10

Social dimensions of L2 learning

As we noted at the beginning of Chapter 4, the field of SLA during the 1980s and 1990s was largely driven by the quest to understand the interaction of learner-internal and learner-external variables, guided by the cognitive-interactionist framework that has its roots in Piagetian developmental psychology. The goal of this research is to identify universal patterns that should be largely true of any human who learns an additional language and the underlying belief is that universal patterns can help us explain L2 learning as a general phenomenon. Beginning in the mid-1990s, however, several SLA researchers felt dissatisfied with this state of affairs and opened up new venues for SLA thought (Hall, 1993; van Lier, 1994; Block, 1996; Lantolf, 1996; Firth and Wagner, 1997). Attuning to the spirit of the times, which in many other human and social sciences had for some time been shaped by a social turn, these critics suggested that the nature of reality was social and fundamentally unknowable and that a pursuit of the particular, and not the general, would be a better disciplinary strategy to illuminate complex human problems, such as additional language learning. Other scholars from the wider field of applied linguistics also pointed at the paucity of social theorizing that characterized SLA work (Rampton, 1990; Sridhar, 1994; Norton Peirce, 1995). This increasing disciplinary awareness set forth a process of intellectual crises and reconceptualization that has yet to be completed, but that was characterized in the early twenty-first century as 'the social turn in SLA' (Block, 2003). By now, diverse lines of work in the field have begun to harvest a social understanding of the very same L2 learning phenomena that others have been trying to explain through universal principles and psychological–individual constructs.

This chapter, which is also the final one in the book, offers a bird's-eye view of the efforts associated with the social turn in SLA and reflects on what we know about social dimensions of L2 learning thus far. We will see how five constructs – cognition, interaction, grammar, learning and sense of self – can be respecified as fundamentally social, if L2 learning is investigated with the aid of five concomitant theories: Vygotskian sociocultural theory, Conversation Analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics, language socialization theory and identity theory. We will also survey some findings about the role of technology in supporting socially rich L2 learning. The discussion will be selective by necessity. My intention is to pinpoint major ways in which social dimensions of L2 learning have begun to be illuminated.

10.1 THE UNBEARABLE INELUCTABILITY OF THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

Under the new social perspectives, the study of additional language learning is not only shaped by the social context in which it happens; it is bound inextricably to such context. The metaphor of the chameleon is helpful in appreciating the full importance of this point. Richard Tucker drew from an undated attribution to Hamayan, cited by Donato (1998), when he noted that capturing L2 proficiency 'is in many ways similar to painting a chameleon. Because the animal's colors depend on its physical surroundings, any one representation becomes inaccurate as soon as that background changes' (Tucker, 1999, pp. 208–9).

The metaphor can be applied to the study of not only L2 proficiency but the entirety of L2 learning. It rests on the widely held belief that chameleons change the colour patterns of their skin so they can camouflage themselves. These colours change when specialized cells (called chromatophores, or carriers of colour) respond to hormonal discharges, which are thought to be triggered by the surrounding physical context. In fact, biologists (e.g. Stuart-Fox and Moussalli, 2008) have persuasively shown that, even though sometimes the purpose of disguise does motivate these colour changes, most often they are a manifestation of social mood swings when interacting with other fellow chameleons, for example during male contests and courtships! Thus, the chameleon metaphor is a doubly meaningful reminder of the inseparability of agent and environment as well as of the centrality of the social in understanding all living agents.

The radical reorientation towards the fundamental role of social processes in SLA draws inspiration from social-constructivist, sociocultural and poststructuralist theories which, since the 1960s, have been in ascendancy in the neighbouring fields of anthropology, sociology, education, philosophy of science, cultural studies and literary criticism. How does the new conceptual apparatus help us study the social in L2 learning? **Social constructivism** tells us that reality is not given naturally; it does not lie out there, to be apprehended by the individual mind. Instead, reality is created by human agents and social groups. **Socioculturalism** goes beyond social constructivism by positing that reality is not only a matter of interpretive construction but that it is also radically collective and social, appropriated and transformed through relational knowledge. In other words, the individual mind finds the source of learning in social communities; learning is available in historical and social processes and emerges among agents in a given context. Only processes, events and activities are real, whereas structures and patterns are epiphenomenal to those processes. Thus, reality is always processual and social and emerges anew each time and again, out of specific interactions with the world, the word and others, always in situated contexts. **Poststructuralism** goes yet even further than socioculturalism by telling us that the structures of human meaning and human social activity that were proposed by structuralist thinkers (notably, Freud, Marx and Saussure) are insufficient to explain the human condition, and that there is nothing that can be known or understood independently from the discourse that names and creates that knowledge. Furthermore, power is enmeshed in

knowledges and discourses. That is, reality is not only socially constructed and socially distributed; it is irreducibly multiple, intersubjective, discursively constituted and the site of struggle over conflicting power interests.

It should be clear, then, that social inquiry into L2 learning must value social experience not as externally documented, fixed environmental encounters, as perhaps suggested by the camouflage theory of the chameleon's change of pigmentation in the metaphor above, and as certainly assumed in much of the research presented in all other chapters in this book. Instead, as suggested by the theory of a social motivation for chameleonic colour repertoires, experience must be understood as radically social. It must be theorized as lived and contested experience, always unfinished and never fully predictable, and always contingent on the situated context of human relational activity. Ineluctably, in order to understand L2 learning from a radically social perspective, one must focus on experience that is lived, made sense of, negotiated, contested and claimed by learners in their physical, interpersonal, social, cultural and historical context. In other words, nothing can be known if it is not known in a given social context – and out of the social, nothing can be known.

10.2 COGNITION IS SOCIAL: VYGOTSKIAN SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY IN SLA

Socioculturalism encompasses not one but many theories. However, without a doubt, the sociocultural approach that has made the strongest contribution to SLA thus far is Vygotskian sociocultural theory of mind. Lev Vygotsky was a Russian psychologist who in the first quarter of the twentieth century developed an influential theory of cultural-historical psychology. It was designed in reaction against behaviourism and its exclusive focus on lower-level mental operations and also against mentalism and the duality of mind and environment that characterized Piaget's psychology. Its main goal was to enable the study of consciousness, defined as higher-level mental operations involved in language, literacy, numeracy, categorization, rationality and logic (Lantolf and Thorne, 2007, p. 202). It reconceptualized cognition as fundamentally social. Others in the Soviet Union expanded on Vygotsky's work in the following decades, notably Alexander Luria and Aleksei Leont'ev, the founder of Activity Theory.

In the context of L2 learning, already in the 1980s James Lantolf began applying Vygotsky's insights to SLA concerns, and he has made the theory and its variations well known to SLA audiences (e.g. Lantolf and Appel, 1994; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, 2007; Lantolf, 2006b). Beginning in the mid-1990s, Merrill Swain reworked output and interaction – main concepts in cognitive-interactionist SLA, as we saw in Chapter 4 – into new sociocultural meanings (Swain, 2000, 2006). These two SLA researchers have opened the way for many others to reconceptualize L2 learning through a Vygotskian prism, leading to a steady and vibrant growth in the current size and scope of Vygotskian SLA research. Indeed, this is the only social approach to L2 learning that has begun to enjoy full acceptance as an SLA theory. For example, it has already been reviewed in a state-of-the-art paper commissioned by

a flagship SLA journal (Lantolf, 2006b) and a special issue of the same journal has been devoted to work within this framework (McCafferty, 2008). Furthermore, it has become a must-include chapter in SLA textbooks (e.g. Lantolf and Thorne, 2007).

Vygotskian sociocultural theory posits that consciousness has its basis in the human capacity to use symbols as tools. Lantolf and Thorne (2007) offer a useful allegory between a spider and an architect to explain this point. Spiders spin their webs out of instinct, without a prior plan or a will to change its shape or size. The web is spun always in the same way, depending on the arachnid species, and always for the same function – to trap food. The architect, by contrast:

> plans a building on paper in the form of a blueprint before actually constructing it in objective physical space. The blueprint is the ideal form of the building, which of course no one can inhabit, but at the same time, it must be sensitive to the physics that operate in the concrete world. The blueprint, then, is a culturally constructed symbolic artifact that represents the actual building and also serves to mediate the construction of the real building. It allows the architect to make changes ideally without ever having to act on the objective physical world.
>
> (p. 205)

Mental activity is always mediated by tools, physical and symbolic; through the use of tools humans can change their reality, but the use of tools also changes them. In addition, no matter whether activity is solitary or with others, cognition and consciousness are always social, and so are the tools that mediate both. For example, a professional body of collective knowledge, a client who wants a house built and a construction crew who can actualize the blueprint in physical space are all part of the architect's activity of designing a blueprint of a building. Indeed, without the social legitimacy of a professional licence, which is sanctioned by a collective group, an architect would not be an architect and her drawing of a building plan would not be recognized as such by others. Importantly, consciousness exists only as a process that emerges out of (past, present and future) activity with others and with tools, physical and symbolic, each with their historical and cultural genealogies. Language is also a process, rather than a product, and it is the most important of all symbolic tools. As all tools, language is used to create thought but it also transforms thought and is the source of learning.

The next four sections are devoted to a discussion of some of the main insights about L2 learning that Vygotskian SLA has contributed to this date.

10.3 SELF-REGULATION AND LANGUAGE MEDIATION

Consciousness helps humans regulate problem solving and achieve their *goals* (what they want to do and anticipate doing) in light of their *motives* (why they want

to do it) and their chosen *operations* or means (how they want to do it) (Lantolf and Appel, 1994, pp. 17–21). Regulation can be of three kinds: object, other- and self-regulation. When people have yet to learn how to control their world and themselves in the context of carrying out a given activity, they orient towards objects. That is, they are initially **object regulated**. Object regulation can be both negative, as when an object in the way of another distracts a child's attention and makes her forget what toy she was told to fetch, and positive, as when a child uses blocks or fingers to solve an addition problem (Lantolf and Thorne, 2007, p. 204). People can also orient during an event towards other people and thus they can be **other-regulated**. This happens characteristically when they participate in new, complex activities with the aid of other co-participants. For example, initial cooking-together sessions between a child and a parent may involve the parent assisting the child to break down the steps of cooking into more manageable actions, many instruction-giving events, some modelling and even some intermittently taking over for parts of the activity where the child is estimated to need help, such as when chopping vegetables with a sharp knife. At the highest level of regulation, people orient to their own mental activity. That is, they are **self-regulated**, if they are capable of carrying out an activity largely independently.

Because language mediates all mental activity, it also mediates all three kinds of regulation. To continue with the example of a cooking session, someone who wants to learn how to cook a new meal, for example the Greek ground meat and eggplant dish called moussaka, may seek object regulation by following a recipe that she has printed from the web. In this case, during the cooking event, there may be many instances of abbreviated but audible speech essentially directed to the self, for example, reading parts of the recipe out loud, verbalizing actions as they are performed, or even proffering expressions of self-encouragement (*OK, good, the béchamel sauce is ready! Well done … Now, next!*). This is what Vygotsky called egocentric speech (following Piaget, but giving it a very different interpretation) and what contemporary Vygotskian theorists prefer to call **private speech**. It is abbreviated but audible speech mostly directed to the self. It emerges most often in the face of some challenge, when people are attempting to self-regulate. Our inexperienced moussaka cook might look for other-regulation by asking a friend – perhaps, but not necessarily, someone who has cooked the dish before – to assist her with the preparation of the meal. In this case, **social speech** will also occur (in addition to private speech) if the friends can support each other and jointly cook the meal, as they other-regulate. By way of contrast, a professional chef may need to 'talk' to the self or to others very little during the moussaka-cooking activity (even in a restaurant's kitchen shared by many other people) and might do most of her meditational thinking in the form of **inner speech**, or subvocally articulated speech that cannot be observed by others.

