to anoint an emerging field of study.

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In any case, after the Simbionese Liberation Army was no longer making headlines, the term 'SLA' for L2 acquisition became acceptable. However, the purpose of my talk today is to go one step further and to recommend that we replace SLA with SLD, a move that de Bot, Lowie & Verspoor (2005) also support. I do not really expect to succeed in this campaign, but as I have just mentioned, the field has already changed its name once, so why not again? In the time I have with you, I will suggest that there is a great deal to be gained by renaming the field and thereby encouraging us to think differently. I will give you twelve reasons for replacing SLA with SLD, using the lens that CT has given me.

Complexity theorists study complex dynamic systems, in which complexity is emergent, not built in. Complex systems comprise many components. As the components interact, they give rise to patterns at another level of complexity. In this way, it can be said that complex systems are self-organizing, showing the emergence of order without central direction or any sort of preformationism. The patterns are dynamic and inseparable from the environment. An example from the natural world, which might help to make these qualities clear, is that of an eddy in a stream. The whirling eddy is a pattern that emerges from water molecules as they pass through a channel of a particular dimension and a streambed of a particular contour. The water molecules that pass through the eddy are always different, yet the pattern endures in the flux, until the environment or the rate of water flow changes.

I believe that language is a complex system, one which grows and organizes itself as people use it, just as the water molecules in an eddy self-organize through the flow. As speakers interact, their language resources change. Importantly, while rules can be used to describe such resources, they are not the product of rules (Larsen-Freeman 1997).

Now with this very brief introduction to a CT-inspired view of language, let me put forth twelve reasons for replacing SLA with SLD.

2. Twelve reasons for preferring SLD to SLA

2.1 Avoiding the commodification of language

First, the term 'acquisition' implies that language is a commodity to be acquired; something that moves from the external to the internal, something that gets taken in. The word comes from the Latin *acquistionem*, the act of obtaining or getting. According to Douglas Harper's *Online Etymology Dictionary* (www.etymonline.com), its meaning of 'thing obtained' came about in the fifteenth century. Seen in this light, the end result of language learning could be conceived of as 'having something' (Larsen-Freeman 2010).

Such conceptions of language as 'a thing one has' are commonplace in applied linguistics. Linguistic knowledge is characterized as a collection of context-independent symbols, such as words, accompanied by morphosyntactic rules that specify the relationships between them. In SLA terms, it is assumed that once learners have learned an L2 word or rule, they HAVE it.

Indeed, teachers often speak of whether or not their students 'have' the past tense, for instance, and SLA researchers report acquisition orders and staged sequences of development, with the claim that one form is acquired or 'had' before another. The (at least) implicit goal

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of teaching and research from this perspective is to explain language acquisition as a process of taking in of linguistic forms as a mental act, albeit one that takes place through interaction with others. After learners acquire forms, they can then do something with them.

Of course, it is well known in SLA research that establishing when something is acquired (i.e. defined as available for use at another time) is complicated, due to the commonly observed fluctuations in performance. In recognition of the nonlinearity of the learning process, SLA researchers have gone to considerable lengths to define the point at which it could be said WITH ANY ASSURANCE that a form has been acquired. For example, soon after the founding of SLA as a separate area of inquiry, researcher Hakuta (1974) adapted Cazden et al.'s (1975) definition to his own longitudinal study of L2 morphological acquisition. In doing so, he defined his research subject's point of acquisition as the 'first of three consecutive two-week samples in which the morpheme is supplied in over 90% of obligatory contexts'. Notice not only that this definition recognizes the nonlinearity of learning (i.e. the acquisition criterion is defined in terms of three successive samples), but it also centers on consistency of native-like use over time, a point to which I will return later.

Such definitions of acquisition may be necessary, but they also lead to the 'longstanding tendency towards the objectification of language' (Dewey 2009: 67). Now, linguists' descriptions of language as an object can be helpful to educators.[1] However, as I suggested earlier, it also possible to conceive of language differently, not as an object, but as a complex dynamic system. Since language is continually changing, even the term 'target language' in language teaching is misleading because the target is always moving (Larsen-Freeman 1997). Instead, perhaps we should see language as AN EVER-DEVELOPING RESOURCE, rather than something to be acquired once and for all.

