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Multilingual Communication and Language Acquisition: New Research Directions

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we outline the differences between a monolingual and multilingual orientation to language and language acquisition. The increasing contact between languages in the context of globalization motivates such a shift of paradigms. Multilingual communicative practices have remained vibrant in non-western communities for a long time. We draw from theorizations of such communication in these communities and connect them to ongoing empirical studies on negotiation strategies in lingua franca English interactions to develop the multilingual paradigm. We conclude by outlining the questions and issues that need further research in order to develop the multilingual orientation to language acquisition.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has thrust communities into greater contact with each other and compelled us to understand multilingual communication. Developments such as diaspora communities, transnational relations, migration, and digital communication have created more multilingual interactions. As we see the way people negotiate language relationships and develop proficiencies in diverse languages, we begin to realize that traditional models of language acquisition and competence lack the capacity to explain contemporary experiences. Less known scholarship on how language relationships and learning work in nonwestern communities suggests that what we see around us now is not new. Such forms of multilingual contact and acquisition are characteristic of other multilingual communities from precolonial and/or premodern times. The assumptions modern linguistics is based on reflect homogeneity and monolingualism, and fail to take account of multilingual realities in diverse contexts and communities. The search is on to develop more complex models that explain not only the ways in which nonwestern/multilingual communities acquire language competence, but how all of us are compelled to learn and use languages in late modernity. In this article, we articulate the emerging realizations about multilingual communication, the needed shifts in language acquisition, the new questions that need further exploration, as well as review exemplary studies that offer useful insights.

MULTILINGUAL COMMUNICATION

In Non-Western Communities

Before we explore how language learning works in multilingual contexts, it is important to understand how communication works in multilingual communities. For important reasons to be discussed below, modern linguistics has posited a model of monolingual communication as the norm for its theorization. For example, Chomsky assumed linguistic competence as intuitive, monolingual, and developing in a homogeneous community. As many have noted, this is an idealization that does not exist in many communities in the world, let alone in the West. How do people communicate in communities which are linguistically heterogeneous?

Indian linguist Khubchandani (1997) has provided a book-length treatment of the way communication works in South Asia. His insights are supported by other linguists from the region (Annamalai, 2001; Bright, 1984; Bhatia & Ritchie, 2004; Mohanty, 2006). Khubchandani's depiction challenges many of the assumptions we take for granted in our field. He argues that the orientation to community is different from those in the West. Community for South Asians is not based on a shared language or culture. The theorization of speech community as based on shared language makes the notion of community in our field homogeneous. For South Asians, community is based on shared space. Therefore, it can accommodate many language groups living in the same geographical space. Such communities assume diversity and contact. Language diversity is the norm and not the exception in non-western communities.

In such communities, people are always open to negotiating diverse languages in their everyday public life. Their shared space will typically feature dozens of languages in every interaction. They do not assume that they will meet people who speak their own language most of the time. This mind-set prepares them for negotiating different languages as a fact of life. When they meet a person from another language group, furthermore, they do not look for a common language that will facilitate their interaction. In most cases, such a search will be futile so they usually start the interaction in their own languages, but both parties retain their own preferred codes in the conversation. Such a practice makes us wonder how communication is possible when no common code is shared.

What enables people to communicate is not a shared grammar, but communicative practices and strategies that are used to negotiate their language differences. Furthermore, these strategies are not a form of knowledge or cognitive competence, but a form of resourcefulness that speakers employ in the unpredictable communicative situations they encounter. Two of the strategies Khubchandani identifies are serendipity and synergy: "Individuals in such societies acquire more *synergy* (i.e., putting forth one's own efforts) and *serendipity* (i.e., accepting the other on his/her own terms, being open to unexpectedness), and develop positive attitudes to variations in speech (to the extent of even appropriating deviations as the norm in the lingua franca), in the process of 'coming out' from their own language-codes to a neutral ground" (p. 94). What this means is that interlocutors are always open to codes they are not familiar with in their conversations (serendipity). To achieve intelligibility and communication in this context of diversity, they aim to find a common ground between the codes and resources to achieve their interests (synergy).