Vygotskian SLA researchers see the learning of an additional language as a process that involves gradually appropriating the L2 to make it into our own tool for self-regulation and thinking, just as once we learned to do the same with our L1 as children. Therefore, they have great interest in understanding regulation during L2 activity through the study of social, private and inner speech. They focus on the

degree to which regulation of the three kinds can happen, and whether each happens in L2 and L1, while doing activities in the L2. Lantolf and Thorne (2006, pp. 83, 110–11) noted that the ultimate accomplishment of self-regulation in the L2 is if mediation can be performed via L2 (as opposed to L1), for example, when either private speech, inner speech, or both, are carried out in the L2 incarnating appropriate L2 forms and meanings.

10.4 SOME FINDINGS ABOUT INNER, PRIVATE AND SOCIAL SPEECH IN L2 LEARNING

We all are aware of inner speech when we feel we can listen to ourselves thinking, as it were. And, in fact, brain imaging studies have captured brain activity in the left inferior frontal gyrus during inner speech, an area which is associated with self-awareness (Morin and Michaud, 2007). Inner speech, which is typically sustainable during self-regulated mental activity, can be studied only indirectly. In a book treatment of the concept, María de Guerrero (2005) reviews brain imaging methodologies as well as introspective methodologies involving questionnaire and interview responses about mental rehearsal. The latter methods have been employed in SLA studies, beginning with de Guerrero's (1994) pioneering study, where she documented many mental strategies employed by L2 learners of English in Puerto Rico. For example, one of them, Amarilis, reported memorizing material for an English oral activity, going blank, being disappointed because she only got 44 points out of 50 on the assignment, and later using inner speech to regain affective control over the situation (p. 112):

(1) **On the bus … I did it all over again [the activity dialogue] to see if I was so stupid that I would forget everything. And I gave myself a 50.**

Most research, however, has concentrated on private and social speech during L2 activity, both of which are more readily amenable to study than inner speech.

Private speech, in particular, is central to the study of mental functioning because it constitutes a link between inner speech, to which it may convert during completely self-regulated activity, and social speech, from which it takes its source. Lantolf and Thorne (2006, pp. 83–94) reviewed the main findings gleaned from seven studies that inspected private speech during L2 task performance. At higher levels of L2 competence, learners were more able to self-regulate, as reflected in generally less pervasive use of private speech during L2 narrative retellings. Instances of private speech (e.g. affective markers such as *oh boy*, *oh no*, *oh my god*, *OK, oh well, now I get it*, *alright let me see*, which can occur in the L2 or the L1) were attested much more frequently among lower-level proficiency learners in many of the studies. More proficient learners also generally exhibited fewer traces of object regulation and more evidence of self-regulation as indexed in some of their language choices during L2 activity. For example, compare the following three L2 renditions of the same ice cream story task employed by Frawley and Lantolf (1985):

(2) **This is a boy who is standing in the street. This is a boy and a man who is selling ice cream. The man is selling ice cream for 50 cents. The boy is telling the man 'Thank you' (p. 32)**

(3) **This man, he took the ice cream from the boy, and the boy became angry because his father took the ice cream and he left (p. 32)**

(4) **… And an ice cream man comes, meets him … And the little boy looks … The first boy gets … So the little boy says … (p. 35)**

The choice of present progressive in (2) appeared more frequently, across studies, in the language of narratives created by many lower-proficiency speakers. The interpretation proposed is that it indexes regulation difficulties. That is, the use of the progressive aspect may suggest that speakers are object regulated by the task because they describe the events in the story as immediate; these speakers are discovering a story as they speak rather than narrating a story. The use of the simple past, shown in (3), however, is interpreted in some studies, although not all, as attempts by more advanced L2 learners to self-regulate in the face of difficulty. As Lantolf and Thorne (2006) explain, this is because simple past tense helps speakers gain a sense of unified, distant gaze towards the story that allows for a better story-telling effect than the progressive form. Yet, this choice is perhaps less self-regulated than the historical present, shown in (4). Advanced learners and L1 speakers were more often able to maintain a consistent use of the historical present across the seven studies reviewed, and Lantolf and Thorne argue there is evidence that this choice shows self-regulation 'in the narrative task because the meaning it carries in this case is simultaneously distance and immediacy' (p. 87). It is important to appreciate just how different these analyses and conceptualizations are from the traditional ways in which learner language is analysed by cognitive-interactionists. Thus, under the interlanguage development view of tense and aspect that we examined in Chapter 6 (section 6.10), the goal was to describe language as an objective system that encodes meaning through different form choices. In the Vygotskian perspective, these tense and aspect choices are studied for what they can help us discover about processes of mediation in the development of regulated L2 mental activity.

Taking a slightly different but still fully Vygotskian perspective, Swain has also investigated the mediating role of language in L2 learning, often concentrating on the study of social speech. She is guided by the tenet that 'verbalization changes thought, leading to development and learning' (2006, p. 110) and she focuses on what she calls 'languaging' to convey the Vygotskian view of language as process in flight (Tocalli-Beller and Swain, 2007, p. 145), rather than as product, which is typically conjured in the cognitive-interactionist notions of pushed output during language production (see Chapter 4, sections 4.5 and 4.9).

Languaging is illustrated in a study by Tocalli-Beller and Swain (2007). They captured the joint learning that occurred between Lisa and Helen, two ESL students in a North American college programme, during a pair-work discussion of the following pun:

Waiter, I'd like a corned beef sandwich, and make it lean.
Yes, sir! In which direction?

Each of the learners knew only one meaning of the word *lean*, and both learned the other meaning from each other during this dialogue (p. 160):

(5) **Helen: I don't understand what is lean.**
Lisa: Uh … lean can mean uh not fat, not fatty.
Helen: Oh. And also uh … you lean on something. That direction or that direction.

The dialogue continued when each learner unpacked the one meaning that was new to them and had been offered by the other partner:

Lisa: Oh, lean against the wall?
Helen: Yeah. And lean is not fat?
Lisa: Yeah.
Helen: There is no fat in the meat.

They then checked with the dictionary, thus using object regulation productively after having achieved other-regulation, and they ended with a mutual acknowledgement of the new meaning each had learned. Both learners remembered the two meanings of the word *lean* seven weeks later, when they were asked to supply it on a post-test.

In another study, Richard Donato (1994) captured three speakers collaboratively learning the past compound reflexive form of the verb 'to remember' in French, while jointly planning for an oral activity for their French class (p. 44):

(6) **S1: … and then I'll say … *tu as souvenu notre anniversaire de mariage* … or should I say *mon anniversaire*?**
S2: *tu as* …
S3: *tu as* …
S1: *tu as souvenu* … 'you remembered?'
S3: yes, but isn't that reflexive? *tu t'as* …
S1: ah, *tu t'as souvenu*
S2: oh, it's *tu es*
S1: *tu es*
S3: *tu es, tu es, tu* …
S1: *t'es, tu t'es*
S3: *tu t'es*
S1: *tu t'es souvenu*

Donato notes that each participant in this activity contributed one piece of knowledge that they already had control over. Speaker 1 controlled the past participle form (*souvenu*), speaker 3 knew the verb is reflexive (*tu t'as*), and speaker

2 controlled the choice of the auxiliary compound form: *être*, not *avoir* (*es*, not *as*). By thinking together in joint activity, and mediated by the tool of social speech, they came up with the new, complete solution: *tu t'es souvenu*.

Activity that is mediated by social speech should not be equated with the cognitive-interactionist notion of learner-initiated negotiation of form (see Chapter 4, section 4.10). While much of the same analysis and evidence would fit both approaches, the differences of interpretation are also deep. The cognitive-interactionist prism would conceive of events such as the ones illustrated in (5) and (6) as linguistic exchanges that facilitate individual learning. The sociocultural perspective, instead, conceptualizes them as captured instances of the process of 'the collective acquisition of the second language' (Donato, 1994, p. 53), which is driven by 'the construction of co-knowledge' (p. 39). Learners strive to self-regulate in their social world and, in the process, they mediate action – and as a consequence, both intended and unintended, they learn – through social, private and inner speech.

10.5 SOCIAL LEARNING IN THE ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT

As already noted, Vygotskians view learning as social: 'the source of development resides in the environment rather than in the individual' (Lantolf, 2006a, p. 726). That is, any knowledge and any capacity to engage in regulated activity appears always first at the social, interpersonal level during activity with others and only later can be seen to operate also at the psychological, intrapersonal level. What must be studied is therefore not the individual but joint social activity, because, as Poehner and Lantolf (2005) explain:

> The individual and the environment form an inseparable dialectical unity that cannot be understood if the unity is broken. As Vygotsky often said, if we want to understand the property of water that allows it to extinguish fire, we cannot reduce it to its component elements – oxygen and hydrogen.
>
> (p. 239)

Not only must the unit of analysis be joint social activity, but this joint activity must be investigated as it unfolds in real time, a methodology that Vygotskians call the **microgenetic method** and which refers to the study of situated change in real time. The analysis of examples (5) and (6) in the previous section illustrates microgenesis. Learning or development is encapsulated in the important Vygotskian construct of the **Zone of Proximal Development** (ZPD), defined as the distance between what a learner can do in the L2 if assisted by others (in joint activity that is other-regulated) versus what she or he can accomplish alone (in independent activity that is, hopefully, self-regulated). To distinguish this novel conceptualization from traditional previous definitions, it is helpful to think that the traditional view of learning provides a *retrospective* account of whatever development has been achieved, whereas the Vygotskian view entails a *prospective*

account of development that can be anticipated in the near future (Aljaafreh and Lantolf, 1994, p. 468; Poehner and Lantolf, 2005). Wells (1999) notes that the ZPD is not a fixed property of an individual, but instead 'constitutes a potential for learning that is created in the interaction between participants in particular settings' and therefore must be seen as 'emergent', because the ongoing interaction during joint activity can open up unforeseen new potential for learning (p. 249). The ZPD potential emerges among peers, not only with an expert, and it does not imply an intention to teach or an overt focus on learning, although it can entail both, particularly in instructional formal settings.

10.6 NEGATIVE FEEDBACK RECONCEPTUALIZED

An area of L2 study where the notion of the ZPD has been fruitfully applied is that of error correction. The proposal was initiated in a pioneering study by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994; Lantolf and Aljaafreh, 1995) which involved seven weekly L2 writing tutorials between each of three female ESL learners and Aljaafreh as the writing tutor. The tutorials focused on affording the L2 writers optimal negative feedback on articles, tenses, prepositions and modals. However, feedback was not conceived as transfer of linguistic information from a tutor to a tutee, as is often conceptualized in the cognitive interactionist approaches described in Chapter 4 (see section 4.11). Rather, it was defined as 'help that is jointly negotiated between experts and novices' (Aljaafreh and Lantolf, p. 480). Ultimately, the purpose was to investigate negative feedback as other-regulation that is finely tuned to provide assistance within the ZPD of a given learner and encourages the emergence of self-regulation. This can be illustrated with a brief and successful exchange (p. 479):

(7) **Tutor:** **Is there anything wrong here in this sentence? 'I took only Ani because I couldn't took both' … do you see anything wrong? … Particularly here 'because I couldn't took both'**
Tutee: **Or Maki?**
Tutor: **What the verb verb … something wrong with the verb …**
Tutee: **Ah, yes …**
Tutor: **that you used. Okay, where? Do you see it?**
Tutee: **(points to the verb)**
Tutor: **Took? Okay**
Tutee: **Take**
Tutor: **Alright, take**
Tutee: **(laughs)**

Optimal negative feedback, exemplified in (7), is thus defined by Aljaafreh and Lantolf as *graduated* and *contingent*. Graduated, rather than uniform, means that the feedback starts off as implicit prompts to aid self-discovery and slowly takes the form of increasingly more explicit clues, as needed. Through this graduated delivery, the more expert interlocutor (i.e. the tutor) engages in a negotiated

estimation of how to provide no less and no more directive assistance than what is needed at any given time 'to encourage the learner to function at his or her potential level of ability' (p. 468). Contingent, rather than unconditional, means that the feedback is 'withdrawn as soon as the novice shows signs of self-control and ability to function independently' (p. 468).