Influenced by CT and its close relative, Dynamic Systems Theory (DST), researchers have focused on an examination of the flexible, transient, dynamic aspects of learner language which emerge from use (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman 2006). Language development is no longer seen as a process of acquiring abstract rules, but as the EMERGENCE of language abilities through use in real time. Constructions emerge in learner production in a bottom-up fashion from frequently occurring patterns of language use[2] rather than as *a priori* components of fixed, autonomous, closed, and synchronic systems.

You might be asking how the patterns arise. An image of the Forbidden City, created by the Swiss/French artist Corinne Vionnet, offers a clue (see www.corinnevionnet.com/site/1-photo-opportunities.html).[3] You see that the image appears blurry. The artist created the image by superimposing many photographs of this landmark. In other words, photos, taken by different tourists, are layered one on top of another. Each tourist who has taken a photo of the Forbidden City chooses an ideal vantage point from which to capture the façade. What is remarkable is the consistency of the viewpoint, despite the fact that there is no marking on the pavement that indicates where a tourist should stand to capture the optimal image. The artist muses that tourists may be seeking perfect symmetry in their composition, or perhaps

[1] As I am the co-author of an 800-page book on English grammar for teachers, it would be hypocritical of me to suggest otherwise.
[2] This is not to suggest that frequency is the sole explanation for the emergence of new constructions in learner language.
[3] Thanks to Nick Ellis for alerting me to the website.

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they frame the photo as they do because they are socially conditioned, having seen earlier images of the Forbidden City on postcards or in travel brochures, for instance.

This perspective on the Forbidden City, a product of overlapping images, seems to me to be a good way of understanding language emergence. Each exemplar that a language user/learner encounters is similar to earlier ones, but also a bit different. On the basis of this experience, a user/learner constructs his or her own version, with similarity, but not absolute fidelity, to previous exemplars. Indeed, phoneticians have known for years that even within the same speaker, the pronunciation of the same word varies with each use (Milroy & Milroy 1999). A dynamic system is built up through iteration or recursion, just as the image of the Forbidden City is constructed from many photographs. However, as we have also seen with the image of the Forbidden City, iterations of a pattern result in an imprecise or blurry image. By analogy, in the case of language use, we can come to understand why no two speakers speak exactly the same way. Iteration is not repetition or exact copying.

Because language is a dynamic system, continuously changing, its potential is boundless, never fully realized. In CT terms, the state space of a language-using system represents the landscape of possibilities of a system (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008).

2.2 Acknowledging regress as well as progress (from the perspective of target-like use)

Acquisition is irreversible, but development, at least as the term has been used with second languages, allows for the possibility of regress from 'target-like use' as well as progress. 'By using "development" rather than "acquisition", we want to make it clear that linguistic skills can grow and decline, and that following from this, language acquisition and language attrition are equally relevant outcomes of developmental processes' (de Bot & Larsen-Freeman 2011: 6). In other words, what is used by a language learner on one occasion may not be used by the same learner on a subsequent occasion, despite its relevance. One construction may seem secure, but when a new, competing (potentially overlapping) construction is introduced, the semantic space they both occupy needs to be renegotiated and reallocated. In the meantime, the gains that appear to have been made with regard to target-like use of the first construction seem to disappear. For example, this is commonly observed in learners of English who appear to understand and to be able to use the simple past tense; however, when the present perfect is introduced, it disrupts, at least temporarily, the learners' correct use of the past tense.

Here is a trilingual example from a paper written in 2010 by Maria Mueller, one of my Austrian students at the University of Innsbruck:

A German speaker from South Tyrol (Austria), studying Italian as an L2, introduced herself:

Mi chiamo Anna e ho passato tre anni alla scuola media.
'My name is Anna and I spent three years in middle school.'

Even though at this point in time the learner's Italian utterance is grammatically correct, this doesn't mean that her language use has become fixed. After subsequently studying English, she later introduced herself this way:

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Me chiamo Anna e ho spento tre anni alla scola media.

