CONDITIONS FOR SECOND LANGUAGE (L2) LEARNING

INTRODUCTION

This chapter compares and critiques selected theories of conditions for second language (L2) learning. These theories are important because they greatly influence L2 teaching, design of curricula and materials, and learning, either for good or ill. Specific chapter goals are to: (1) explain and critically analyze chosen theories, including non-L2 theories that have influenced L2 research, theories originating in the L2 field, and very recent L2 theories; (2) present four overarching problems; and (3) propose future directions. To be included in this chapter, a theory has to address L2 development broadly, not just one or two aspects; has to be published or in press; and has to be potentially influential across the whole field or at least among a large number of researchers and practitioners. I selected theories from various perspectives, such as teacher-centered/structured, sociocultural, cognitive-psycholinguistic, natural, whole-person-focused, and technology-based. I intentionally included some hybrid theories that combine, for example, sociocultural and cognitive-psycholinguistic elements.

Learning conditions are defined as factors, either internal or external, that influence learning. These conditions may be either “typical” of learners or “essential” for learning (Spolsky, 1989), although most theorists do not make this distinction clear enough. I use the term L2 learning to refer to the learner’s development of a language once the native language has been learned. I avoid technical distinctions between learning and acquisition. These terms no longer simplistically imply, if they ever really did, “learning ≈ instructed or formal” and “acquisition ≈ natural or informal;” after all, “instructed L2 acquisition” is now a common term. To avoid confusion, here the generic term L2 learning (or L2 development) covers an array of modes for L2 growth, which can occur in myriad locations.

EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

Early developments concerning conditions for learning outside the L2 field have influenced theorizing among L2 specialists. These developments include the work of Gagné, Vygotsky, and experts on situated...
cognition and communities of practice, such as Lave and Wenger, as well as others.

Gagné’s Conditions

Gagné’s (1965) ideas have affected L2 learning and teaching (Brown, 2002), multimedia learning (Gagné, 1993), and general instructional design (Gagné, Briggs, and Wagner, 1992). He presents a highly teacher-centered approach meant to influence the learner’s internal cognitive processes. The following four conditions summarize his much larger set of conditions.

Condition 1. Nine external instructional events (what the teacher does) are associated with internal cognitive processes (what the learner does).

Condition 2. Five types of learning are key: verbal information, intellectual skills, motor skills, attitudes, and cognitive strategies (variations on these in L2 strategy instruction formats include Cohen, 1998; O’Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990, 1996).

Condition 3. All five learning types involve some form of noticing or attention on the part of the learner.

Condition 4. Each learning type has its own sequence of instructional procedures.

Gagné’s theory has helped organize many aspects of learning, teaching, instructional design, and instructional technology. His highly structured, teacher-led framework of nine learning events was particularly influenced by Skinner’s behaviorist concept of sequenced learning events. The value of his work lies in the simple but profound concept that different types of learning require different instructional sequences and learning conditions, although many L2 experts reject the very rigid principles of behaviorism. Some specific limitations can be noted in the theory: (1) Gagné calls for a (verbal) context for encoding, but there is little attention to the social context; (2) he recognizes the importance of cognitive strategies, but his strategy instruction does not explicitly present metacognitive strategies, a primary basis of learner self-regulation, as a separate knowledge type; and (3) although Gagné worked with specific conditions for attitude learning, he did not explore sociocultural aspects of attitudes, motivations, and beliefs.

In sum, Gagné’s work focuses on highly structured, teacher-controlled, systematic, detailed, step-by-step, “micro” processes of learning and teaching. In contrast, Vygotsky, discussed next, presents a theory centered on sociocultural understandings.

Vygotsky’s Theory of Dialogic Learning

Vygotsky’s (1962, 1978) theory is the foundation of sociocultural psychology. His work became known in the West only in the 1960s
and beyond, although it was known in Russia as early as the 1920s.
Primarily in the 1990s and thereafter L2 theorists, including Lantolf
and Appel (1994) and Lantolf (2000), started paying serious attention
to possible applications of Vygotsky’s work to L2 learning. Vygotsky’s
concepts are framed below as conditions for learning.