When these strategies are adopted, even deviations can become norms (as Khubchandani mentions in the quote above). The speakers negotiate their differences to construct norms that work for them in their conversation. These are intersubjective norms; they are co-constructed.

While these norms will work in that particular context, they may not work for another set of communicators. Norms have to be co-constructed in the local context, as befits their codes and purposes. In this sense, preconstructed grammar will not help in multilingual contact situations. The speakers have to co-construct the grammar that will be operational in their interaction. Grammar, therefore, is emergent in these contexts.

The norms that are thus operational in a multilingual interaction are hybrid, and accommodate the languages the different persons bring to the interaction. Such hybrid codes have the possibility of becoming forms of pidgins and creoles over time. Khubchandani mentions that there are many such hybrid languages in South Asia, whose identities and origins are difficult to locate as they have gone through deep mixing. While in other communities language loyalties and ideologies will lead to these codes becoming new and separate languages in their own right, in South Asia they are kept open for further negotiation, appropriation, and hybridization.

To achieve communication out of such diversity, multilinguals also bring certain attitudes that are helpful. They are always consensus-oriented and mutually supportive to achieve their shared goals. Since there are always important social objectives to be accomplished, multilinguals do not let language differences hinder their objectives. They work around them with great equanimity. They also bring a different orientation to communication from monolinguals. They do not depend only on the verbal medium to accomplish intelligibility. Communication involves using ecology as a resource; the objects in the setting, the communicative context, the body, and paralinguistic cues all help in the communication. Khubchandani argues that language in the region is "regarded as a non-autonomous device, communicating in symphony with other non-linguistic devices; its full significance can be explicated only from the imperatives of context and communicative tasks" (p. 40). More importantly, even intuition and extra-sensory perception contribute to meaning-making. Communication is not purely a cerebral or rational activity.

In such communities, language acquisition also works differently. Since the languages one will confront in any one situation cannot be predicted, interlocutors cannot go readily armed with the codes they need for an interaction. Therefore, in such communities, language learning and language use work together. People learn the language as they use them. They decode the other's grammar as they interact, make inferences about the other's language system, and take them into account as they formulate their own utterances. Based on her observations of multilinguals, House (2003) argues that "all these strategies seem to show that ELF [English lingua franca] users are competent enough to be able to monitor each others' moves at a high level of awareness" (p. 559).

The objective of language learning is also different for multilinguals. They do not aim to master a language for all purposes and functions. They master the codes that are sufficient for the functions they want that language to perform. There is no need to develop proficiency in all the languages for the same purposes—or the same language for all purposes. Multilinguals adopt different codes for different contexts and objectives. From this perspective, the objective of their acquisition is repertoire building rather than total competence in individual languages. Multilinguals prefer to develop a range of codes for a range of purposes.

English in Contact Situations

The picture Khubchandani presents of multilingual communication in non-western communities is confirmed by the burgeoning research on lingua franca English (LFE) in diverse communities (see, for a state-of-the-art, Seidlhofer, 2004; Canagarajah, 2006). We find that multilinguals who use English for contact purposes do not adopt a common code (i.e., standard British or American English). They start with their own codes and adopt negotiation strategies to achieve intelligibility. In this sense, LFE is a locally achieved practice. The speakers adopt suitable strategies to construct intersubjective norms that are sufficient to achieve their communicative objectives.

The research on LFE helps fill in some of the gaps in scholarship from precolonial multilingual communities. Since precolonial communication cannot be empirically observed now, and scholarship on those practices has been ignored or suppressed by mainstream linguistics, the descriptions largely derive from archival research. To know more about the negotiation strategies and communicative practices that facilitate communication, we have to directly observe and empirically analyze interactions. The strategies we derive from LFE research is a good starting point. They help us develop a more representative taxonomy and a list of strategies that multilinguals adopt in their interactions.