Graduation and contingency were formalized by the researchers in a 13-point regulatory scale that was derived in a bottom-up analysis from the data (Lantolf and Aljaafreh, 1995, p. 622). It begins with most implicit or inductive prompts to encourage self-regulation, for instance, with the tutor asking the learner to read the essay and try to find errors before coming to the tutorial (level 0), or the tutor asking 'is there anything wrong in this sentence?' (level 3, shown in (7) above). The scale ends with increasingly more explicit and informative clues, for example with the tutor providing the correct form (level 10), a metalinguistic explanation (level 11), or new examples of the correct pattern (level 12). In example (7), the tutor only needed to graduate assistance up to level 6, by indicating the nature of the error rather broadly ('What the verb verb … something wrong with the verb … that you used. Okay, where? Do you see it?'), and the learner was able to come up with the correction on her own, first by pointing at the verb, then by uttering 'take'.

Over time, across episodes and tutorials, the microgenetic method should help capture how 'learning evolves through stages of decreasing reliance on the other person toward increasing reliance on the self' (p. 479), that is, from other-regulation to self-regulation. In other words, over time, assistance (i.e. negative feedback) ought to be more frequently placed on the implicit end of the regulatory scale. However, as Lantolf and Aljaafreh (1995) showed when inspecting the data longitudinally, these changes cannot be expected to be linear and smooth. Instead, microgenesis helps capture change that is dynamic, dialectical and at times regresses to earlier forms of mediation. As we have noted repeatedly across all chapters in this book, L2 development is always non-linear and dynamic.

Aljaafreh and Lantolf's proposal was tested in a quasi-experimental study by Nassaji and Swain (2000). Over four writing tutorial sessions, Nassaji acted as a tutor and provided feedback on article errors to two Korean ESL learners. The tutorials involved providing graduated and contingent or ZPD-tuned assistance to one of the writers, and random or ZPD-insensitive assistance to the other. In this latter condition, the tutor provided a prompt choosing a level randomly from the regulatory scale and then tried to avoid further collaboration or interaction on the issue. In the last tutorial, both learners completed a fill-in-the-gap version of each of the four essays they had discussed with the tutor, with each gap representing one of the article errors that had been discussed during their own sessions. On average, the learner who received the ZPD-tuned feedback was able to fill in the correct articles 83 per cent of the 28 total instances that had been negotiated in her sessions, whereas the learner who participated in the ZPD-insensitive tutorials was able to correctly provide only 40 per cent of her 20 randomly negotiated instances. Thus, these results lend some initial support to the proposal.

In most cognitive-interactionist discussions of L2 instruction, there is a felt tension that stems from dichotomies such as explicit and implicit instruction,

deductive and inductive instruction, and instruction that integrates form with meaning versus that which isolates form from meaning. A benefit of exploring negative feedback, in particular, and L2 instruction, in general, within the Vygotskian framework of the ZPD is that these dichotomies blur and a continuum is conjured all along these dimensions, which can change within the same interactional activity dynamically as well as over multiple successive activities, as co-participants jointly facilitate the gradual and non-linear emergence of self-regulated mediation during L2 activity.

10.7 INTERACTION IS SOCIAL: CONVERSATION ANALYSIS AND SLA

If Vygotskian sociocultural theory offers SLA researchers a social respecification of cognition and puts consciousness at the centre of inquiry, the approach known as Conversation Analysis puts forward a novel social respecification of interaction and has its centre in the study of sociability as a mundane and orderly accomplishment. When applied to SLA problems, this framework characterizes L2 learning as primordially socio-interactional practice and focuses on the detailed analysis of naturally occurring spoken interactions, whether in casual and intimate conversation, in institutional and public talk, or in the instructional talk of classrooms and tutorials.

The field of sociology experienced a profound crisis in the United States in the 1940s, stimulating seminal work by sociologists Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel during the 1950s and 1960s. Goffman focused on the self, symbolic interaction and life as a theatre, whereas Garfinkel emphasized practical activity, interactionally created sequentiality and the local production of social organization. In the early 1960s Garfinkel coined the term 'ethnomethodology' to refer to his approach to the study of social order. The school of Conversation Analysis (CA) built on his ethnomethodological thinking, first through new ideas developed by Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff, both students of Garfinkel, and soon joined by Gail Jefferson, herself a student of Sacks. Although these scholars spent most of their careers in California, during the 1980s Jefferson relocated to the Netherlands, thus helping extend the geographical sphere of influence of the school. CA has now greatly expanded and is practised by a large and diverse interdisciplinary community in the United States, Europe and Australia, with a shared interest in studying the organization of talk-in-interaction.

In the context of L2 learning, CA began to be applied to L2 data first in Denmark by Alan Firth and Johannes Wagner, as they studied oral interactions among non-native speakers who used English as a lingua franca for business-related purposes in Europe. Although dissemination of their empirical work began in the early 1990s, it was a special issue in the *Journal of Pragmatics* (Wagner, 1996) and an oft-cited article in the *Modern Language Journal* (Firth and Wagner, 1997) that rapidly opened up these ideas to the European and North American SLA audiences, together with an early piece by Markee (1994), who had also broached the discussion of CA in North American SLA. In little more than ten years, CA-for-SLA,

as it has been termed, has grown into its own area of study. Other leading contributors have joined Firth and Wagner, such as Numa Markee (1994, 2000) and Junko Mori (2007) in the United States, and Paul Seedhouse (2004, 2005) in the United Kingdom, and SLA scholars who were well known for other work, such as Gabriele Kasper (2006) and Anne Lazaraton (2002), have reoriented their careers and joined the research programme as well. The application of this framework to SLA has resulted in the rapid accumulation of edited volumes, special issues of journals and book-length L2-related treatments. Authoritative reviews of this burgeoning literature have been undertaken by Seedhouse (2005), Kasper (2006) and Mori (2007).

10.8 THE CA PERSPECTIVE IN A NUTSHELL

A goal of CA, and one that makes it related to but different from ethnomethodology, is the discovery of universal mechanisms by which organized talk is possible. That is, CA practitioners believe that 'context-sensitive social actions' offer evidence for the existence of 'a context-free machinery', which ultimately helps explain humans' capacity to engage in interaction and display their social actions in specific local contexts (Seedhouse, 2005, p. 167). The context-free machinery includes rules for **turn taking** (or how to keep, yield or take the floor), **repair** (or how to address trouble in talk) and **sequential design** (or how to make each new action-at-talk change, maintain or produce the next new action-at-talk, in sequentiality that is emergent but constrained by shared preferences among sanctioned choices). However, evidence of the context-free machinery is always sought in local interaction in situ, and this is something that CA shares with ethnomethodology. Language is social action, and this special stance is reflected in the use of the verb 'do' in CA, which you will find in many titles of CA studies: people do not use language to communicate; they do language, and they do communication.

A cornerstone of CA thinking is the **radically emic perspective**, explained by Markee and Kasper (2004) as follows:

> CA establishes an emic perspective … by examining the details of … the orientations and relevancies that participants display to each other through their interactional conduct … Thus, participant orientations, relevancies, and intersubjectivity are not treated as states of mind that somehow lurk behind the interaction, but as local and sequential accomplishments that must be grounded in empirically observable conversational conduct.
>
> (p. 495)

This radically emic imperative of CA must not be confused with the emic perspective that ethnographers pursue as an ideal in their research (Headland et al., 1990). Not only is the CA concept of emic very different from the concept as conceived of in the ethnographic tradition, but it is also in epistemological tension with it. Ethnographers seek to attain an insider's view of the context and a deep

understanding of what is relevant in it for participants, and they do this by becoming intimately familiar with participants and settings through long-term observation and participation, as well as by directly eliciting the participants' perspective through interviews and by gathering information about the wider context, such as institutional documents and cultural artefacts (Wolcott, 1999). A main goal is to give voice to participants in the research interpretations, and this is done via triangulation and member checks during the analyses and via polyphonic styles in the reporting that recognize and balance multiple etic (the researcher's) and emic (the insider's) perspectives. By contrast, CA forbids the analyst to engage in any *a priori* invocation of social structure, culture, power, ideology or any such interpretive categories that pre-existing theories or assumptions may make available, although it may allow all such categories if they are *a posteriori* interpretations closely grounded in the observable interactional conduct of the social agents at talk. We may want to think about it in terms of *witnessable* evidence, a term that I find useful and borrow from Livingston (2008). Likewise, interviews, participants' insights, or information retrieved from the wider context are precluded, since only witnessable evidence produced in the ongoing immediate interaction is allowed into the analysis. Thus, this CA radically emic imperative makes it difficult to investigate macro dimensions of the social context that many other L2 researchers find important. At the same time, however, it also has salutary consequences for disciplinary understandings of L2 learning, as we will see in the next two sections.

Another trademark of CA is the highly technical transcription conventions that analysts must use in order to capture the relevant details of a given interaction, which are needed to render observable or witnessable evidence of the actions-at-talk. For example, squared brackets [] indicate overlap between speakers; numbers in parenthesis (0.56) indicate timed pauses; segments inside parenthesis [h] indicate uncertainty in the transcription; underlinings show emphasis; colons ::: show lengthened vowel sounds; a left-facing arrow < indicates the beginning of rushed talk and a right-facing > arrow the beginning of talk that is slowed down; and upward ↑ or downward ↓ arrows indicate upward or downward intonation.

In the next two sections, I have chosen to highlight two contributions of CA-for-SLA and one doubt.

10.9 SOME CONTRIBUTIONS OF CA-FOR-SLA

A main insight of CA is that L2 interactions, just like any human interactions, are orderly accomplishments in doing communication, rather than random or deficient attempts at using the L2. Thus, what other approaches may take for evidence of linguistic problems, CA reconceptualizes as interactional resources. Donald Carroll (2005) illustrates this in a study of conversational data between three self-selected female peers in a second-year EFL classroom in Japan. He carefully inspected the phenomenon of adding an extra vowel at the end of certain words (e.g. *what-o* or *what-u*, *have-u*, *raining-u*, *dark-u*), which is typically

interpreted by SLA researchers as an attempt to impose the consonant–vowel syllabic structure of L1 Japanese on English words, a case of negative L1 transfer (see Chapter 3). Carroll's CA analysis ascertained that the extra vowel was associated with several interactional actions, most of them related to its value as a 'displayed sense of incompleteness' (p. 229), which allowed a speaker to maintain or reestablish speakership. Thus, for example, it appeared at the end of utterances, timed to coincide with what could be an appropriate juncture for another speaker to take the floor. In such cases, all speakers oriented to the vowel signalling that there was more to come from the same speaker. This is how speaker S uses *raining-u*, and *like-u* as she produces the two-part comparison of what she doesn't like (rain) and what she does (blue skies) (p. 228):

(8) **S: yeah (0.22) but (0.49) but I don't like(h) raining-u**
(0.14)
K: [mm::::]
A: [ah::h::] very dark-u
(0.14)
S: da- yeah [I::a I] I like-u
A: [un un un]
K: [a::h::]
(0.19)
S: I: I(h): huh (h)rike-u (0.14) brue sky

By looking at interactional practice as an accomplishment, CA changes the lens from the usual inspection of what L2 learners cannot or will not do, to a more affirming exploration of what they can indeed do as they 'do' interaction.