Condition 1. Humans inherit sociocultural artifacts and knowledge
that can add to their genetic inheritance (e.g., Wells, 2000).

Condition 2. Emotion, sensation, perception, and all human learn-
ing, including L2 learning, are suffused with social concepts and
language.

Condition 3. Children, as well as older learners, learn by interacting
with others (social mediation) through language.

Condition 4. Language is the most important semiotic (symbolic)
tool humans possess.

Condition 5. The more experienced or capable person has dialogues
with the learner, and the learner internalizes and transforms the key
elements of these dialogues, turning them into higher mental func-
tions, such as planning, organizing, evaluating, analyzing, and
synthesizing (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, and Miller, 2003; Vygotsky,
1962).

Condition 6. Three stages are required for this internalization and
transformation: social speech (the interpsychological plane), egocentric
speech, and inner speech (the intrapsychological plane) (Vygotsky,
1962). Thus, learning starts out as “other-regulation” but, through a
series of dialogues with more capable people, becomes inner speech,
which can become self-regulation (see e.g., Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev,

Condition 7. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the differ-
ence between the individual’s current level and the potential level
that can be reached with assistance.

Condition 8. As a corollary, “dynamic assessment” is essential
because it measures the area of potentiality, not just the present level
(Wertsch, 1985), which is usually the only level measured by what
Vygotsky disparages as “static assessment.”

The theory, when applied to the L2 field, awakens L2 teachers and
researchers to crucial conditions for learning an additional language.
For understanding L2 learning and teaching, many of Vygotsky’s con-
cepts are fundamental: the teacher’s role in dialogues, the learner’s role
in moving stepwise from social to inner speech, social and semiotic
mediation, higher order functions, increasing self-regulation, and the
role of language in concept development, for example. The ZPD-based
concept of dynamic performance assessment, as yet little understood
or applied by Western L2-testing specialists, could become a major
advance for L2 testing. Despite some limitations, such as an explana-
tion of how the teacher can hold a dialogue with 20 or 30 students in
a class at the appropriate level of their individually differing ZPDs,
Vygotsky’s work is now viewed as seminal and extremely important
in the L2 field. His theory is rooted in culture, history, and personal
relationships. Thus, it is a theory of “situated cognition,” a precursor
to later theories dealing with situated cognition in communities of
practice, discussed next.

Situated Cognition in Communities of Practice

Situated cognition as viewed today has at least two different meanings
(1) learning that is based (anchored, situated) in a specific, real-life,
interesting, challenging problem to be solved by learners; and (2)
learning that is situated in a community of practice, i.e., “a group of
people who share an interest in a domain of human endeavor and
engage in a process of collective learning that creates bonds between
them” (Wenger, 1998, p. 1). This section concerns the second meaning
of situated cognition.

Lave and Wenger (1991) are authors of the term “communities of
practice,” which they coined while studying apprenticeship as a model
for learning. We all have experience as apprentices in various commu-
nities of practice: at home, at work, in educational institutions, and so
on. Situated cognition in communities of practice can be described
vis-à-vis the following learning conditions.

Condition 1. Three elements characterize a community of practice:
domain, community, and shared practice, the last of which is a
repertoire of knowledge, skills, beliefs, artifacts, documents, and
strategies (Wenger, 1998).

Condition 2. Apprenticeship is not just a relationship between a stu-
dent and a master but instead a set of complex social relationships.
Learning by the apprentice is an integral part of generative (creative)
social practice in the lived-in world (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 35).

Condition 3. A person might be an expert (“old-timer”) at the center
in one community of practice, while being a novice (“newcomer” or
“apprentice”) at the edge or periphery of other communities of
practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Condition 4. Communities of practice are dynamic, with peripherally
participating members moving toward the center as experts over
time and with slightly more experienced apprentices teaching newer
apprentices.