One of the earliest strategies to emerge in LFE was documented by Firth (1996). In what he calls the "let it pass" principle, multilinguals do not disturb the flow of communication when one encounters a word or structure that deviates from one's norms or turns out to be unintelligible. The person waits patiently for further occurrences of the item, so that with more clues or additional opportunities to renegotiate it, he or she constructs meaning. Native English Speakers (NES), on the other hand, may judge the item immediately as ungrammatical, censure it, or not display the patience and tolerance to wait for clarification, or be supportive of the other to work collaboratively for meaning. Such responses will lead to a breakdown in communication.

Other pragmatic strategies help multilinguals negotiate their variable form. Amazingly, "misunderstandings are not frequent in ELF interactions" according to Seidlhofer (2004, p. 218). This is achieved because "when they do occur, they tend to be resolved either by topic change, or, less often, by overt negotiation using communication strategies such as rephrasing and repetition" (p. 218). Topic change, rephrasing, and repetition are well-known strategies in sociolinguistics; they come in handy for multilinguals when they want to repair any potential communication breakdown.

Certain strategies are calculated to achieve a kind of suspension of expectations regarding norms. Therefore, when forms from a different language or English variety surfaces, they do not interfere negatively in multilingual encounters. Planken (2005) describes how this condition is achieved in inter-cultural business communication among Scandinavian nationals. She observes that the participants do some preparatory work through their initial turns to create a third space—"a no-man's-land" (Planken, 2005, p. 397) between the divergent languages and cultures—to negotiate LFE on equal terms. Through reflexive comments on their own communicative practices, self-deprecating humor, and the evocation of their shared non-nativeness, they distance themselves from their own norms and activate flexible practices that facilitate communication. As long as a certain threshold of understanding is obtained, interlocutors seem to overlook idiosyncrasies.

Part of these pragmatic resources are discourse strategies (at the supra-sentential level) to accommodate local variants. Meierkord (2004) finds that though individuals retain the

characteristics of their own English varieties, they facilitate communication through syntactic strategies like segmentation (involving utterances that are shortened into clausal or phrasal segments which form the basic informational units) and regularization (involving the movement of focused information to the front of the utterance). These strategies take into account the need for the speaker to process codes that are strange to them. Speakers monitor their syntax to facilitate intelligibility and communication across differences.

House (2003) demonstrates how students of English from different countries bring pragmatic strategies valued in their own communities to facilitate communication with outsiders. These are, paradoxically, culture-specific strategies that complement intercultural communication. For example, House found that "Asian participants employ topic management strategies in a striking way, recycling a specific topic regardless of where and how the discourse had developed at any particular point" (p. 567). This discourse of "parallel monologues" actually helps nonproficient English speakers, as it enables them to focus on each move as if it were a fresh topic. In the three strategies House describes, while the local cultural ways of interacting are alive in the English of Asians, they still serve to ensure intelligibility and communication with outsiders. This communication is possible because the other also brings his or her own strategies to negotiate these culture-specific conventions. Participants, then, "do their own thing," but still communicate with each other. Not uniformity, but alignment is more important for such communication. Each brings his or her own language resources to find a strategic fit with the participants and purpose of a context.

Perhaps the principle behind all these strategies is alignment. Multilinguals cannot come ready with all the codes they need for an encounter. That expectation will never be fulfilled as multilingual communities feature a dizzying array of codes, often unpredictable in an encounter. What multilinguals aim to achieve therefore is an alignment of the language resources they have with the purposes in question. Successful communication depends on aligning the linguistic resources to the social, situational, and physical features operative in a context (Kramsch, 2002). Therefore, language acquisition involves learning how to align one's language resources to one's needs and situations, rather than aiming to achieve a target-level of competence. Atkinson, Churchill, Nishino and Okada (2007) define alignment as "the means by which human actors *dynamically adapt to*—that is, flexibly depend on, integrate with, and construct—the ever-changing mind-body-world environments posited by sociocognitive theory. In other words, alignment takes place not just between human beings, but also between human beings and their social and physical environments" (emphasis in original, p. 171).

While these insights help us greatly in understanding how multilingual communication works, we have only scratched the surface so far. We need more research on the strategies multilinguals employ to negotiate language differences. The studies in this special issue offer further insights into the communicative and learning strategies of multilinguals. We move now to consider the implications of such communicative practices for language acquisition.