Cognitive-interactionist SLA researchers investigate L2 interactions as filled with meanings that they attribute to (from their perspective) commonsensical actions, such as misunderstanding a message or correcting an error, and commonsensical categories, such as being a non-native speaker, or being a student, or being a female (see Chapter 4). By contrast, the CA study of L2 interaction posits that actions and categories which outsiders, including researchers and teachers, may assume to be at work in an interaction have no constant value. Instead, they can be relevant or irrelevant to particular L2 users and their interlocutors in specific interactional events. The relevance of these actions and categories is co-produced by the participants locally, turn by turn, and it is adjudicated by the analyst via inspection of the available observable evidence in the interactional conduct, in agreement with the radically emic perspective that CA adopts. This position of CA has the potential to afford a healthy new lens that suspends and challenges many taken-for-granted constructs.

For example, the notion of error becomes obsolete in the CA approach, because nothing can be treated as error *a priori*. Instead, CA analysts talk about repairables, but only when the participants display evidence that they orient to something in the talk as a source of trouble for them. Indeed, much talk seems to proceed as if what grammarians call errors did not exist, as CA studies of L2 data have uncovered little

if any evidence that interlocutors consistently orient towards 'errors' or invoke them in their interactional conduct. Likewise, negotiation for meaning is not necessarily a priority in L2–L2 talk-in-interaction, and Firth (1996) and many others have noted that speakers orient to 'normality' in most cases, for example by doing 'let it pass', which refers to frequent instances when a hearer 'lets the unknown or unclear action, word or utterance "pass" on the (common-sense) assumption that it will either become clear or redundant as talk progresses' (p. 243).

Similarly, the identity of speakers as 'native' or 'non-native' and as 'novice language learners' or 'expert language users' cannot be taken as fixed, as CA has demonstrated how such categories may be relevant in one interactional event and irrelevant in the next. This was shown by Yuri Hosoda (2006) in her analysis of 15 video- and audio-taped casual conversations involving 15 L2 Japanese speakers, who had been living in Japan between 6 and 20 years, and their L1 Japanese friends or acquaintances. She captured witnessable evidence supporting the interpretation that, on occasion, the L2 speakers 'orient to themselves as a "novice" in the language spoken in the interaction while they treat their interlocutors, at that moment, as a language expert' (p. 33). This occurred when an L2 speaker invited their L1 friend to correct or help with certain lexical items. These invitations were recognizable because they were performed via overt signals such as sound lengthening, rising intonation, explicit expressions of ignorance, gaze, raised eyebrows, and so on. However, Hosoda also observed many instances in which so-called ungrammaticalities were not oriented to by either speaker, an indication that differential language expertise was treated as irrelevant in such cases.

Co-participants in an interaction typically, but not always, co-orient to joint interactional action and interactional identities. In the study by Hosoda just discussed, for example, she found that momentary orientation to language novice or expert status was co-shared, as in all the cases without exception when an L2 speaker oriented to trouble with lexis 'the L1 speakers took on (relative) "expert" roles by supplying lexical items and pursuing L2 speakers' uptake' (p. 44). A slightly different picture emerged from a study by Salla Kurhila (2005), in which she analysed 14 hours of video- and audio-taped personal and institutional exchanges among about 100 different L2 speakers of Finnish and 20 L1 Finnish speakers, focusing on instances in which a non-native speaker oriented towards trouble with morphology, particularly Finnish case endings. In some instances, her results were in agreement with Hosoda's findings, and the orientation of the L2 speaker was also shared by the L1 speaker, who provided the target form in the next turn. In other instances in the data, however, in the presence of a same previous action by an L2 speaker, L1 speakers did not orient to these L2 speaker-initiated grammatical repairs and instead displayed understanding with head nods and acknowledgement tokens (*mhm*, *joo*, or 'yes' in Finnish). In these data, it was frequently L1 Finnish-speaking secretaries who did so. Kurhila suggested that the given L1 speaker in such a given interaction was orienting to the interactionally relevant action to keep the conversation moving, perhaps because their institutional roles of secretary took precedence over their role as linguistically expert interlocutors in those particular instances.

External contexts or settings, however, cannot be taken to 'impose' particular roles or restrictures on the interactional work of L2 speakers because, as Kurhila (2005) herself puts it, in any ongoing interaction 'each response talks a different set of identities and relationships into being' (p. 155). This has been shown to be the case even in the institutional context of teacher–student and student–student talk examined in CA studies of L2 classrooms. In one such study, Keith Richards (2006) concluded that in classroom settings the default institutional roles are teacher and student, but they are 'not binding' as discourse identities in the moment-by-moment organization of the interaction; instead they just play a 'pre-eminent position within the range of possible options' (p. 60) and this pre-eminence of the roles is constantly subject to interactionally achieved change. In sum, as Firth and Wagner (2007) put it, identity in CA is always 'a motile, liminal, achieved feature of the interaction' (p. 801).

10.10 LEARNING IN CA-FOR-SLA?

A doubt has been expressed by all reviewers of the efforts at applying the CA framework to SLA problems: It is unclear what CA findings may mean in practice vis-à-vis efforts at understanding L2 learning. This is because no *a priori* concept of 'learning' can be assumed, unless speakers in a given interaction happen to orient to learning (Seedhouse, 2005; Kasper, 2006; Mori, 2007). A strategy to address learning from a CA perspective has been to study interactions longitudinally, so as to be able to inspect whether over time L2 speakers can be seen to transform and expand resources displayed in past interactions, thus perhaps providing evidence of socio-interactional development in the L2.

Brouwer and Wagner (2004) illustrated the potential of this research strategy by inspecting repeated interview-like conversations over two and a half months between Tomoyo, a Japanese student in Denmark, and Viggo, her Danish acquaintance. The researchers noted that Tomoyo initially used rather general displays of trouble (*hvad siger du*, 'What do you say') but later she increasingly used more specific tokens (*hvad betyder X*, 'What does X mean'), better helping Viggo identify the source and initiate repair. She also gradually produced better timed and more varied acknowledgement tokens as well as more appropriately timed laughter as response to acknowledgement tokens from Viggo. Young and Miller (2004) undertook a more in-depth analysis of four weekly writing tutorials between Chuong, a Vietnamese ESL learner in college, and his tutor. They showed how by the third session Chuong became increasingly more active at turn taking and initiated more interactional actions associated with 'doing revision', such as producing an explanation (*this this very strong?*) and offering candidate language for the revisions. Very importantly, Young and Miller also made the point that the tutor herself changed over time in ways that were co-produced by tutor and tutee and facilitated the beneficial changes in the tutee. Hellermann (2006) tracked the growth in interactional competence witnessable over seven and a half months of instruction in the video- and audio-recorded interactions of two learners enrolled

in a college ESL-sustained silent reading course. Eduardo, a 51-year-old immigrant from Mexico with limited schooling and literacy, gradually displayed ways in which he became more competent and slowly but surely began interacting and participating in the instructional events of the course. Abbey, a 21-year-old student born and schooled in China, needed much less time but also showed growth in her display of verbal and non-verbal actions during talk-at-interaction events in this classroom.

In the end, however, even when put in longitudinal perspective, the examination of interaction from a strictly CA perspective can take us only far enough to answer the question of When is L2 learning happening? while it faces difficulty answering the more traditional questions of What is L2 learning? and How does it happen? It is no coincidence, therefore, that in the three longitudinal studies we have just reviewed the researchers resorted to the help of additional theories that directly focus on learning, such as communities of practice (Brouwer and Wagner, 2004), situated learning (Young and Miller, 2004) or language socialization (Hellermann, 2006). It may be that, in the future, CA-for-SLA will need to blend other such theories and craft a theoretically hybrid intellectual space that enables a fuller exploration of L2 learning.

10.11 GRAMMAR IS SOCIAL: SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a school of linguistics that respecifies grammar as a social semiotic process, that is, as the social action of meaning-making, which always occurs in context and is driven by functions and purposes in the lives of communities. It investigates the relationship between meaning and form, content and wording, context and text, integrally. Instead of viewing these pairs as analytical dichotomies, it considers them inseparable, complementary counterparts that explain how people 'mean', how they construe their experience through meaning making. This is studied mainly via the analysis of phenomena beyond the clause that are instantiated in oral and written texts. The meaning-making potential entailed in the discourse-semantic and lexicogrammatical resources of a language is enabled by the interpretive expectations of use of the larger society and as they are instantiated in particular contexts of situation. When applied to SLA problems, SFL compels us to redefine additional language learning as semiotic development in an L2, or the development of flexible meaning-making L2 capacities across contexts.

SFL was founded in the 1960s by M. A. K. Halliday, a UK-born and Australia-adopted linguist. He completed his doctorate in Mandarin Chinese at the University of London and taught that language for several years, after which he was inducted into linguistics by the successors of the Prague School. In the mid-1970s he relocated in Australia, where he wrote many of his most influential writings, and he currently resides in Hong Kong. Given this intellectual trajectory, SFL can be said to have ties with European functionalism but to be decidedly international. It has become the most practised linguistic approach in Australia (and the only linguistic

movement to have had a serious impact on national educational practices ever), but it also encompasses a geographically widespread and large research community, with an international association, an annual conference since 1974 and a flagship journal, *Functions of Language*, published by John Benjamins. In the view of some, SFL has grown to be the strongest competitor of Chomskyan linguistics, the formalist linguistic school *par excellence*.

In the context of L2 learning, a few researchers in North America have heralded the approach – in particular, Mary Schleppegrell (2004), Heidi Byrnes (2006) and Mariana Achugar and Cecilia Colombi (2008). All of them have argued that SFL offers SLA researchers unique advantages. Nevertheless, in SLA other schools of linguistics have been endorsed more strongly, for example, cognitive linguistics (which, like SFL, accords meaning a pivotal place in its theory of language) and corpus linguistics (which, also much like SFL, places language use beyond the sentence at the centre of the descriptive enterprise). And, yet, SFL has a much more explicit social orientation than cognitive linguistics or even corpus linguistics does. It is perhaps for this reason that it has greatly influenced other lines of critically oriented functional linguistic work, including social semiotics, the study of multimodality, Critical Discourse Analysis and ecolinguistics. SFL-inspired SLA research (e.g. Young and Nguyen, 2002; Schleppegrell, 2004; Mohan and Slater, 2006) has engaged in the in-depth description of the language resources associated with various academic registers that most people learn during schooling, explicating the challenges that they pose for L2 users. Particularly rich are descriptions of how the registers of history and science differ from everyday language. By comparison, studies of actual development of meaning-making capacities in the L2 are still rare. In the next section, we examine three emergent efforts in this direction.

10.12 LEARNING HOW TO MEAN IN AN L2

L2-oriented SFL scholars have focused on the ways in which users of a language gradually develop the capacity to transform oral or everyday language and mobilize it into the range of formal and written registers that are required for successful functioning in academic contexts. Cecilia Colombi and Mariana Achugar have applied this SFL view of academic language development to the context of the university education of Spanish heritage speakers in the United States. Many of these learners already possess strong oral expertise for meaning making in daily-life contexts, but they wish to expand their competencies and learn more specialized registers for future professional goals.