Condition 5. The whole community learns, because learning occurs
not just in an individual mind; learning also occurs collectively, in a

Condition 6. In communities of practice, participants are constantly
constructing and altering identities through interaction (Norton,
2001). When identities are shaped, threatened, or reshaped in communities of practice, other learner factors—values, emotions, motivation, and performance—are naturally engaged in the process. Some concepts from the theory of situated cognition in communities of practice have been applied to L2 learning. For instance, Norton (2001) provides examples of situated cognition and identity regarding participation and nonparticipation in L2 learners’ “imagined [desired] communities.” Much more L2 research would be valuable in this exciting and important area. However, some criticisms can also be raised regarding the basic theory. The concept of distributed/collective learning requires more specificity in diverse communities of practice. In addition, the spatial metaphor of movement from the community’s periphery to the center, while useful in many instances, might seem simplistic when we consider all the different trajectories, identity conflicts, emotions, desires, skills, and knowledge emerging in an L2 community of practice simultaneously or over time.

Unlike the theories above, the next theories first arose in the L2 field.

**Major Contributions Within the L2 Field**

In this section, conditions for L2 learning are drawn from Krashen’s hypotheses about L2 acquisition, Spolsky’s detailed theory of L2 learning conditions, and H.D. Brown’s principles of L2 learning and teaching. The numbering system for the conditions is my own.

**Krashen’s Hypotheses**

Krashen’s (1982, 1985) theory is founded on the distinction between L2 learning and acquisition. The following conditions are based on his hypotheses.

**Condition 1.** *L2 acquisition involves unconscious, creative communication.* L2 acquisition “... is a subconscious process identical in all important ways to the process children utilize in acquiring their first language ...” (Krashen, 1985, p. 1).

**Condition 2.** *Comprehensive input is required for L2 acquisition.* L2 acquisition develops only when the individual receives “comprehensible input,” that is, input slightly above his or her current level of comprehension (“i + 1”).

**Condition 3.** *Affect is important.* For L2 acquisition, comprehensible input must occur in an atmosphere in which the student’s “affective filter” is low, that is, a situation with as little anxiety as possible.

**Condition 4.** *Acquisition occurs without grammar instruction.*

**Condition 5.** *Acquisition involves natural order.* Acquisition of L2 grammatical structures occurs unconsciously in a natural order.
Condition 6. **Speaking must be allowed to emerge spontaneously.** Speaking production ability emerges spontaneously after learners have developed enough linguistic competence through comprehensible input. A silent period is expected.

Condition 7. **L1-L2 transfer errors occur.** When a person tries to produce the L2 beyond his or her acquisition level, he or she tends to employ L1 rules erroneously.

Condition 8. **In contrast to L2 acquisition, L2 learning is conscious and hence limited.** L2 learning is a conscious, declarative process that occurs in typical, formal classrooms.

Condition 9. **“Learned” knowledge involves the monitor.** Learned knowledge serves as an editor (monitor). To use the monitor, the individual must have sufficient time to think about and use conscious rules, must attend to form rather than meaning, and must know the rules (Krashen, 1982).

Condition 10. **Adults and children operate differently.** Acquisition is the single route possible for children to internalize the L2, just as they absorb the L1. However, adults have two possible routes: acquisition and learning (Krashen, 1985).

Krashen has had a significant effect on the L2 field over the last three decades. His theory describes a distinct classroom mode, the Natural Approach (Krashen and Terrell, 1983). However, the Natural Approach is in its own way prescriptive and narrow, exhorting teachers to provide a natural, informal setting for L2 acquisition and to abjure grammar instruction entirely. Contrary to Krashen’s view, Scarcella and Oxford (1992) note that comprehensible input is not sufficient for transforming input into usable “intake.” Moreover, Krashen provides no clear definition of “comprehensible input.” The “i + 1” formulation is a good heuristic or symbol but not a true explanation of a process. In addition, there is no special role for comprehensible output in the theory. McLaughlin (1987) challenges the theory for never adequately defining “acquisition,” “learning,” “conscious,” and “subconscious.” Krashen’s assertion that grammar study has no role is contradicted by examples of the utility of grammar study within a communicative methodology (e.g. Lightbown and Pienemann, 1993; McLaughlin, 1987). It is also questionable whether a single natural order of L2 acquisition exists given the variety of L1 backgrounds learners have, the effects of L1 on L2 development, and other factors. The theory provides no detailed explanation of how the “affective filter” develops.