Toward a Synthesis

The above description of how communication works in multilingual communities and in contact situations suggests a different orientation to language:

- For multilinguals, languages are always in contact and mutually influence each other. From this perspective, the separation of languages with different labels is a construct of

traditional linguists; it is an ideological act of claiming ownership over certain codes in order to identify one's community and identity (Pennycook, 2010);

- Multilingual users treat all the codes in their repertoire as a continuum, and not separated from each other; they draw from all of them for their communication (Garcia, 2009);

- Multilinguals do not have separate competences for separately labeled languages (as it is assumed by traditional linguistics), but an integrated competence that is different in kind (not just degree) from monolingual competence;

- For multilinguals, languages are not necessarily at war with each other; they complement each other in communication. Therefore, we have to reconsider the dominant understanding that one language negatively "interferes" in the use of another. The traces of one language on the other are creative, enabling, and offer possibilities for voice;

- Texts and talk do not feature one language at a time; heteroglossic, they are intermeshed and mediated by diverse codes;

- In the midst of such diversity, meaning does not arise from resorting to a common grammatical system, but through negotiation practices in local situations;

- Though stable systems of language (in the form of registers, genres, and dialects) do evolve from local language practices, they are always open to renegotiation and reconstruction as multilinguals mix other codes in their repertoire for voice.

From this perspective, we have to question some distinctions made in mainstream linguistics and SLA that are overly influenced by monolingual orientations to communication. In order to understand language acquisition in multilingual communities, we have to reconsider these binaries and move towards a paradigm shift. We list the binaries below:

Monolingual versus multilingual acquisition: Mainstream linguistics treats learning as taking place one language at a time, separately for each, in homogeneous environments, influenced by the Chomskyan model. Such an assumption enables scholars to study acquisition in clinically controlled environments where the input can be carefully monitored to observe the process of acquisition and output. However, this is an artificial situation. In everyday life, multilinguals learn languages when all of them are mixed in their environment. They are able to develop their competence in combination with different codes when the stimuli are mixed. Also, it appears as if their competence is not separated for different languages; they are integrated (Cook, 1999). Cook's notion of multicompetence accommodates the notion that the language proficiency of multilinguals is qualitatively different from that of monolinguals (see also Grosjean, 1989). Multilinguals multitask and parallel process the other codes in their repertoire even when they use one of their codes.

Grammar versus pragmatics: The traditional distinction between competence and performance has given more significance to grammar in language learning and communication. Grammar is deep structure and finds realization in social life. Pragmatics turns out to be a factor exterior to language in some traditional models. We are now moving to a position where performance cannot be separated from grammar. In fact, from what we see of multilingual communities, pragmatic strategies enable one to communicate successfully irrespective of the level of grammatical proficiency. Negotiation strategies can even reconstruct grammatical

norms. We have to give more importance to the role of interactional practices and negotiation strategies in language competence and acquisition, yet there are other reasons why we cannot assume that grammatical knowledge constitutes everything about language ability. In multilingual communities, grammar is emergent. Therefore, learners should not think that they can achieve a finite level of grammatical knowledge that can help them through communication.

Cognition versus context: The same binary competence/performance also gives importance to cognition over the material world and social context in language acquisition. This bias goes back to the Cartesian primacy given to mind over body and matter. Influenced by this thinking, traditional linguistics posits that we formulate and store language norms detached from the situations and environment in which they are embedded. Also, learning is considered more effective when it takes place separately from the contexts where multiple languages, communicative modalities, and environmental influences are at play. However, we see in multilingual communities that the ecology is actively utilized in communication. We have to consider how ecological information is coded in our cognition. Scholars are formulating sociocognitive models for language acquisition that go beyond this binary (Atkinson et al., 2007; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Individual versus community: Are language learning and use orchestrated primarily by the individual even when they occur through interaction? What we see in multilingual communities is that communication and acquisition take place in collaboration with others, through active negotiation, as an inter-subjective practice. In what is labeled the social turn in language acquisition (Block, 2003), scholars are considering how language acquisition is considerably shaped by issues of identity, community, and socioeconomic investments (Norton, 2000). Furthermore, language competence should accommodate the ability to collaborate with others in communication and joint production of meaning. From this perspective, if there is a communication breakdown, it is not the fault of one person alone, but all the parties in the interaction.

