

Second Language Acquisition and Social Identity

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Purpose

Investigation of the processes of English acquisition and acculturation of immigrants from varied backgrounds.
Research question:
How representative are the claims of SLA theories, such as Acculturation (Schumann 1979), Interaction (Long 1983), Social Effects (Ellis 1994)?

Method

Survey questionnaire
Random selection, diverse body of subjects

NY Statistics

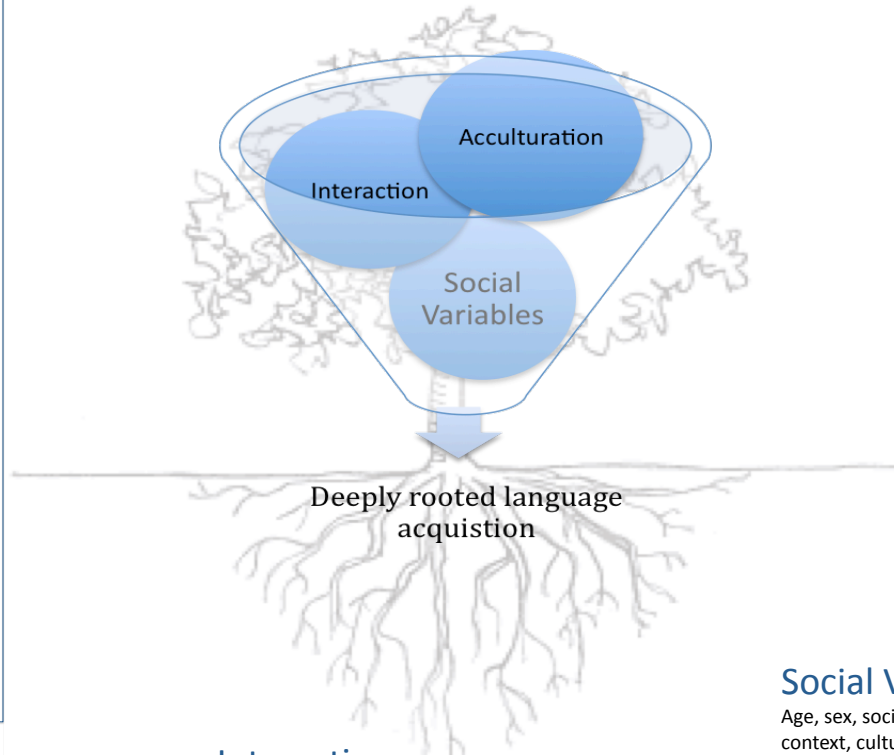
New York immigrant population:
2009: 21.4%

Place of origin:

Latin America	53.1%
Asia	27.7%
Europe	12.7%
Africa	3.9%

www.migrationinformation.org

25% of immigrants are under 18
(Portes and Rumbaut 2005:986)



Conclusion

The proposed SLA theories do not hold true for the majority of L2 learners. Acculturation, Interaction and favorable social conditions serve the learner as tools in language acquisition. Deeply rooted language acquisition is not guaranteed by any of these theories.

Further Research

Learners Agency

- The proposed theories refer to outside resources and influences, on which the learner is dependent.
- How can an L2 learner take agency in his/her learning? And how would agency impact his/her language acquisition?

Multiple Identities

The majority of immigrants do not identify with the U.S., but have negotiated multiple identities, selecting and shaping their new identity. "I am an American because it's multicultural" (Subject 2)

Acculturation (Schumann 1979)

The learner who adopts the life style and value of the TL group will achieve language proficiency

Cases: subject 20 and subject 1

- Same proficiency: native
- Subject 20: complete acculturation (no longer speaks French)
- Subject 1: no acculturation
- More participants who consider the U.S. their home have native proficiency, more participants who do not consider the U.S. their home have Near Native proficiency

Hypothesis:

- The participants who view their native country their home keep their foreign accent
- Caroline achieved near native proficiency outside of the TL context (no opportunity for acculturation)
- Acculturation is not a requirement for language acquisition

Interaction (Long 1983)

Acquisition requires interaction with TL speakers. Interaction involves input and output.

Cases: Subject 5 and subject 6

- Same proficiency: advanced
- Subject 5: (EFL: 12 years, immersion: 10 years)
- Subject 6: (EFL: 9 months, immersion: 19 months)
- 5 subjects have native proficiency:
- 3/4 subjects use TL 100%
- 1/4 use mother tongue 50% of the time (Subject 12)

Hypothesis:

- Under very different degrees of input Subject 5 and Subject 6 achieved the same proficiency.
- Interaction is an important aspect of language acquisition: The only participants who have acquired native proficiency are those that use English only. Their output is 100% TL.
- In some cases (Subject 12), learners achieve native proficiency in mixed interaction context

Social Variables (Ellis 1994)

Age, sex, social class, ethnic identity, social context, cultural background affect L2 acquisition

- Participants from countries with cultures and languages that are very different from the U.S. have achieved high proficiencies.
- The different between their native and their host culture has not impeded their language acquisition.

degree	Social Distance				
	very low	low	medium	high	very high
economical/ political	First World	First World	First World	Second World	Third World
linguistic/ cultural	Germanic language family	related language family (Romance)	no linguistic relation	related language family (Romance) or less related (Slavic)	related language family (Romance)
countries that occur in study	Germany, Sweden	France, Spain	South Korea	Argentina Eastern Europe	African countries