Krashen attempts to revolutionize the way we look at L2 acquisition by painting a picture with broad brush strokes, while Spolsky, discussed next, is more like a calligrapher, codifying in great detail and precision the conditions of L2 learning.
Spolsky’s Conditions for L2 Learning

Spolsky’s (1989) goal is to create a general theory of L2 learning, which contains 74 conditions (“rules”) for L2 learning. The book’s central question is, “Who learns how much of what language under what conditions?” Spolsky (1989) asserts that the theory is based “firmly and clearly in a social context” (p. 14). “Language learning is individual but occurs in society, and while the social factors are not necessarily direct in their influence, they have strong and traceable indirect effects…” (p. 15). Compared with Spolsky, Norton (2001) and others give a more prominent place to sociocultural influences on L2 learning. The following paragraph briefly summarizes the conditions in Spolsky’s theory.

Conditions 1–7 relate to the nature of L2 knowledge. The learner’s L2 knowledge forms a systematic whole but is marked by variability. Analyzed L2 knowledge is recombinable and creative but can also be enriched with unanalyzed knowledge. Conditions 8–15 concern language use. Receptive skills (listening, reading) usually develop before productive language skills (speaking, writing) and to a higher level. Some L2 knowledge might be intuitive and implicit (rules not expressible by the learner). Learners vary in automaticity (fluency) of speaking, accuracy, and amount of control. Conditions 16–20 are focused on testing and measurement of L2 knowledge and skills. Knowing an L2 involves not only knowing discrete items but also controlling integrated functional skills. Conditions 22–31 and 50–56 focus on individual learner factors, while conditions 34–41 involve linguistics.

Social context is the focus of Conditions 42–49, and conditions 57–62 concern opportunities for the learner to analyze the L2, recombine, embed, remember, practice, and match knowledge. Conditions for natural learning (63–73, odd numbers) are: communicative use, many fluent speakers, open space, and uncontrolled language but possibly modified for comprehensibility. Conditions for formal learning (64–74, even numbers) are: only one fluent speaker (the teacher), enclosed space, controlled language, simplified language, and much practice.

Spolsky deserves praise for this attempt to produce a comprehensive theory of conditions for L2 learning. Many areas are well represented in Spolsky’s theory, e.g., multiple types of language knowledge, specific linguistic foundations, formal versus informal learning, and language use. However, considering the theory’s massiveness, criticisms are bound to emerge. For example, in the context of world languages, many experts (see Davies, 2003; Singh, 1998) question whether learners outside of a certain geographic range have ever encountered “native speaker language,” and those researchers ask whether a typical
native speaker” can be said to exist. The theory lacks well-developed conditions for L2 learner autonomy/self-regulation. Finally, social and cultural aspects, while mentioned, are not adequately developed in the theory.

In comparison to Spolsky’s long list of L2 learning conditions, the theory of H.D. Brown (2001) is intentionally simpler. Obviously, the purposes differ.

Brown’s Theory

Brown’s (2001) theory reflects a “whole-person” approach, not just a psycholinguistic approach. He presents 12 principles of language learning and teaching, which can be considered conditions, as I show below. According to Brown, L2 learning requires the following:

Condition 1. Efficient L2 learning involves timely movement from control of a few language forms to automatic processing of a relatively unlimited number of language forms. L2 teaching should not focus just on isolated items but should also give learners authentic, meaningful practice opportunities leading to automaticity.

Condition 2. Meaningful learning is by definition relevant to learners’ goals and interests.

Condition 3. Learners’ actions are driven by anticipation of reward, so teachers must understand learners’ motivations and purposes, and learners must be aware of the beneficial aims of the course.

Condition 4. The most powerful rewards are intrinsic, that is, internal to the learner, even without external rewards. Teacher praise and constructive feedback can be reinforcing, but intrinsic motivation is more powerful.

Condition 5. L2 mastery depends largely on use of learning strategies. Although the methods employed by the teacher are important, learning strategies are equally important.

Condition 6. As one learns an L2, one develops a second identity or language ego. Teachers should show sensitivity and support to learners who might feel inhibited or defenseless in the classroom.

Condition 7. Self-confidence influences L2 development. A self-confident learner can accomplish the task regardless of language ego.