In a series of longitudinal studies reviewed by Achugar and Colombi (2008), Colombi tracked changes towards more academic writing in the essays written over nine months by Rosa, Roberto and Lucía, three Mexican-American college students enrolled in a Spanish course. She was able to demonstrate three kinds of positive change. First, over time Rosa, Roberto and Lucía made their writing more academic-sounding by using a higher proportion of content words (nouns, verbs,

adjectives and adverbs), that is, by increasing their textual use of what is known as **lexical density**. This is in contrast to oral and informal discourse, which typically contains a higher number of function words (pronouns, demonstratives, articles, prepositions). Second, they also increasingly used more expressions that packaged and condensed a given meaning over grammatically incongruent wording, or what Hallidayans call **grammatical metaphor**. This can be illustrated in the English utterance *the withdrawal of assistance led to concern*. The nouns *withdrawal*, *assistance* and *concern* actually mean two actions ('to withdraw', 'to assist') and one quality ('being concerned'). More grammatically congruent pairings of form and meaning would be preferred in oral and everyday discourse, for example: *someone stopped helping* and *someone is concerned*. Third, and as part of the increase in the use of grammatical metaphor, towards the end of the nine-month period of study the essays written by Rosa, Roberto and Lucía showed a decrease in what is called by SFL scholars **grammatical intricacy**, that is, language that relies on subordination to express logical connections. To continue with our example, the verb *led to* does not really mean any action, like verbs usually do, but instead establishes a cause–effect connection between two ideas. In everyday language, the same logical relation could be expressed more congruently by means of subordination, via an adverbial clause that expresses temporal or logical relations: *when/because someone stopped helping, they got worried*. The grammatical intricacy of the essays declined over time as these writers gradually tapped grammatical metaphor to express logical connections between textual elements, instead of relying exclusively on subordination. In sum, by slowly engaging in greater lexical density, more abundant and varied use of grammatical metaphor, and lesser grammatical intricacy, these writers continued developing the kinds of flexible L2 repertoires that can be called upon in written, formal contexts of L2 use.

Another interesting application of SFL to the study of additional language learning can be found in the notion of **functional recasts**, proposed by Bernard Mohan in the context of content-based education for English language learners in Canada (see Mohan and Beckett, 2003; Mohan and Slater, 2006). Unlike the recasts studied by cognitive-interactionists, which focus on formal errors (see Chapter 4, section 4.11), functional recasts offer semantic paraphrases that edit a learner's discourse towards more formal ways of expressing a certain academic meaning. Specifically, teachers offer functional recasts to support learners in their efforts to achieve higher lexical density, more grammatical metaphor and less grammatical intricacy in their academic oral expression. This is shown in an excerpt from an ESL college classroom in Canada, involving a teacher and a student interacting during an oral presentation about the human brain (Mohan and Beckett, 2003, p. 428):

(9) **Student:** **To stop the brain's aging, we can use our bodies and heads. Like walking make the circulation of blood better …**
Teacher: **So, we can prevent our brain from getting weak by being mentally and physically active?**

We can see that the teacher reformulation transforms 'use our bodies' into *being physically active* and 'use our heads' into *being mentally active*, thus changing the student's congruent realizations (verbs that are actions and nouns that are entities) into grammatical metaphors that construe the same meanings as adverbs and adjectives. The researchers described the occurrence of such functional recasts in the content-based classroom as 'a complex, rapid-fire editing process with [the student] as author and [the teacher] as editor, both working to enhance the text that [the student] is creating' (pp. 430–1). Interestingly, they also noted that as learners experiment with the processes that result in higher lexical density and more abundant use of grammatical metaphor, results will vary, and the teacher may at times offer semantic paraphrases that push learners in the reverse direction towards more congruent language, thus 'undoing the learner's over-ambitious attempts at less congruent and more compact statements' (p. 428). Once again, then, and as every approach to L2 learning shows, development is not linear.

A third area of contribution by SFL scholars is perhaps lesser known among SLA researchers but also extremely interesting. It pertains to the study of social 'identities as indexed in expanding language choices' (Achugar and Colombi, 2008, p. 49). This is done by analysing interpersonal language resources that SFL scholars have identified as organized into **appraisal systems** (Martin, 2000). These resources help construct the user of the language as taking a stance, producing an evaluation and holding authority. Traditional resources may be hedging devices, for example by using modal verbs in certain ways, but the lexicogrammatical devices that construct appraisal are subtle and they extend over clauses, as meaning making usually does. Achugar (reported in Achugar and Colombi, 2008) tracked such changes in the answers that Marcelo, a graduate student in a bilingual Master of Fine Arts programme in southwest Texas, offered when she asked 'what does it mean [to you] that the program is bilingual?' at two different times, one year apart. As a first-year student, Marcelo was able to construct affect attitudes by expressing feelings (*me impresiona*, 'it impresses me') and drawing on references to personal experience in order to answer the question. As a second-year student, he used subjective evaluating devices (*yo creo que*, 'I think that') and even attempted to mention published authors (*no me acuerdo cómo se llamaba ni cómo se llamaba lo que escribió pero* …, 'I don't remember the name or the title, but …'). Achugar interprets these changes as indexing a developed sense of expertise and belonging to the academic community, an 'awareness of the resources available to present oneself as an authority and to be recognized as a member of [a] professional community' (Achugar and Colombi, 2008, p. 53).

In sum, the SFL approach offers much promise for SLA purposes. However, it remains to be seen whether SLA researchers will take more full advantage of the benefits of using it to illuminate the study of L2 learning.

10.13 LANGUAGE LEARNING IS SOCIAL LEARNING: LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION THEORY

Language socialization theory respecifies language learning as fundamentally about social learning. This vibrant area of research has expanded greatly in its three

decades of existence, as two authoritative reviews by Garrett and Baquedano-López (2002) and Duff (2007) amply show. It originated in the field of linguistic anthropology during the 1970s and early 1980s, when the seminal work of Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin led the way into richly contextualized studies of young children and their caregivers, mutually engaged in social routines that helped socialize the new members into the language, culture and values of their given community (e.g. Ochs and Schieffelin, 1984). The approach was then expanded by Shirley Brice Heath (1983) to include school–community differences in socialization and an explicit focus on literacy, not only orality. Many other researchers representing the second generation that began in the 1990s have continued to expand the socialization perspective with increasingly more work being conducted in L2 and multilingual contexts.

In their reviews, Garrett and Baquedano-López and Duff characterize the study of language socialization as preeminently ethnographic and longitudinal, preoccupied with the connection between language and culture, straddling micro and macro dimensions of context, and analytically centred around routines, rituals and other kinds of human activities that recur and are typical of a given community. These commentators also characterize the framework as influenced by European critical sociologists (Bourdieu and Giddens, especially) and increasingly more open to diverse sociocultural and poststructuralist critical theories. The theoretical expansion results from a concerted effort to be responsive to the strongly multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual makeup of our contemporary world and it reaffirms a continual interest to address 'the channels of mutual influence linking ideology, practice, and outcome' (Garrett and Baquedano-López, p. 355). Many of the titles of language socialization studies since the 2000s thus flag key terms, such as 'narrative', 'identity' and 'ideology', that are also associated with other sociocultural and poststructuralist approaches to the social study of language.

10.14 THE PROCESS OF LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION: ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

Much L2 socialization research has explored the kinds of cultural repertoire that make membership into a group possible, and the social processes that may support learners' appropriation of such repertoires. In doing so, this work has thrown into sharp relief the ways in which access to the new language and participation in the new community is not without struggles for L2 learners.

A common obstacle is when assumed shared knowledge is actually not shared. For example, Patricia Duff (2004) discovered that it was a typical practice in two grade 10 classes in a Canadian high school to draw on pop culture during animated teacher–student discussions. The teachers and the Canada-born students would make jokes, tell anecdotes and structure social studies debates around what they thought was common-knowledge references to *The Simpsons*, the British royal family, and so on. They seemed to use such talk effectively, in essence connecting relevant personal knowledge with academic subjects, an excellent educational

practice that usually maximizes learning. However, for the ESL members of the two classes, who had lived in Canada for one to three years only and were largely unfamiliar with Canadian pop culture, such talk only served to silence them and weaken their learning of the subject matter. Interestingly, none of the participants in these classrooms showed much awareness of just how difficult these interaction events were: fast-paced, full of slang and with many speakers contributing at the same time. Instead, the silence of the ESL peers was interpreted by the teachers, the Canada-born students, and even the ESL students themselves, as shyness and limited language ability, attributes associated with dominant ideologies of 'being Asian' and 'being a newcomer'.

Second language socialization studies have further revealed that learning outcomes can be greatly improved when L2 learners are not construed as definitional novices and instead their invisible expertise is made visible during socializing events. For example, in a two-year study, Betsy Rymes (2003, 2004) focused on Rene, a Costa Rican boy who had arrived in the United States in kindergarten and was enrolled in second and eventually third grade in an elementary school in the southeastern United States. Rene was usually friendly and verbally outgoing but became visibly shy during the official reading lessons. Rymes showed that this shyness was interactionally created by a zealous teacher, who overacted as the expert with her excessive modelling of classroom activities, and by other already socialized students, who always beat Rene when competing for the floor. Unexpectedly, during the second year of study the boy was able to engage in the kinds of language use his teachers had been desperately trying to elicit from him. This happened when some space opened up for talking about things that were familiar to his world beyond the school. For example, he decoded successfully the word *chancy* in a phonics card game by drawing on his knowledge of *Chansey*, one of the characters in the immensely popular video game of Pokémon (Rymes, 2004). With the co-participation of other peers, who were also Hispanic immigrants and ostensibly shared inside knowledge of certain birthday customs, he also narrated to a surprised and interested Ms Spring (his white, middle-class ESL teacher) an animated face-in-the-cake story (2003, p. 397):

(10) **The first time I did it I … was like four years old. And then I took a bite, and then my dad stook my whole face in the ca:ke ((laughs slightly)) And then I started crying**

Rymes emphasized that these productive moments usually happened when the students emerged as experts and the teacher was momentarily repositioned as a cultural novice in the interaction. She argued that these events where teacher–expert and learner–novice roles are reversed, or at least blurred, are important sites for language socialization and learning.

Second language socialization research has also clearly shown that access and participation are often restricted because members of a given group or community, the so-called 'experts', are variably knowledgeable, competent and willing as socialization partners. In a one-year study of the academic socialization of

international students at a Canadian university, Naoko Morita (2004) investigated the experiences of six female Japanese students enrolled in a variety of Master's and doctoral courses. Among them, 23-year-old Nanako and 27-year-old Rie were doing a Master's degree in education. Both worried about their difficulties in participating in class discussions and actively sought the help of their instructors. One of the instructors whom Nanako approached responded in a supportive manner that, although without leading to any changes in Nanako's visible behaviour, greatly encouraged her and helped her learn better (p. 587):

(11) **If someone followed me in all my courses and simply observed me, she would have just thought that I was a quiet person. But my silence had different meanings in different courses. In Course E, the instructor made me feel that I was there even though I was quiet. In the other courses my presence or absence didn't seem to make any difference … I just sat there like an ornament.**

The instructor whom Rie approached, on the other hand, explicitly construed her problems as a personal deficiency in language ability and invoked the good of the other students as a main reason for declining to make any adjustments in her teaching. After several proactive efforts, Rie had to resign herself and gave up on her hopes to recruit a willing socializing partner in this teacher: 'It was unfortunate that my presence was not respected' (p. 594). By contrast, she was able to negotiate successful participation in one of her other graduate courses, where her Japanese-Korean multicultural background was viewed as an asset: 'I could feel my own presence in this course' (p. 592). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that both expert and novice contributions are always co-constructed, not predetermined, and that their success or failure is also co-shared, rather than located in one or the other participant alone. For example, for Emiko, a 24-year-old Japanese student in the same study, an accommodating response by her instructor did not have the same benefits as it had for Nanako. Instead, Emiko felt initially more comfortable when her instructor agreed not to call on her during class discussions, but eventually her learning was short-changed because she felt cornered into the role of being the only silent member of the class.

10.15 THE OUTCOMES: WHAT IS LEARNED THROUGH L2 SOCIALIZATION?

By focusing on 'the process by which novices or newcomers in a community or culture gain communicative competence, membership, and legitimacy in the group' (Duff, 2007, p. 310), second language socialization studies help reconceptualize as social not only the process of language learning but also its outcomes. Namely, what is learned when people embark on additional language learning goes well beyond the mastery of a language, even if this is broadly conceived as including discourse, pragmatics and non-linguistic resources. It also encompasses 'appropriate identities, stances … or ideologies, and other behaviors

associated with the target group and its normative practices' as well (p. 310).