Determinism versus agency: Traditional linguistics places learners at the mercy of grammar and discourse for communication. Acquiring mastery over a grammatical system (defined as already existing outside the speaker) is treated as the goal of language acquisition. To the extent that the learner approximates the preconstructed form, he or she is treated as proficient in the language. Such an orientation is deterministic and fails to give agency to learners. What we find in multilingual communities is that subjects shape language to suit their purposes. We have to be open to the new norms and meanings constructed by learners. We have to give agency for learners to creatively appropriate the language according to their own values and interests. From this perspective, deviation from norms may not be a sign of incompetence, but creativity and agency.

Fixity versus fluidity: What is the place of deviation, variation, and alteration in language, and can a system lack boundedness? Traditional linguistics defines languages as a closed system. The system of a language is treated as separate from other languages, and from other modalities of communication and ecological factors. Treating language acquisition as a mastery of this closed language system reduces the complexity of communication. From modernity and structuralism, linguistics inherits models of control, predictability, and mastery. Closed systems are amenable to control. Similarly, the process of language acquisition is treated as linear, cumulative, unidirectional, and monodimensional in traditional SLA. Scholars are now open to the possibility that language acquisition involves orchestrating multiple competencies together—that is, social, cultural, and cognitive as well as linguistic (Larsen-Freeman, 2002; Kramsch,

2002). Also, acquisition does not involve a linear progression from L1 to L2, with the first language influencing the second, or one placed on top of the other without implications for either. We are now open to the possibility of recursive language acquisition, where the language learnt later shapes the competence of the earlier languages, and both mutually influence each other to move in new directions (Garcia, 2009). Scholars are now adopting models such as complexity theory (Larsen-Freeman, 2002) to understand how localized changes in acquisition can have far reaching implications for competence.

There are other common sense constructs in language acquisition that also need to be questioned when we change our theoretical perspectives. Consider the following distinctions: *learner* versus *user*. Learners are supposed to be developmental and not fully fledged users of a language. SLA does not acknowledge the possibility that learners may be using the language for functional purposes to achieve their objectives, regardless of the level of competence they possess. At what point does one stop being a learner and become a user? Is there a threshold level of proficiency one has to attain before he/she can be considered a user? What we find from multilingual communities is that people use diverse languages in functional ways even if they have only limited contact with or exposure to the language. Notions such as performativity and crossing acknowledge the fact that in the context of migration and globalization, people can employ language tokens for issues of identity and community even when they do not have advanced competence in a language (Rampton, 2008). These realities make us question this distinction.

Nonnative versus *native:* This distinction comes loaded with a lot of biased assumptions that may not hold for multilingual communities. The construct assumes that native speaker norms are what nonnatives are trying to approximate. However, multilinguals are not trying to mimic native speakers; they are trying to be good multilinguals whose identities relate to their own communities. Therefore, multilinguals are not interested in mastering native speaker norms, but appropriating the language to suit their own values and interests. Furthermore, multilinguals relate to all the languages in their repertoire as part of an integrated continuum. They will not be able to classify certain languages in their repertoire as less significant to be classified as second or third languages. Also, subjects in multilingual communities are socialized into all their languages equally that they will not be able to consider one language as coming first in terms of time of acquisition, sequence of acquisition, or level of competence. It must also be noted that the label "nonnative" casts a permanent status of deficiency for multilingual subjects such that their creative and functional uses of the language are never given legitimacy by native speakers. The distinction thus enables native speakers to enjoy more power in language and professional relationships, ignoring the fact that multilinguals bring certain resources and strengths for language use and acquisition that monolinguals may not possess.