Condition 8. L2 learners must take risks for long-term retention. To encourage risk-taking, teachers create an appropriate, encouraging classroom atmosphere and ensure that L2 tasks are at the right difficulty level.

Condition 9. L2 learning and culture learning are connected. L2 teaching involves teaching customs, values, and ways of thinking and feeling. Teachers should be sensitive to students’ culturally related L2 learning preferences.
Condition 10. *The L1 influences L2 learning*, either facilitating or interfering, depending on the closeness between the two languages and other factors.

Condition 11. *The learner’s interlanguage is systematic or quasi-systematic*. Knowledge of how the interlanguage operates influences the feedback teachers give students.

Condition 12. *Learners need to develop communicative competence*, so the L2 classroom must be authentically communicative and relate to learners’ future needs. It must attend to use and usage and to both fluency and accuracy.

This theory encapsulates currently predominant, research-based beliefs concerning a necessary balance between form and meaning and between accuracy and fluency. One of the strongest aspects of the theory is the inclusion of multiple affective or cognitive-affective factors, such as anticipation of reward, intrinsic motivation, language ego, self-confidence, and risk-taking. Some linguistic factors are also cited (L1 influences on L2 and interlanguage), as well as certain cognitive factors (learning strategies and the movement to automatic processing). The link between culture and language is made clear, as is the importance of meaningful learning and communicative competence. Brown is awake to the social aspects of learning, as seen in the emphasis on interaction and the role of culture, but his theory unfortunately does not explicitly provide depth about socioculturally mediated learning or communities of practice. He cites the importance of the learning environment, but a setting that seems encouraging and nonthreatening for one learner might not seem so for another. How the classroom atmosphere is experienced at a given time depends on the individual learner’s personality, general anxiety level, and other factors.

Recent contributions are shown next in areas of conditions for instructed L2 acquisition and conditions for technology-related L2 learning.

**WORK IN PROGRESS**

This section presents recent work on conditions for L2 learning, first without an emphasis on technology and then with technology. I review theories by Ellis (2005) and Zhao and Lai (2007).

*Ellis’ Model of Instructed L2 Acquisition*

In this primarily psycholinguistic theory, Ellis (1999) uses the term “instructed L2 acquisition” for a specific purpose. For him, acquisition is indicated when an item or feature is truly internalized and entered into the learner’s interlanguage for communicative use. Ellis (2005)
offers ten principles of instructed L2 acquisition that are expressed below as learning conditions. \textit{L2 instruction needs to} . . . 

Condition 1. . . . \textit{ensure that learners develop both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence.}

Condition 2. . . . \textit{ensure that learners focus mainly on meaning.} Meaning includes both semantic meaning (L2 as a subject of study) and pragmatic meaning (L2 as a tool for communication).

Condition 3. . . . \textit{ensure that learners also focus on form.} This can occur through either an intensive emphasis on specific forms or an incidental, extensive attention to larger numbers of forms.

Condition 4. . . . \textit{be predominantly directed at developing implicit knowledge of the L2 while not neglecting explicit knowledge.} Implicit knowledge underlies fluency and explicit knowledge underlying accuracy.

Condition 5. . . . \textit{take into account learners’ “built-in” syllabus.} Order of acquisition is approximately the same for natural and instructed L2 learners, so any instruction must be compatible with natural processes.

Condition 6. . . . \textit{provide extensive L2 input.} Input can occur in natural or instructed acquisition. This means using the L2 extensively in the classroom and having many outside opportunities for L2 input, including extensive reading.

Condition 7. . . . \textit{provide opportunity for L2 output.} Interaction encourages acquisition when a communication problem occurs, students must negotiate meaning, and adequate scaffolding is present.

Condition 8. . . . \textit{emphasize that the opportunity to interact in the L2 is central to developing proficiency.} Students must have a reason to attend to language, have opportunities to express personal meanings, be engaged in tasks beyond their current proficiency level, and interact in a large range of contexts.

Condition 9. . . . \textit{take into account learners’ individual differences.} These include, e.g., motivation and learner strategies. Strategy instruction should include both analytical and experiential modes.