Here, the learner has combined her L3 with the L2. The English verb 'to spend' can be used with expressions of time (e.g., 'to spend a week'); however, in Italian, the verb *spendere* only collocates with money, while time is expressed with the Italian verb *passare*. In other words, in this second introduction, the learner used the English verb for spending time and added to it the Italian past tense morpheme. Her use of Italian thus 'regressed', in that her first exemplar was more target-like while the second was a mix of Italian and English. From a traditional way of looking at learner language production, Anna's second utterance could be described as an error. From a CT perspective, however, such linguistic innovations are characteristic of both development and use. As Long (2009: 380) states, 'development is not always target-oriented'. Herdina & Jessner (2002) assert that growth and decline are normal phenomena in developing systems, both are developmental, but the direction of change depends on the impact of internal and external resources.

2.3 'Acquiring' a language implies there is an endpoint

'Acquisition' suggests completion, but 'development' is never complete. For one thing, our language resources change. For another, we use our resources differently with different individuals and also when we encounter and engage with different genres. While our language resources are not bounded, they are nevertheless shaped by the in-person, remote, and virtual interactions in which we engage. As Thelen & Bates (2003) note, the patterns are created and dissolved as tasks and environments change. Preferred patterns become stabilized through frequency of use and the strengthening of connection weights in neural networks (Hebb 1949), but they are always subject to change. As I have subtitled one of my publications, 'There is no end and there is no state' (Larsen-Freeman 2006a), contrasting with the idea of there being 'end-state' grammars.

2.4 Creating new patterns

A fourth reason for talking about development rather than acquisition is that each learner has 'the capacity to create his or her own patterns with meanings and uses (morphogenesis) and to expand the meaning potential of a given language, not just to internalize a ready-made system' (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: 116).

Whether the gatekeepers of a given language allow learners to do this, i.e. allow a neologism to endure, is of course another question – a political question of who possesses the political capital to innovate – but that is another matter, which I take up later. In any case, it can be said that

> 'language is not a fixed code' (Harris 1996) that exists independently of its users, and that is ready-made for users before they start using it, but rather it is created, or at the very least assembled from conventional units, each time it is used (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: 111).

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Typically, the innovations come in the form of analogizing from other exemplars. Speakers of English have no trouble when nouns such as 'e-mail' come into existence. They easily convert them into verbs: 'I e-mailed to see when the meeting was taking place'. Language users (and I include learners) actively transform their linguistic world; they do not just conform to it (Larsen-Freeman 2006b: 285).

That means that there is no homogeneity. We create new patterns from old by analogy when we want to make new meanings, going beyond what is present in the input (Larsen-Freeman 1997). Furthermore, we use our language resources differently with different others. There is no single homogenized language competence.

2.5 Making meaning, not merely acquiring forms

A closely related fallacy has to do with our definition of what is being acquired. Linguists' descriptions of language can undoubtedly be helpful. However, despite the early morpheme studies of SLA, in which I myself took part, I have come to understand that it is not necessarily a morpheme affixation rule that is being acquired from the learners' point of view. One reason is that learners, particularly untutored learners, do not see language as composed of linguists' units. What do such learners know about morphemes? A more important reason is that learners are intent on making meaning, and to do this, they will use whatever language resources are available to them. Not only do their resources not necessarily coincide with linguists' units, but they can also, as we have seen from corpus linguistics, be diverse forms of various lengths. For instance, it seems that the verbs to which morphemes are attached are often perceived by learners as monomorphemes or as one unit. I say this because, as I have seen from my own research in the mid-1970s, there is often a preference to use certain morphemes with certain verbs; that is, with some verbs, a morpheme is much more likely to be used than with others. Learners' performance cannot stem from acquiring form-based rules, therefore, since learners' development is uneven: much more gradient in nature.

2.6 Participating as much as acquiring

It has been argued that learners participate in language as much as they acquire it (Sfard 1998). In other words:

> Language is socially constructed [. . .]. Language use, social roles, language learning, and conscious experience are all socially situated, negotiated, scaffolded, and guided. (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman 2006: 572)

In CT/DST terms, we may speak of the [social] process of co-adaptation, in which the language resources of two or more people are modified through their interaction. As speakers interact, they modify their language, in part to align, or to show solidarity, with the other speaker, and in part to accommodate to the other's comprehension. For instance, as a child

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and its caretaker interact, their language resources are dynamically altered, as each adapts to the other. The social context thus affords the possibility for co-adaptation.