Interlanguage versus *target language:* Multilingual speakers are not moving toward someone else's target; they are constructing their own norms. It is meaningless to measure the distance of multilinguals from the language system of native speakers when they are not aiming to master their norms. Besides, we have to question the assumption in the interlanguage concept that there are gradations, linear progression, and an endpoint to be achieved in language learning. We have seen that each multilingual interaction is a unique social accomplishment, with its own set of participants and languages, raising unique challenges for negotiation. It may not be the case that one communicative act contributes to the other and so on, leading to a cumulative line of progression. Since the contexts are so variable and unpredictable, it is not possible to say that a target can be reached for perfect or competent multilingual proficiency. If at all, we can speak

of achieving a type of language awareness and competence that can help handle diverse communicative situations. However, it is possible that multilinguals already come with this kind of competence, and do not wait for language learning to develop it. In this sense, multilingual proficiency has to be granted relatively greater agency, at least analogous to the agency attributed to the development in one's first language in certain generativist models. The multilingual speaker comes with the competence—in many respects, more advanced than that of the child because of the years of multilingual practice enjoyed in their local communities—which is then honed through actual interactions. This development does not have to be marked by miscommunication or deficient usage.

TOWARD A PARADIGM SHIFT

What we see above about language use and acquisition in multilingual contexts suggests that we have to relate to the study of language differently from what we have done hitherto. It is becoming evident that the way we have been studying language is heavily influenced by monolingual orientations that are not relevant to any communicative situation anywhere. Even western communities are multilingual. They have not been introduced to multilingualism only in the context of late modernity and its attendant developments of migration and transnational relationships. As Dorian (2004) argues, monolingualism is a recent invention even in the West: "Monolingualism, now usually considered the unmarked condition by members of the dominant linguistic group in modern nation-states, was in all likelihood less prevalent before the rise of the nation-state gave special sanction to it" (p. 438). The diverse languages and multilingual encounters in Western communities have been ignored in scholarship and, in some cases, socially suppressed.

There are disciplinary biases in our field that also lead to the oversight of multilingual paradigms. Many point to Saussurean linguistics and the structuralist movement as sharing the blame for the narrowing of perspectives (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). For these disciplinary movements, language is defined as a thing in itself, an objective, identifiable product. Therefore, language as a practice and the ways it works in social action or is learnt in everyday contexts becomes irrelevant. Moreover, language is treated as form, a tightly knit structure. Therefore, its symbiotic relationship with ecological contexts has been cut off. Also, the contact between different language systems and the way they shape each system are treated as irrelevant. It is appropriate that the Norwegian scholar of contact linguistics, Haugan (1972), considers the basic assumptions of linguistics as stuck in an infantile stage: "The concept of language as a rigid, monolithic structure is false, even if it has proved to be a useful fiction in the development of linguistics. It is the kind of simplification that is necessary at a certain stage of a science, but which can now be replaced by more sophisticated models" (p. 325). However, the assumptions of the dominant models do not serve only academic convenience. Postcolonial and subaltern scholars consider knowledge as interested (Pennycook, 2001; Makoni, 2002). In this sense, the dominant models of linguistics confirm the ideology of monolingual states and identities held by privileged communities in the West. Could there be vested interests in holding on to monolingual paradigms?

We articulate in Figure 1 the changes that we need in our disciplinary discourse in order to accommodate multilingual language acquisition. Though these shifts should be evident from the discussion above, we can briefly outline them here. We have to start describing the

"grammar" of mixed languages, rather than separated languages, as communication always involves languages in contact. Hybridity is not a special or exceptional condition. It is the state in which languages always function. We have to also move away from descriptions of grammar as being complete and static. Since speakers are always co-constructing norms creatively in their interactions, we have to consider grammar as always emergent in practice (along the lines articulated by Hopper, 1987).