Thus, for example, in a study abroad investigation, DuFon (2006) showed many interactional ways in which L2 learners of Indonesian were socialized by their host families into talking about and acting towards food. In the process, they learned a great deal of L2 vocabulary (*pedas*, 'spicy'; *asin*, 'salty') and formulas for how to compliment (*enak*, 'delicious') or directly criticize (*kurang enak*, 'not very tasty'; *hambar*, 'tasteless') the cook (both actions are apparently acceptable during Indonesian meals!). But they were also socialized into thinking of food as a central pleasure of life and some of these US learners moved towards this world-view, which was different from the more utilitarian food-as-nutrition stance they had brought with them from their home culture. Kyle, one of the study abroad students, reflected on these changes (p. 117):

(12) **My eating behavior has changed. Now I eat a lot in the morning, plus my eating etiquette has changed. Things that taste good taste really good. I kind of look at the food differently, with more respect.**

The inseparability of language learning and the learning of normative ways of being and thinking is well illustrated in an ethnographic study conducted by Leslie Moore (2006), which documented L2 teaching practices during the first year of elementary schooling among the Fulbe, a multilingual Muslim majority ethnic group in the northern part of Cameroon, in west-central Africa. Fulbe children usually learn Fulfulde at home and acquire Arabic for religious purposes and French for education purposes during schooling, starting at age 6. Moore focused on the ways memorization (or guided repetition, as she prefers to call it) was used in the teaching of Arabic verses of the Qur'an, which occurred in Qur'anic schooling, and the teaching of French dialogues, which occurred in public schools. Memorization was used in both contexts because it is valued in Fulbe society as an excellent learning method, particularly suitable for children between the age of 6 and puberty, who are thought to possess a *taaskaare wuule* or virgin memory and to be *tabulae rasae* or blank slates (p. 116). However, her analysis of 90 hours of recordings over a school year showed that the method was used in subtly different ways in the two contexts. During the Qur'anic lessons, students were expected to learn from the models offered by teacher or *mallum* or by a more senior student appointed by the *mallum* to that role, never from each other. It was fully understood that they would not learn the verse contents, only the form. Appropriate learner behaviour included being attentive and mentally imitating and rehearsing the verses and (at a different pace for each student) eventually being able to faithfully perform the sacred text, adopting similar 'pronunciation, sequencing, volume, and embodiment' as the *mallum* (p. 115) and without making mistakes. If any errors occurred, the student would be interrupted and the *mallum* would repeat the full verse again without indicating the blame of the error in any way. That is, there were no correction moves of the kinds illustrated in Chapter 4, section 4.11. By contrast, during the memorization activities in the French dialogues, the pedagogical approach of teachers in the public schools was closer in

all these respects to what is practised by many Western language teachers. Moore argues that these differences are linked to the distinct social learning goals of the lessons in each context. Namely, the Arabic teaching of the sacred Qur'anic verses seeks to socialize young children into traditional and ethnic Muslim and Fulbe values, such as respect, humility, reverence and discipline. By contrast, the French language taught in elementary schools is part of a national project to develop a Cameroonian modern identity, which is implicated in postcolonial French values of being *évolué* or civilized and rational, related to more general Western educational values.

This far-reaching view of the outcomes of language socialization, then, resonates with James Gee's (1990) description of language competence:

> In socially situated language use, one must simultaneously say the 'right' thing, do the 'right' thing, and in saying and doing express the 'right' beliefs, values, and attitudes.
>
> (p. 140)

While many researchers and teachers will agree with this definition of L2 competence, it raises the difficult question of whether the adoption of what a community or a group defines as 'right saying, doing and being' must be taken as the neutral, necessary and benign goal of L2 learning. If so, socialization could risk being just a more fashionable guise of the dangerous ideology of assimilation. It should be clear that this is not the intended goal of researchers who apply language socialization to L2 learning. Nevertheless, this difficult but important question is to some extent eschewed unless identity, ideology and power are brought to the fore. As we will see in the remainder of the chapter, this is precisely what identity theory can offer to SLA researchers.

10.16 SENSE OF SELF IS SOCIAL: IDENTITY THEORY

Identity theory is seldom directly examined as part of the official world of SLA. Nevertheless, the study of identity and L2 learning is one of the most vibrant research areas in the wider field of applied linguistics. Identity theory respecifies sense of self as socially constructed and socially constrained. Interest in this area began to grow when in 1993 Bonny Norton Peirce completed her dissertation on the identity struggles of five immigrant women in Canada and later published parts of the study in two extensively cited sources, an article in *TESOL Quarterly* (Norton Peirce, 1995) and a book (Norton, 2000). In 2002 a new journal was devoted to the area, the *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, published by Routledge. Since then, work on second language identity has only continued to intensify.

The vibrant interest that identity theory has spurred is visible in the many second language studies cited in three reviews by key contributors to this literature: Blackledge and Pavlenko (2004b), Norton (2006) and Block (2007). They note that the preferred contemporary theoretical prism to study identity in applied

linguistics is poststructuralism and that narratives have become an important site to inspect identity in many L2 studies (Block, 2007, p. 867). They also warn us that identities must be understood as socially constructed and situated, always 'dynamic, contradictory, and constantly changing across time and place' (Norton, 2006, p. 502). Furthermore, they posit that people cannot freely choose who they want to be, but rather they must negotiate identity positions in the larger economic, historic, and sociopolitical structures that they inhabit and which inhabit them (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004b, p. 3). You will find that in their writings second language identity scholars use many words that denote this poststructuralist view of identity as dynamic and contested, for example, nouns such as *fissures, splits, splinterings, gaps* and *seepage*, and adjectives such as *shifting, fragmented, decentered* and *hybrid*. Finally, much second language identity research, although not all, is decidedly oriented towards macro dimensions of context and explicitly theorizes the social as a site of struggle in need of transformation. Much of it, therefore, explores ways in which scholarly knowledge can become a platform for advocating social justice for L2 learners (Norton Peirce, 1995; Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004b).

The most influential model of second language identity theory has been formulated by Norton (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). One main concept is **investment**, or the notion that 'if learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital' (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 17). The investment that a given learner makes in learning an L2 can only be understood by consideration of her identities, her desires and her changing social world, as all three contribute to the structuring of different investments at different times and across contexts. This is complemented by the claim that intertwined with their investments are L2 learners' affective and symbolic affiliations to various **communities of practice**. Some of them are real, immediate communities in which learners strive for acceptance or legitimate membership, such as the classroom communities in which Nanako, Rie and Emiko wanted to belong more fully, in the study by Morita (2004) discussed in section 10.14. Others are **imagined communities**, or communities that exist at present only in the imagination, and which learners forge on the basis of their past memberships and life history as well as on the projections they make for a better future (we will examine an example in the next section). A final key element of Norton's identity model is the notion of **the right to speak**. This right and the power to exercise it is unequally distributed, and often L2 learners find themselves positioned by others as speakers without that right. The theoretical influences on this model of identity, as Norton (2006) succinctly explains, span sociology (Pierre Bourdieu), feminism (Chris Weedon), cultural anthropology (Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger) and literary criticism (Mikhail Bakhtin). In the next two sections, I illustrate these and other concepts of second language identity theory with a selective sample of ways in which identity is relevant for two rather different kinds of context for L2 learning: circumstantial and elective.

10.17 L2 LEARNERS' IDENTITY AND POWER STRUGGLES: EXAMPLES FROM CIRCUMSTANTIAL L2 LEARNING

Circumstantial L2 learning involves situations where members of a language minority must learn the majority language for reasons over which they have little choice and which are typically associated to larger-scale world events, such as immigration, economic hardship, postcolonialism, war or occupation. Identity research in these contexts has shown that learners strive to construct positive identities for themselves from a position of marginalization, and that they do so by reference to the identity options available to them in the multiple and contradictory discourses of family, school, workplace, media and so on.

Particularly in institutional contexts where language minority learners enjoy little power, such as schools, they are seen to struggle to fashion and negotiate identities that may allow them to exercise their agency and be viewed positively by others. Many encounter only limited success in overcoming marginalization. This was shown by McKay and Wong (1996) in a two-year ethnography of the literacy and identity experiences by four adolescents, all recently arrived immigrants from Taiwan and China who were enrolled in seventh and eighth grade in a high school in California. Among them, Brad Wang was probably the least successful story. He was the only student from a lower socioeconomic background, and he experienced a spiral of dispiriting positionings that in effect ended his high-school career. For one, his verbal virtuosity in spoken and written Chinese and his prior attendance of one of the top middle schools in Shanghai were invisible to his teachers, but his lack of toys and material goods were patently visible to his peers. Being one of few Chinese mainlanders in the school, he attempted to find strength in Chinese nationalist discourses that construe mainlanders as superior to other Chinese (as did another student, who told one of the researchers, *zhengzong zhongguoren* or 'I am authentic Chinese', p. 589). However, outnumbered by the school cliques of Cantonese and Taiwanese students, this was an ineffective, isolating move. He was initially eager to catch up with English, but his desperate attempts to save face by feigning comprehension soon made him be labelled as dishonest by his teachers, who drew from the racialized discourse that blames immigrants who do not assimilate and learn English fast as unwilling and of lower moral values. In the end, he was imposed an identity as a low achiever. From that imposed identity, his great potential for literacy growth, obvious to the researchers, remained untapped by the teachers. Gradually Brad Wang began acting out and eventually dropped out.

It has also been shown that the discourses and narratives through which possible identities are available to L2 learners are always contradictory and heterogeneous, and that the identity positionings they help fashion are also subject to change. In another ethnographic study, Linda Harklau (2000) traced the experiences of Aeyfer, Claudia and Penny during their senior year of high school and their first year of college. Unlike the newcomers studied by McKay and Wong, these students were old-timers who had been in the United States between six and ten years. In high school they enjoyed favourable subject positions, partly drawn from 'broader U.S.

societal "Ellis Island" images of immigrants leaving their homes, enduring financial and emotional hardships, and through sheer perseverance succeeding in building a better life for themselves in America' (p. 46). Interestingly, teachers and students participated in the co-construction and perpetuation of this heroic immigrant identity. For example, whenever given a choice over the topic of their writing, the students repeatedly chose to write about their personal immigration story, in essence appropriating the 'Ellis Island' myth to their own advantage. This positive identity, however, coexisted with discourses of paternalism and deficiency, in teacher images of immigrant students who do their best but always struggle academically. The generally affirming experiences in high school changed radically when Aeyfer, Claudia and Penny entered a two-year community college and were tracked into ESL classes by virtue of their being classified as non-native speakers by the institution. Their readings and assignments now contained constant probes to narrate themselves in a space between 'your country' and 'the United States', which trapped these US-educated immigrants in their college teachers' imposed identity of the international student, the newcomer who needs to be socialized into new ways of being. Once again, the discourses were heterogeneous and the positionings ambivalent. For example, Harklau noted that these students' idea of 'their' country seemed to align with neither the distant social worlds they had left behind many years before nor 'the White, middle-class version of culture that they and their teachers referred to generically as "American"' (p. 56). Bored and frustrated as a result of such imposed identities, Aeyfer, Claudia and Penny eventually avoided re-enrolling in more ESL classes, once they discovered they were not compulsory.