Condition 10. . . . \textit{assess both free and controlled L2 production.}

In this list of research-based conditions for effective instructed L2 acquisition, Ellis underscores the importance of implicit L2 knowledge while still giving explicit knowledge a role. He promotes a focus on meaning while not forgetting form or the learner’s “built-in syllabus.” He accurately emphasizes the crucial nature of interaction, which is related to multiple opportunities for input and output practice in varying contexts. He notes that strategy instruction is not only part of the teacher’s role but should also occur in more than one modality.
to meet the needs of diverse learners. One drawback is that this list contains nothing about key sociocultural factors, such as social mediation, identity, power struggles, or values. Nothing is stated about the effects of the nature of the classroom environment or other sociocultural environments on L2 learning. The theory discussed next is about conditions for learning the L2 with technology. As would be hoped, there is some overlap with Ellis’ concepts of instructed L2 acquisition.

Zhao and Lai’s Theory of Technology-Enhanced Instructional Conditions

Zhao and Lai’s (2007) theory contains four instructional conditions, which relate to L2 instruction regardless of whether it is enriched by technology or not. However, they cite research showing that technology-enhanced L2 instruction is often better able to fulfill the four conditions. Technologies mentioned by the authors range from ordinary TVs, audiotapes, videos, and mobile phones to the most sophisticated computerized hardware and software, even artificial intelligence.

1. **Learners need high quality input.** Technologies offer authentic input of various types: comprehensible, simplified, and enhanced.
2. **Learners need ample opportunities to practice.** Technology provides practice via computer-mediated communication, mobile phones, and human-computer interaction.
3. **Learners need high quality feedback.** Technology contributes to feedback vis-à-vis error-tracking, speech recognition, adaptive feedback, and learner control of feedback (a form of self-regulation or autonomy).
4. **Learners need individualized content.** Technology allows greater customization and individualization.

The theory by Zhao and Lai is elegant in its simplicity and rich in its research foundation, based on studies with and without technology-enhanced instruction. It helpfully includes both the psycholinguistic perspective and the sociocultural approach, although the former is emphasized. There is little to criticize, but more could be added, for instance, regarding certain sociocultural factors. Though the theory mentions learner strategies in relation to individual differences, strategies could also be discussed in regard to their powerful role in communicative practice. It would be useful for the theory to explain in further detail how individualization can work, especially in the context of students’ needing to meet learning standards at multiple educational levels (national, state, and local).
Several problems and difficulties exist, including lack of understanding of the intellectual roots (cultural, historical, and personal) of many theories, lack of clarity of purposes, the sheer number of theories, and inconsistency in addressing some basic theoretical necessities.

Issue 1. **Theories of conditions for learning are often accepted (or rejected) at face value, i.e., superficially and without an exploration of their cultural, historical, and personal roots.** Each of the theories reflects cultural belief system(s), historical factors, and personal experiences. However, those who encounter these theories do not necessarily know or think about the cultural, historical, and personal underpinnings—the “intellectual history” of each theory, so to speak. No matter how objective a learning theory might seem, no learning theory is culture-free, ahistorical, or lacking in a personal imprint. It is unfortunate that researchers, teachers, and others do not always recognize or seek the background of a given theory. Such knowledge might help potential users understand why a given theorist frames the theory in particular ways, especially with regard to assumptions about purpose(s) for learning, role of the teacher, role of the learner, teacher–learner relationships, appropriate tasks, nature of input and feedback, implicit/explicit knowledge, emphasis on content or language, and learning environment.

Issue 2. **These theories have a mixture of purposes, which are not always made clear.** Perhaps there should be greater clarity in several of the theories regarding just what the theories hope to explain. Many theories contain a combination of conditions/principles of teaching, learning, and linguistic factors. Are they learning and teaching theories? Strictly learning theories? Linguistic theories?

Issue 3. **There is a plethora of theories.** More than 20 years ago, Long (1983) noted that the field of L2 acquisition or learning already possessed more than 60 different theories. These theories covered areas such as acculturation, affective variables, variation, and discourse. Theories tend to proliferate rather than consolidate, so there are likely more theories now than then. Few attempts have been made pull these theories into a full-scale, testable, comprehensive theory, although Spolsky certainly tries his best.