Shanker & King (2002) note that an apt metaphor for an information processing view of communication is a fax machine, where messages are transmitted from one machine to another. A CT/DST approach, on the other hand, finds the metaphor of a delicate dance more appropriate. A dance involves many different steps, each unique, and each negotiated as the dance progresses. According to Shanker & King, perfectly matched dancers display 'interactional synchrony' in which the partners are mutually attuned in an interactional process. Even such dancers, however, do not always perform seamlessly. They exhibit waves of asynchrony and synchrony, striving to adapt to their partners' motion (de Bot, Lowie & Verspoor 2007: 9).

In CT/DST terms, we would say that the person is coupled with his or her environment. Van Geert & Fischer (2009: 327) write that development applies to person–context assemblies across time. Contexts are no longer seen as independent variables, as background to the main developmental drama. Of course, it is analytically possible to separate the person from the context; however, that separation requires the untenable assumption that the two are independent (van Geert & Steenbeek 2005).

Quoting Keats, Kramsch (2002) makes a similar point. She asks 'How can we know the dancer from the dance?' From a CT perspective, we would not draw the line between a person and context because development is never a function of a person or context alone, but results as a function of their dynamic interaction (Thelen & Smith 1998: 575). Indeed, we can never have complete information about a system in that '[a] system is never optimally adapted to an environment since the process of evolution of the system will itself change the environment so that a new adaptation is needed, and so on' (Heylighen 1989: 2).

2.7 Discouraging comparisons with monolinguals

An SLA perspective may not discourage comparisons with monolinguals. As I noted earlier, it is often the case that for research purposes L2 acquisition is measured by distance from a monolingual native speaker target. Bley-Vroman (1983) cautioned against this practice thirty years ago when he argued that it was important to look at the learner's developing second language system in its own right. Nonetheless, the 'comparative fallacy', whereby learners' language production is compared to that of monolingual speakers of the language, endures to this day. Others have also objected, using such concepts as 'multicompetence' (Cook 1991), which aims to counter a deficit view of language development. In other words, rather than seeing L2 learners as somehow defective compared with native speakers, Cook feels that they should be perceived as multicompetent individuals with knowledge of more than one language in the same mind.

When we speak about the multicompetence of a plurilingual person, we are not just talking about someone who can use more than one language; we are also adopting a different image, one in which several languages and several cultures interact to create a global, complex competence – a competence, which includes the L1, or L1s, and other known languages.

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This competence changes and evolves as the person goes through new linguistic and cultural experiences. It is fluid, not static.

In her plenary address at the American Association for Applied Linguistics Conference last year, Ortega proposed that monolingualism should not be the starting point or end point or the normal point of comparison for SLA, although it usually is. Elaborating on this ideological position, Ortega (2010) stated that when SLA researchers eliminate '. . . bilinguals' other languages from analysis, the bilinguals' repertoires are made to look like "less" instead of "more". In contrast, insights into bilingualism 'counter the myth of immutable, fixed, inalienable privileges of the language(s) owned by birth . . . '. I think that conceiving of the process as developmental rather than acquisitional is more likely to discourage comparisons with monolingual performance.

2.8 Recognizing the sensitivity of a complex dynamic system

Complex systems are dependent on their initial conditions, a phenomenon known in CT as the BUTTERFLY EFFECT. What this means is that complex systems are highly sensitive: even a small difference at one point in a developmental trajectory can make a big difference as it proceeds. This is because as a learner's system develops, it 'functions as a resource for its own further development' (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: 158). In other words, language is autopoietic; it contains the seeds for its own development. Learners learn a new language by referring to what they already know, and what they already know constantly changes with meaningful language use.

Speaking in biological terms,

> Taking a [complex] systems perspective on developmental processes means, among other things, attending to the ways in which the developing organism functions as a resource for its own further development. The organism helps determine which other resources will contribute to that development, as well as the impact they will have. The roles played by the vast and heterogeneous assembly of interactants that contribute to a life-course are system-dependent and change over time. (Oyama, Griffiths & Gray 2001: 5).