Finally, second language identity research has shown that not only surrounding discourses and ideologies, but also actual and imagined communities of practice, help structure the investments and, consequently, the varied learning trajectories and learning outcomes that are observed in contexts of circumstantial L2 learning. Norton Peirce's (1993) analysis of Katarina's story clearly illustrates this point. Katarina was a Polish immigrant who had a Master's degree in biology and 17 years of teaching experience in her home country, but she knew no English (although she was trilingual in Polish, Russian and German) when she arrived in Canada with her husband and their six-year-old daughter. Katarina felt alienated, not her own self, when positioned as an immigrant by others and 'bitterly resisted being positioned as unskilled and uneducated' (p. 142). Despite her new changed context, she continued to view herself as a member of a community of well-educated professionals. Therefore, and as part of her quest to regain her past professional status in a new professional life, she invested in this imagined community by completing an 18-month computer course. In order to meet this goal, she found herself forced to work as a part-time homemaker, a job that did not match her professional training and in which she did not recognize herself. Eventually she also decided to drop her subsidized nine-month ESL course only four months into it, essentially choosing the study of computers over the study of English, even though English was also a necessary tool in the fashioning of a professional identity. This choice was structured by her greater investment in a well-educated self than in an English speaking self, which was part of her identity as a member of her imagined

professional community: 'I choose computer course, not because I have to speak, but because I have to think' (p. 142). Katarina's English did improve quite a bit over time, but the improvement came out of being able to practise English in a low-stakes context that she only viewed as temporary and not a part of her 'normal' self, as she felt relaxed when speaking in English with the elderly she was caring for. In stark contrast, with English-speaking professionals, such as teachers and doctors, she found it difficult to speak. This observation was true of other women in the study and led Norton (2001) to note that 'the very people to whom the learners were most uncomfortable speaking English were the very people who were members of – or gatekeepers to – the learners' imagined communities' (p. 166). The question remains as to whether and how Katarina, and other women in positions like hers, will develop not only L2 fluency in low-stakes contexts but also the ability to claim the right to speak in the L2 in high-stakes contexts, which are likely to be related to the communities that they envision for their future selves.

10.18 CLOSE IMPACT OF IDENTITIES ON L2 LEARNING: EXAMPLES FROM ELECTIVE L2 LEARNING

Elective L2 learning is engaged by people who learn a language from a majority position of equal power and hence with no evident or immediate power struggles. Studies of identity in elective language learning contexts are less numerous than those conducted in contexts of circumstantial bilingualism, and they have mostly concentrated on tracing the experiences of foreign language learners when they enter into contact with the L2 community, typically during residence in the L2 environment.

Identity research in these contexts has shown that foreign language learners also have investments that are structured by their identities and that guide different learners to allocate energy and effort differently in their efforts to learn an L2. For example, as we mentioned in Chapter 9 (section 9.4), many foreign language learners embrace the emulation of an idealized native speaker as a goal. This idealized goal draws from the discourse of monolingualism dominant in much foreign language education, which holds that the best kind of linguistic competence is that which is attained by primary socialization (i.e. in a language given by birth) and which contains no impurity or trace of other languages (i.e. no codeswitching or code mixing, no transfer, no foreign accent) (see Ortega, 1999). Nevertheless, other foreign language learners may actually selectively resist emulating aspects of that idealization, precisely because they clash with their current sense of self. This was shown by Yumiko Ohara (2001) when she examined the pitch levels used by three groups of female Japanese speakers in the United States. Ohara recorded the women on a series of scripted tasks in both languages and undertook a phonetic analysis of pitch frequencies, then interviewed them. The five Japanese-dominant bilinguals (i.e. international graduate students from Japan) consistently produced higher pitch in Japanese than in English. At the other extreme of the spectrum, the five 'budding bilinguals' (p. 236), who were enrolled in a first-semester university

course, showed no evidence of changing their pitch across their two languages, neither did they give any signs of being aware of any pitch issues in Japanese when they were interviewed. These findings support the contention that in Japanese a high-pitched voice is a recognizable marker of femininity and suggest that certain subtle indexical resources of identity, such as the association between pitch and femininity, may be beyond the grasp of learners in the beginning of the learning process. The most interesting finding, however, arose from the five English-dominant Japanese speaking females, who had at least four years of Japanese university study and one year of living in Japan. All five were acutely aware of the cultural significance of pitch. However, their agency to act upon this awareness was exercised differently. Three of them produced the expected higher pitch in Japanese. In their interviews, they explicitly mentioned accommodation as the main reason. They felt they needed a higher pitch if they wanted to sound Japanese and come across as polite to Japanese interlocutors. The other two females, however, did not change their pitch. In their interviews, they explicitly revealed their resistance to this one aspect of the L2 in the construction of their Japanese identities (p. 244):

(13) **Sometimes it would really disgust me, seeing those Japanese girls, they were not even girls, some of them were in their late twenties, but they would use those real high voices to try to impress and make themselves look real cute for men. I decided that there was no way I wanted to do that.**

For elective language learners, as much as for circumstantial ones, the extent to which they can exercise their agency and be who they want to be in the L2 is constrained by the agency of other speakers, who, like them, also draw on ideologies rooted in their surrounding discourses. This was the argument developed by Meryl Siegal (1996) in her case study of Mary, a high-school teacher from New Zealand who in her mid-forties spent a year in Japan funded by her government. Mary was heavily invested in learning to be pragmatically appropriate in the L2 and fervently wanted to be the kind of person who is polite and does not offend while using her upper-intermediate Japanese. Although she consciously avoided using honorifics because she found them too difficult, she developed multiple strategies to fashion this new identity as a humble and feminine self during interactions with Japanese speakers. For example, she deployed many hesitancy markers (e.g. *anō*) in her talk, she occasionally adopted a singing voice to come across as cheerful and she covered her mouth when laughing. Despite such careful efforts, Siegal captured an interaction during office hours between Mary and one of her Japanese teachers, in which she inadvertently was rather massively inappropriate when speaking to a social superior. For example, she used the particle *deshō* profusely without being aware of its multifunctional meanings that made it inappropriate in the context and she closed the exchange with 'excuse me, thank you very much' (*chotto dōmo, sumimasen, arigatō gozaimasu*) in a singing voice that was appropriate for a service encounter but not for a meeting with a professor. All these choices were aggravated by the fact that her speech was stripped

of honorifics, which are essential when speaking to a social superior in Japanese. Interestingly, even though she violated a number of pragmatic norms, about which she cared greatly, she remained wholly unaware of the potentially face-threatening effect of her talk. This was because her interlocutor apparently did not give her any overt feedback. Siegal suggested this response may have been motivated in the Japanese nationalist discourse of the *henna gaijin* or 'strange foreigners', which construes Japanese as a difficult language that foreigners cannot and need not master; it would be only an oddity for foreigners to learn Japanese things too well and become too Japanese.

Finally, studies show that the socially constructed categories of gender, race and class are relevant for elective L2 learning in that they affect foreign language learners' investments, desires and identity negotiations in a number of important ways. For example, sexism greatly pervaded the language learning experiences of a group of US women during study abroad in Russia (Polanyi, 1995). Ironically, it also encouraged them to stretch their L2 competence, as they learned to negotiate in the L2 'how to get out of humiliating social encounters, how to interpret the intentions of even polite-seeming educated young men, how to get themselves in one piece after an evening spent in fending off unwanted advances' (p. 289). Gendered racism put an end to Misheila's desire to learn any Spanish ever again, after a bitter study abroad period in Spain during which she found herself constantly verbally harassed by men (Talburt and Stewart, 1999, p. 169):

(14) **My observation is very negative. For me while I've been in Spain I notice that the African woman is a symbol of sexuality. When I walk in the streets I always receive comments on my skin and sexual commentaries, especially with old men and adolescents between the age of 15 and 20.**

Class, by way of contrast, was a main identity force for Alice, a college French student in the United States who engaged in L2 learning as a project of social upward mobility and identity reconstruction. This case was carefully documented by Celeste Kinginger (2004) over four years. Alice was bought up by a working-class single mum who moved her two daughters through Ohio and Georgia, and later by her grandfather in rural Arkansas. She had experienced many hardships in life and felt different from her younger and more privileged college peers. She was invested in French for its symbolic promise to help her transcend and escape her difficult life. Kinginger described the many ways in which Alice drew from the US popular discourses of French as the language of love, culture and frivolity, which are reinforced by textbook materials and the media, and used this ideology to imagine a future French-speaking self that afforded her the opportunity to symbolically exchange trailer parks for châteaux, as it were. Despite many disappointments over four years of several study abroad stays, Alice was eventually able to succeed in her quest. In order to do so, she had to engage in deep renegotiations of identity and had to look for opportunities for learning in less than obvious places. In the end, however, she was able to complete her project of a new identity as a competent L2 French speaker and a future French language teacher. Learning French allowed her

'to upgrade her access to cultural capital, become a cultured person, and share her knowledge with others' (p. 240).

10.19 TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION AS A SITE FOR SOCIALLY RICH L2 LEARNING

We cannot finish a chapter on the social dimensions of L2 learning without commenting on the learning of an additional language in virtual contexts, that is, in contexts mediated by technology, since so much of our contemporary lives are spent in networked communication that transcends space and time. As Kern (2006) chronicles in an authoritative review of L2 learning and technology, the full palette of social theories we have discussed in this chapter has been successfully applied to the study of this area, expanding the epistemological landscape and also establishing a metaphor of **technology as medium**, or technology that creates 'sites for interpersonal communication, multimedia publication, distance learning, community participation, and identity formation' (p. 192). Lam (2006), Sykes et al. (2008) and Thorne and Black (2007) offer good reviews of cutting-edge developments in the domain. This research shows that technologies put to the use of digital social networks can foster second language and literacy learning that is remarkably rich in social terms.

A stream of socioculturally oriented research about L2 learning and technology has concentrated on exploring the learning about target discourses and cultures that accrues from participation in online communication either with classmates or in geographically and culturally distant classroom communities. In some studies, an expansion of the socio-interactional competence in the L2 is documented. For example, Darhower (2002) analysed the discourse produced by two intact classes of fourth-semester Spanish students when they completed weekly in-class chat activities over a nine-week term. He noted that the foreign language was used for a much wider variety of interpersonal purposes than would have been possible in the official face-to-face classroom discourse, including teasing and joking, and even deploying profane language during half-humorous flaming. He argued that such language use has potential for the expansion of L2 sociolinguistic repertoires. In many other studies, foreign language students are seen to develop much cultural knowledge about the L2. This is true of so-called telecollaborations among geographically and culturally distant classroom communities (Belz and Thorne, 2006) but also of less structured and more casual L2–L1 online encounters (e.g. Tudini, 2007). Other benefits of these virtual engagements are that students are often able to confront stereotypes and prejudice and increase cultural self-awareness (e.g. O'Dowd, 2005). Technology-mediated crosscultural partnerships are also particularly prone to generate healthy doses of intercultural discomfort and tension (e.g. Basharina, 2007) that should be carefully addressed by language teachers.

Much of the insight we currently have about technology and language learning comes from another stream of research about the use of out-of-school technology by immigrant youth. The findings amply document processes by which technology

can help minority L2 learners fashion positive identities that can counter the negative positionings available to them in the world of school. This is done in many cases through the development of online relationships in transnational communities. Lam (2000) documented the story of Almon, a teenage immigrant from Hong Kong who had resided in the US for five years. He felt unsure of his English skills and discriminated against in the context of a school culture that positioned him as an ESL learner and a low achiever. His engagement with instant messaging, penpal emailing and his creation of a webpage about his favourite teenage Japanese pop singer opened up a new world of peers on the internet, who helped him construct a new, confident identity in which Almon felt an expert in web design and Japanese pop culture and a competent user of English. In a later article, Lam (2004) reported on two young women, Yu Qing and Tsu Ying, who emigrated from China and had been in the US for three years. Even though they were B students, they felt uncomfortable speaking English in the cliquish life of school, where they were caught in between worlds, unable to access much interaction with their Anglo peers and intimidated by their American-born Chinese peers, with whom they shared the same ethnic background but little linguistic or cultural common ground. Experimenting with the internet and looking for ways to practise their English online, they discovered a chatroom where immigrant Chinese people from all over the world chatted in English. Yu Qing and Tsu Ying showed a tremendous level of engagement with this new community, joining daily for about three hours during the eight-month study. They freely and creatively used English and mixed it with Romanized Cantonese, using these resources to create rapport and construct a shared identity as bilingual English–Cantonese speakers with a shared experience of immigration. Lam noted that participation in this supportive virtual community helped them gain English fluency and boosted their confidence also in their school environment.