Issue 4. **Some key issues of theory-building have not been consistently addressed.** In the field of L2 development, many attempts at delineating conditions, hypotheses, conclusions, or principles have been made without regard to some important fundamentals of theory-development. Gregg (1999, applying the work of Cummins, 1983) points out two problems inherent in trying to understand L2 learning or acquisition: logical and developmental. The logical
problem involves explaining the nature of human competence to develop an L2. This problem requires a property theory of the system’s components and their interrelationships. The developmental problem involves explaining processes whereby development occurs over time, calling for a transition theory of cause-and-effect. I classify the first problem-and-theory set as “static” (or synchronic/single-time) and the second as “dynamic” (or diachronic/ across time). Both general types of theory, property and transition, are necessary for understanding L2 development. However, most theories tend to be only one or another—property or transition—or else include a somewhat unsatisfying or slightly unorganized mix of both. Theorists should explain whether they are presenting property theories, transition theories, or some combination and should indicate how they are doing this.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

New options for research and theory concerning L2 learning conditions can be associated with specific themes. One burgeoning theme is conditions for facing an L2 learning crisis and moving beyond it effectively (Oxford, Meng, Zhou, Sung, and Jain, 2007). My recent research has uncovered dozens of L2 learning crises associated with repeated failure in L2 classrooms; loss of L2 self-worth or self-efficacy when learners face dismissive, controlling, punitive, indifferent, power-hungry, or discriminatory L2 teachers or sarcastic and unwelcoming peers; and interrupted schooling and trauma among immigrants and refugees learning an L2. This work incorporates concepts from self-determination (e.g., Ryan and Deci, 2000), autonomy and strategies (Benson, 2006; Little, 1994; Oxford, in press), competence (Ryan and Deci, 2000), motivation and demotivation (Dörnyei, 2001; Oxford, 2003), sociocultural identity (Norton, 2000, 2001), trauma (Bracken, 2005), and resiliency (Masten, 2006). The factors of crisis, trauma, and resiliency expand our understanding of conditions for L2 learning.

A second theme involves emotions. MacIntyre (2002) complains that the only emotion L2 researchers have studied in depth is anxiety. However, new L2-related work appears to be dramatically expanding the study of emotion, especially as related to identity. Recent contributions are by Pavlenko (2006) and Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), who discuss emotions and identity not as merely individual, personal features but instead in sociocultural terms within multilingual settings. Future research along this line can be explicitly associated with sociocultural issues of symbolic and actual power, “native-speakerism,” the role of nonnative speakers in teaching and learning an L2, language prestige and discrimination, and post-colonialism in general.
A third theme comprises conditions for technology-enhanced learning. Technology can lead L2 learning out of the classroom and into almost any venue. The significant array of technologies presented by Zhao and Lai (2007), as well as found in CALL theories (Egbert, Chao, and Hanson-Smith, 1999; Pennington, 1996), offers new ways of thinking about conditions for L2 learning. It would be extremely interesting to find out more about the linguistic, cultural, cognitive, and affective aspects of L2 learning that can be facilitated via technology.

A fourth theme, hardly touched upon at all in the theories in this chapter, involves characteristics of the teacher. The teacher is not a faceless, nameless machine any more than is the learner. It is almost unbelievable that theories of conditions of L2 learning do not address features of teachers who facilitate L2 learning in particular types of contexts and varied geographic regions around the world. Some useful research exists on (a) L2 teacher beliefs and behaviors, often as related to L2 student beliefs and behaviors (e.g., Kalaja and Barcelos, 2003; Oxford, 2001), and (b) teacher characteristics outside of the L2 field (Brophy, 2002).

Much theoretical research and practical work needs to be done in the ongoing and important area of conditions for L2 learning. This area affects millions of learners throughout the world, as well as their teachers, families, and others. This chapter stands as a formal call for widespread, coordinated efforts to uncover conditions for L2 learning in varied sociocultural settings. Interdisciplinary efforts are very valuable, especially when researchers and theorists from diverse schools of thought work closely in teams. Such creative efforts will benefit everyone, particularly L2 learners and teachers.

REFERENCES