2.9 Acknowledging variation

There is no one target language. Even if one claimed that the target was a standard form of language, it would be inadequate. For one thing, standard languages differ depending on their geographic location. Standard British English is different from Standard North American English, for instance. Furthermore, there is a great deal of variation in language use, that is, even within a dialect there is little homogeneity. This is certainly the case in the current historical period, where people 'shuttle rapidly between communities and communicative contexts, in both virtual and physical space' (Canagarajah 2006: 25). However, variation in language use is not only symptomatic of postmodern globalization.

Walker (2010) asserts that variation is an entirely natural phenomenon and a basic fact of language life. Indeed, without variation, languages would be unable to serve speakers' needs:

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'Heterogeneity is . . . necessary to satisfy the linguistic demands of everyday life' (Labov 1982: 17). Walker goes on to point out the ways in which variation originates, not only through the evolution prompted by geographical distance and accompanying isolation, but also though social contact, creativity, and deliberate self-renewal as languages adapt in order to meet the needs of generations of speakers. He offers the growing use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as a case in point.

Thus, as we have seen already, a language is not a single homogeneous construct to be acquired. Rather, a complex systems view sees any stability in language arising from use. Such a view 'foregrounds the centrality of variation among different speakers and their developing awareness of the choice they have in how they use patterns within a social context' (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: 116). This awareness fits much better with a developmental perspective, I believe.

2.10 Acquiring a language is not a homogeneous activity either

What does it mean to say that one has acquired another language? Caspi (2010), for example, discusses the 'receptive-productive' vocabulary gap and finds evidence for a continuum of development from a learner's perception/recognition of new words to their (spontaneous) production. In other words, in the learning of vocabulary words alone, we cannot speak of acquisition as a completed process because different facets of development proceed at different paces. Caspi explains that this unevenness is due to the interactions between levels of vocabulary knowledge and to the limited resources of the developing system.

A highly successful language learner, Elka Todeva (2009: 68), adds to this her subjective experience:

> One of the questions that I always find difficult to answer is 'How many languages do you speak?' Often asked this question, I find myself prefacing my answer with 'Well, I have formally studied quite a few languages and have a high level of comprehension in still more'. Then, as a rule, I explain that English and Russian are perhaps the only languages I speak fluently, in addition to my L1, of course. I often wish people would ask instead 'How many languages can you read in?' or 'In how many languages do you have decent listening comprehension?'

The point is, when we speak of acquisition, we must remain mindful that, just as with language itself, development is not homogeneous.

2.11 Recognizing the bi-directionality of transfer

Transfer of the patterns of one language to another by learners is not unidirectional. Indeed, McWhorter (2002) shows that English was adopted by Scandinavian invaders of the British Isles, but that it was also altered by them. Acquisition in SLA has always implied directionality from an L1 to an L2, but there is research to support the fact that interactions in the L2 can influence the L1 as well (Cenoz, Hufeisen & Jessner 2001; Cook 2003).

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Pavlenko & Jarvis (2002), for instance, found evidence of what they called 'bidirectional transfer'. The English spoken by the Russian L2 learners in their study was influenced by their native Russian, and the same L2 learners' English in turn influenced their Russian. Grosjean's claim that the nature of multicompetence is dynamic and flexible, and that bilinguals are not two monolinguals in one (Grosjean 1992), further supports this observation. As Pavlenko & Jarvis write 'the evidence of bidirectional transfer underscores the unstable nature of "native-speakerness"' (2002: 210).

Kroll, Gerfen & Dussias (2008: 109) observe that most of the evidence suggests that lexical access is nonselective in that alternatives in both languages appear to be activated in parallel in bilinguals when words are processed. Others, too, have found evidence of the influence of the L2 on the L1 in the areas of phonology (Flege 1987), rhetorical preferences (Kubota 1998), and expression of motion (Brown & Gullberg 2008); for further discussion, see Ortega (2010). In fact, this phenomenon is not limited to incipient bilinguals. Reverse interactions happen even at intermediate proficiency levels (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008).

2.12 Remembering the learner

Acquisition is applied to language; development is, too, but development can also apply to the learner.