Finally, several studies have documented remarkable literacy engagement by L2 users who found in technology-mediated virtual communities the space for creative writing and self-expression that they could not find in the academic discourse of schoolwork. Black (2006) chronicles the success story of Tanaka Nanako (presumably a self-chosen pseudonym). She was a young Chinese girl from Shanghai whose family emigrated to Canada when she was 11. Being a great fan of animé, the world-popular Japanese animation, she soon discovered fanfiction, which are online sites in which fans of media series (e.g. *Star Trek*, Harry Potter, animé) post their own creative writing that spins off the officially authored stories. Nanako read animé fanfiction avidly before she finally created her own page at the age of 13. Soon thereafter she became a prolific fanfiction writer on the site. Black documents the many ways in which Nanako's writing of fanfiction afforded her a wealth of process writing experiences that included peer feedback and multiple revisions as well as space for the development of positive identities. For example, one of Nanako's posted stories (written in 14 chapters!) 'became wildly popular' and 'received over 1,700 reviews from readers' (2006, p. 177). One can only imagine the tremendous boost that she experienced in her identity as a person and an English writer. Likewise, Yi (2007) described the less dramatic but equally intense

engagement with literacy in Korean by Joan, a Korean–English bilingual ninth-grader in a US school who was able to thrive as a creative and versatile writer with the support of a local digital community of about 25 Korean heritage youth in her same city. Finally, the production and consumption of online (and traditional) texts that draw on multimodal forms of meaning making, including language, images and sound, has also been identified as a particularly important site of language and literacy learning that multilingual users, particularly young ones, can exploit with positive results for their academic achievement as much as for their identity development (e.g. Kenner and Kress, 2003; Hull and Nelson, 2005).

10.20 NEVER JUST ABOUT LANGUAGE

As I hope to have made clear throughout this chapter, for many, perhaps most, people who undertake to learn an additional language, what is at stake is not only the odds that they succeed in acquiring the second language or even that they succeed in acquiring the literacy and professional competencies that they desire for themselves or that they may need to function in society. For many, perhaps most additional second language learners, it is about succeeding in attaining material, symbolic and affective returns that they desire for themselves. It is also about being considered by others as worthy social beings. If this is so, then we must conclude that people who undertake to learn an additional language are engaged in changing their worlds. We can say, in this sense, that L2 learning is always transformative.

Much goes into the definition of what must develop when L2 competence develops, if the insights from the social turn are heeded. As Norton (2006) succinctly put it:

> second language learners need to struggle to appropriate the voices of others; they need to learn to command the attention of their listeners; they need to negotiate language as a system and as a social practice; and they need to understand the practices of the communities with which they interact.
>
> (p. 504)

To this broad list, Norton has proposed we must also add the 'ability to claim the right to speak' (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 23) and 'an awareness of how to challenge and transform social practices of marginalization' (p. 25). That is, part and parcel of becoming competent in an additional language is growing able to exercise agency and productive power (Kamberelis, 2001) and transform one's worlds in and through the L2. But L2 learners as much as the people who surround them can have different affiliative or antagonistic engagements, as Bhabha (1994, p. 3) calls them, and these will influence the uneven access to, and variegated outcomes of, L2 learning. The institutions in which people live, and the material, social and cultural histories they live with and through, add complexity to people's ability to change their worlds through and in the learning of an additional language. Social contexts for L2 learning are, in this view, sites of struggle and transformation. But once we

become convinced that L2 learning is never just about language, and that it is always transformative, the predicament is not small.

For one, we learn that we cannot promise L2 learners that their plights, their marginalization or their desires will be solved, only if (and as soon as) they attain a good level of L2 competence. Just as learning an L2 is never only about language, so is being judged as a competent and valued social being never just a matter of sheer L2 competence, even under greatly expanded definitions that include gestures and concepts (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006) or normative ways of saying, doing and being (see section 10.15). Many studies show learners with higher linguistic competence being bypassed by gatekeepers in favour of others with lesser linguistic expertise precisely because of race (Toohey, 2001), gender (Willett, 1995) or lack of material and symbolic resources (McKay and Wong, 1996). These influences were more important than linguistic and even sociocultural competence in those contexts.

With the awareness that L2 learning it never just about language also comes the question of whether we should do something about it. If the project of learning an additional language is itself about transforming social worlds, shouldn't educators who serve L2 learners, and researchers who study them, support them in their transformative efforts? Critical applied linguists have suggested the answer is yes (Canagarajah, 2002; Pennycook, 2004; Heller, 2007). As noted, some poststructuralist identity authors also maintain that scholarly knowledge can become a platform for advocating social justice for L2 learners (Norton Peirce, 1995; Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004b). Suggestions have been also made for how to work for transformation, both by developing resources for L2 learners from minority groups to learn to empower themselves and contest marginalization through and in L2 learning (Davis et al., 2005) and by helping L2 learners from majority groups to empower themselves and critically interrogate normative discourses also through and in L2 learning (Kramsch, 2006). The social turn in SLA continues to entice people who are interested in understanding additional language learning to venture and glimpse new possibilities for L2 learners in their social contexts.

10.21 SUMMARY

- Since the mid-1990s, there is an ongoing social turn in SLA that has its roots in social constructivism, socioculturalism and poststructuralism and posits that we can only understand L2 learning if we examine it fully embedded in its social context.
- Vygotskian sociocultural theory respecifies cognition as fundamentally social and proposes consciousness as the central function of human cognition and the main object of inquiry; language is used to create thought, it also transforms thought, and it is the source of learning.
- The main concepts to remember in Vygotskian sociocultural theory are: language as a symbolic tool; mediation through object, others and self;

social, private and inner speech; the emergence of self-regulation; and the Zone of Proximal Development.

- The Vygotskian approach to SLA conceives of L2 learning as joint activity in which construction of co-knowledge is enabled and in which self-regulation is facilitated and negotiated through different kinds of mediation.
- L2 learning is captured through the microgenetic method during meditated thought and talk in L2 and L1 and it is evaluated not as already attained development but as potential improvement towards self-regulation for the future.
- CA-for-SLA investigates the socio-interactional accomplishments of L2 learners as they do communication, and it reconceptualizes into interactional resources actions and solutions that other approaches may take for evidence of deficiency.
- By following the radically emic imperative of grounding interpretive claims in the observable or witnessable evidence of interactional actions, CA-for-SLA proposes that a number of categories (e.g. error, negotiation for meaning, learner identity, linguistic expertise) have no constant value but are made relevant or irrelevant anew in each local interaction and each turn-at-talk.
- Co-participants in an L2 interaction typically, but not always, co-orient to joint interactional action and interactional identities. The external contexts and settings make some orientations, identities and goals more available than others, but they do not completely determine them.
- Systemic Functional Linguistics respecifies grammar as a social semiotic process, that is, as the social action of meaning making. The framework has been applied to L2 learning more readily in order to describe the textual challenges of L2 learners but less often to investigate semiotic development in the L2.
- The development of academic repertoires can be studied by inspecting textual changes in lexical density, grammatical metaphor and grammatical intricacy longitudinally; all three qualities are related to semiotic processes involved in making formal language less grammatically congruent and more informationally dense than everyday language.
- Functional recasts and appraisal systems are two other areas in which some SFL-inspired efforts at studying semiotic development in an L2 have been made.
- Language socialization theory sees language learning and social learning as constitutive of each other; it investigates how, through social activity with willing experts, newcomers gain not only language knowledge but also membership and legitimacy in a given group or community.

- In L2 studies, language socialization researchers have concentrated on studying what kinds of access to the new language and what conditions of participation in the new community support or hinder L2 learners' appropriation of the linguistic and cultural resources needed to be accepted in a new context as a competent member.
- The outcomes of language socialization are far reaching and include normative ways of viewing the world. That is, by increasingly participating more actively in activities with others, learners acquire new ways of saying, doing and being.
- Identity theory reconceptualizes sense of self as socially constructed and socially constrained and shows how this construct helps explain different language learning trajectories and their outcomes.
- The main concepts to remember in identity theory are: investment, communities of practice, imagined communities and the right to speak.
- Identity, ideology and power are intertwined and help understand L2 learning.
- In contexts for circumstantial as well as elective L2 learning, learners struggle to fashion identities that allow them to exercise their agency and be viewed positively by others; possible identities are made available by surrounding discourses in social structures that yield unequal power; learners have some agency to negotiate, resist, accommodate or change their identities across time and space.
- Technology-based communication affords L2 learners rich opportunities for identity negotiation and reconstruction and social and cultural learning, as well as unprecedented support for literacy development.
- The social perspectives on L2 learning discussed in this chapter, and particularly among them the poststructuralist approaches, suggest that L2 learning is never just about language; for many, perhaps most, people who undertake to learn an additional language, it is about succeeding in attaining material, symbolic and affective returns that they desire for themselves and it is also about being considered by others as worthy social beings. In both cases, learners are engaged in changing their worlds, and thus L2 learning is always transformative.

10.22 ANNOTATED SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Thinking socially, rather than psychologically, is not an easy task. You can read Kubota's (2003) incisive allegoric story of Barbara to understand what I mean by this. In that article she shows that it is common to go through a difficult and unfinished personal transformation in our understanding of the ineluctably social

construction of all knowledge and discourse, including the knowledge and discourse of L2 learning. A specific danger is to read studies of L2 learning that inspect the problems from a radical, socially respecified perspective and, nevertheless, to miss the point and reinterpret what we read through our accustomed ways of thinking. Therefore, I urge you to enter the readings with an open mind and a holistic outlook and, at the same time, to pay close attention to detail as you delve into this literature.

For each of the topics discussed, the authoritative reviews cited at the beginning of each exposition can help you gain a good sense of the area and lead you to work beyond the limited selection that could be accommodated in the chapter. If you are the kind of reader who benefits from first looking into concrete examples of studies and only then reading the reviews, I can offer the following reading suggestions. Empirical studies can consolidate your view of Vygotskian sociocultural theory, and Frawley and Lantolf (1985), Donato (1994) and Nassaji and Swain (2000) are particularly interesting and easy to read for this purpose. For CA-for-SLA, reading the oft-cited Firth and Wagner (1997) is a must, followed up by the hybrid L2 CA studies by Hellermann (2006) and Richards (2006). The best short cut for applications of Systemic Functional Linguistics to L2 learning is Achugar and Colombi (2008), who also offer particularly helpful tables summarizing much relevant research. For language socialization theory, I recommend you read Gregory et al. (2007). This richly textured study of 6-year-old Sahil and his grandmother Razia in Bangladeshi London will help you connect the various themes reviewed in the sections you read about this approach. A good introduction to identity theory would be to read the empirical studies by Norton Peirce (1995), McKay and Wong (1996) and Kinginger (2004), in that order, as they complement one another and will strengthen your understanding of the approach. With respect to technology-mediated L2 learning, Lam (2004) offers an excellent example for how the framework of second language socialization can be creatively employed to study technology, and Black (2006) makes a convincing case for the truly unprecedented opportunities for L2 learning and identity transformation that social technology can offer youth. Finally, the studies collected in the important book by Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004a) can serve as a nice bridge between identity theory and critical applied linguistics.