Figure 1. Traditional Monolingualism Paradigm vs. Emergent Multilingual Paradigm

Traditional Paradigm	Emergent Paradigm
• Systematized language	• Mixed languages
• Predefined grammar	• Emergent grammar
• Formal competence	• Everyday performance
• Individual enterprise	• Social practice
• Grammar	• Pragmatics
• Rules of correctness	• Strategies of negotiation
• Product	• Practice
• Unitary language system	• Language awareness
• Joining a community	• Shuttling between communities
• "target language"	• Repertoire
• Homogeneous speech community	• Heterogeneous community
• Language	• Ecology
• Verbal	• Multimodal
• Rational process	• Multisensory experience
• Cognition	• Context
• Positivistic models	• Open models
• Linear models	• Dynamic, complex systems

We have to focus on everyday performance when we consider the facility of someone to use a language. The current focus on formal competence overlooks the dexterity speakers need to negotiate interactions with diverse speakers who bring different grammatical systems for communication. In this sense, the ability to communicate is not purely an individual accomplishment. It is a collaborative accomplishment in situations of local practice. From this point of view, we have to go beyond grammatical competence to consider how pragmatic strategies enable one to utilize and shape the grammatical knowledge they have for their purposes. Such a consideration will take us beyond a focus on correctness to strategies of negotiation. Depending on one's strategies, one can make "deviations as the norm" in Khubchandani's terms (1997, p. 94). What is incorrect can become correct depending on one's strategies of negotiation. This also implies that we would not look at language as a product, but a form of social practice. To negotiate in this fashion, language awareness is more helpful rather than the mastery of the grammatical system of separate languages. As Seidlhofer (2004) pithily remarked, teaching Language is more useful for such multilingual acquisition, rather than teaching languages.

The objectives of language acquisition also become different. Whereas joining a target community was the objective of language acquisition traditionally, in the multilingual orientation one focuses on shuttling between communities with fluidity and ease. In fact, the multilingual paradigm does not perceive communities as homogeneous, but in themselves diverse and

requiring competence in different codes for survival. For this purpose, mastery of a particular target language is useless. What one needs is repertoire building. As we discussed earlier, multilinguals develop the competencies they need for different functions in different languages rather than replicating the competence in all languages for all purposes.

We must also expand our orientation to communication in order to accommodate multilingual communication. We have to go beyond a focus on the verbal system to consider other modalities of communication. We have to even consider including ecological factors for the way they facilitate communication. From this perspective, using a language is not purely a rational activity, as traditional linguistics sometimes makes it appear. Language use is a multisensory process. Therefore, we have to go beyond a reliance on cognition as the motor for communication and consider the centrality of material factors for the way they shape language and communication. Such considerations will lead us to think of language as an open system that is fluid, evolving, and hybrid, in contact with diverse languages, ecology, and the material world. The focus on each language as a closed system, made up purely of grammatical elements, misses the complexity of communication.

Work toward alternative models of language acquisition should not ignore or suppress the previously dominant constructs such as form, cognition, and the individual; these constructs should get redefined as hybrid and fluid, and situated in a more socially embedded, ecologically sensitive, and interactionally open model. Several new theoretical attempts in language acquisition are progressing in the above directions. One thinks of complexity theory (Larsen-Freeman, 2002), activity theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), ecological models (Hornberger, 2003), communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), and phenomenology (Kramsch, 2002). Though there are considerable differences between them, there are also similarities which show attempts to go beyond the traditional models of language learning. All these approaches treat

- Competence as an adaptive response of finding equilibrium between one's resources and the factors in the context (participants, objectives, situational details), rather than a cognitive mastery of rational control;
- Cognition as working in context, in situ, distributed across diverse participants and social actors;
- Proficiency as not applying mental rules to situations, but aligning one's resources to situational demands, and shaping the environment to match the language resources one brings.

We have to see how these models will shape scholarship and research in more constructive directions in the years to come.

IN THIS ISSUE

The articles in this special-topic issue explore diverse issues in multilingual language learning and acquisition. Among the four articles, we have one on policy, two on the acquisition of language in different skill contexts (reading and writing), and a fourth article on pedagogical implications.

In the first article, Kiernan considers the irony of a multicultural country adopting a monolingualist language-in-education policy. She argues that the rich multilingual repertoires of students in Canada are restricted to their homes and not brought into the classroom to play a productive role in their education. Her article shows the ways in which language-in-education policies are lagging behind status planning activities in many countries. While many communities are making provisions to accommodate the emergent multilingualism in the context of globalization and migration, schools still tend to adopt restrictive pedagogies. As a result, they are unable to benefit from the creative modes of language acquisition and communicative practices students display outside the classroom.