Van Geert & Fischer (2009: 313–314) tell us that:

> Etymologically, the term 'development' means unwrapping, that is taking something out of its original wraps, thus uncovering something that is present at the beginning but concealed. As a verb *develop* appears in a transitive as well as an intransitive, more precisely reflexive, form. For instance, you can develop a photo (people used to do these things before the digital camera) or develop a real estate project. However, it is a bit odd to say that a parent develops a child. One can say that the child develops grasping, or that the child develops. In the latter case, *develop* is used as a reflexive verb, that is, a verb where the agent and the patient are the same . . . Thus, development is an internally driven process of growing that is in some way potentially present from the beginning. This is not, in any way, a form of nativism, claiming that the end state (or at least some essential core of it) is present from the beginning. *Potential* is derived from the Latin word for *power*, thus meaning that something at the beginning has the power of developing into some particular final state through transformations that unwrap the potential by making it actual.

Although I would take exception to their use of 'final state', I think that van Geert & Fischer's way of looking at development, a way that involves the learner in the developmental process, is a much more accurate portrayal of the learner's involvement than the use of the term 'acquisition'. The learner develops his/her language resources, and in so doing, the learner develops. This way of putting it seems to me to be much more respectful of the learner's agency.

3. Conclusion

As I said at the outset of this talk, I do not really expect professional discourse to change. SLA is a well-established acronym for the field, and is likely to remain so. However, there is value

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to entertaining a different term and therefore a different way of thinking, one that centers on learning and learners.

One implication, for instance, is that researchers must always remember to look at what a learner is doing from the learner's point of view. The learner may not be thinking in terms of linguists' units or linguists' descriptions. It would also mean that, seeing development as a continuous process of change over time, we could ask questions such as 'How do the moment-to-moment aspects of language learning map onto the longer timescales of development?' (Elman 2003); 'Where do novel language behaviors come from?'; 'What are the motors of change?' (Thelen & Corbetta 2002).

Furthermore, the process of development cannot truly be understood if we confine ourselves to looking at the SLA process in the usual way, which is through investigating associations between variables across populations. Nor can we solely calculate group means and believe that we are getting the full picture. Looking only at averages obscures the individual differences between learners and makes us overlook statistical 'outliers', whose behavior may be interesting and relevant.

Another implication is that assessment would take on an entirely different character. If we are not comparing the learners' performance to that of native speakers of the language, then, according to Ortega (2010),

> As much as possible, we would analyze complete repertoires of bilinguals across languages, so as to always search for 'more' rather than 'less' in bilinguality and so as to keep in sight that neither L2 nor L1 are immutable or fixed.

Further,

> We would conduct non-normative comparisons with multilingual natives and other diverse multiple-language learning profiles over the life span.

To these calls, I add we would maintain an empirical focus on experience over time, looking for periods of increased variability in a learner's production as a sign that a phase transition is about to take place. We would also look for expressions of creativity, likely identifiable more readily from a retrodictive examination (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008).

From a teaching perspective, we would come to understand that in multilingual language development, it is most important to know what the learner is entertaining about the language that is developing. After all, we don't only teach language, we teach learners. And teaching a language does not involve the transmission of a closed system of knowledge. Learners are not engaged in simply learning fixed forms or sentences, but rather in learning to adapt their behavior to an increasingly complex environment.

Furthermore, learners learn to use language, like the steps in a dance, through repeated activity in slightly different situations. Learning is not a linear, additive process, but an iterative one. Linguistic structures do not only symbolize reality; they are used to actively construct reality in interaction with others (Kramsch & Whiteside 2008).

We would also need to teach language as the meaning-making resource it is, teaching reasons as much as rules (Larsen-Freeman 2003). If students understand why something

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functions the way that it does in a language – the reason behind the form – they are much more empowered to go beyond the given to create something anew.

Finally, and most appropriately for AILA 2011, the term SECOND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT fits well with the theme of our congress – harmony in diversity – because it recognizes that there is no common endpoint at which all learners arrive. It is in the variation that strength resides. This variation is a sign of our uniqueness, but is also a stimulus for growth. For after all, as I said earlier, learners/users of a language actively transform their linguistic world; they do not merely conform to it. And this, we do together.

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DIANE LARSEN-FREEMAN is Professor Emerita of Education, Professor Emerita of Linguistics, and Research Scientist Emerita at the University of Michigan. She is also a Visiting Professor of Educational Linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania. She has published widely in the areas of English linguistics, second language development, language teaching, language teacher education, and Complexity Theory.

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