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A Passage in Time

In 1975 (Vol. 8.4, 201–218), **S. P. Corder**, during the course of his state-of-the-art review *Error analysis, interlanguage and second language acquisition*, focused on the recent literature on simplified linguistic systems and suggested that research had shown that interlanguage systems often resemble other simple codes such as pidgins or creoles '. . .now recognized to bear considerable resemblance to each other whatever their linguistic provenance' (p. 211). He then went on to suggest that the study of pidginisation and creolisation may help us better understand the L2 learning process.

> Interlanguages and pidgins are not the only simple codes which we meet. Ferguson (1971) draws attention to the fact that language communities regularly use institutionalised and stereotyped codes for special communicative functions which are also simple in the same sense, and that these codes resemble, structurally, interlanguage systems. Such reduced codes as foreigner-talk (Ferguson, 1975) or baby-talk (Ferguson, 1964) are found in many language communities. Corder (1975) has speculated that we do not in fact learn these codes anew as separate systems in later life but that they represent part of every native speaker's competence and represent, as it were, fossilised stages in the progressive elaboration of his knowledge of his mother tongue, available to him for use on socially approved occasions. Thus, in a sense, the whole of a person's linguistic development remains available to him all his life, and is thus part of his knowledge of language when he comes to learn a second language. The starting point of learning a second language is thus not necessarily the fully complex adult code of his mother tongue but might be one of its simpler codes. Widdowson (1975) makes a similar point when he says that 'simplification is a process whereby a language user adjusts his behaviour in the interests of communicative effectiveness'. If this is true of the fully mature native speaker, then it may well be true of learners and account for the apparent regressions to earlier (simpler) approximative systems under the pressure of communicative needs noted by Selinker (1972). As Valdman (1975) has pointed out, this throws doubt on the whole validity of attempting to reconstruct a learner's approximative system on the basis of his recorded utterances and indeed on the usefulness of the systematic distinction between competence and performance insisted upon by Chomsky.

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