In the next article, Alsheik studies the reading strategies of students in three languages. His findings confirm the view that multilinguals bring complex strategies of acquisition by virtue of their linguistic status. Alsheik shows that his three subjects display a high awareness of their strategies. Scholars have theorized that the ability to shuttle across diverse languages creates stronger language awareness and more complex metacognitive skills (House, 2003). Alsheik also shows that the readers deploy more reading strategies in their second and third language than in their first language. This finding suggests that learners activate their strategies more in the context of new linguistic challenges. Strategies come to their help when grammatical competence is inadequate. Alsheik goes on to show that the more proficient readers deploy a wider range of strategies than the least proficient reader who relies purely on translation. This finding could mean that strategies are indeed beneficial in developing competence in multiple languages. There does seem to be an incremental relationship between strategies and multilingual competence.

The article by Depew focuses on the writing strategies of second language students in social media sites on the Internet. These new sites of language use create more opportunities for multilingual interaction and language creativity. Such alternative and unconventional sites for learning also provide more options for language acquisition by enabling student to use multiple modalities to respond to various rhetorical situations. Whereas classroom contexts impose monolingual norms and deficient identities on students, communicative sites such as the Internet liberate them to negotiate language freely and develop their resources without inhibitions. Though Depew's students are considered developmental, they show remarkable rhetorical awareness in switching registers, representing identities, and negotiating meanings in English. Such examples demonstrate the multilingual communicative strategy of focusing on practices and letting grammar take care of itself. The study shows that issues of identity development and representation have powerful influences on language development. Social media sites connect students into an imagined community that motivates them to negotiate their language differences effectively. Other scholars like Lam (2004) have also pointed out how on the Internet multilingual youth bond as members of a global English speaking community and negotiate the language in their own terms.

In the final article, Warford demonstrates the advantages of a narrative pedagogy for developing competence in heritage languages. What his article shows is the power of contextualized holistic learning for language acquisition. While the narrative provides a context for language, it also encourages conversation which facilitates language negotiations in the classroom. While the interlocutors (teachers and students) focus on problem solving and exploration of content in the narratives, language development takes care of itself. Warford explains this pedagogy in terms of Vygotsky and others who focus on the semantic potential of the language. As students negotiate language in the context of emotionally rich stories, props to

understand the content, and the gestures and expressions of people who narrate or dramatize them, learning also becomes multimodal. The pedagogy offers one way in which the lessons of multilingual acquisition can be operationalized in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

While the contributions to this volume move us further along in understanding multilingual language acquisition, we conclude by identifying new areas in which more research is needed. We need to learn more about the negotiation strategies multilinguals employ to manage communication and learning. As we focus more on pragmatics rather than grammar, our knowledge of strategies needs to advance further. We need more studies on everyday contexts of language acquisition and use. Language acquisition studies still tend to be classroom based. The rich learning strategies people adopt in everyday contexts go unstudied. As we learn that classroom learning strategies may not fully reflect the acquisition in everyday communicative contexts, we must start studying interactions outside. On that note, there are many unconventional and nontraditional contexts of language use and acquisition that go unstudied. For example, conversations in call centers between native English clients and multilingual service agents from India, Philippines, or China is a rich source of multilingual communication. Similarly, the interactions between people from diverse communities in chat rooms, Facebook, and other digital environments need more attention. We also need more emic studies by multilingual subjects who are in the middle of these negotiations. The observations of researchers from outside these interactions do not always capture the subtle negotiations that participants engage in (as Firth & Wagner, 1997 argued long time ago). Narrative studies, reflective commentary, and self-report data can usefully complement the studies by researchers. Most of all, studies from communities outside the academic and scholarly center are needed to pluralize our knowledge on language acquisition. We need more voices from the periphery to offer more insights into how language use and acquisition have been taking place so effectively there from many years before modernity.

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