

# The Multiple Realities of Multilingualism



# Trends in Applied Linguistics

## 3

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# The Multiple Realities of Multilingualism

Personal Narratives  
and Researchers' Perspectives

*Edited by*

Elka Todeva

Jasone Cenoz

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Mouton de Gruyter (formerly Mouton, The Hague)  
is a Division of Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin.

⊗ Printed on acid-free paper which falls within the guidelines  
of the ANSI to ensure permanence and durability.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

The multiple realities of multilingualism : personal narratives and researchers' perspectives / edited by Elka Todeva, Jasone Cenoz.

p. cm. — (Trends in applied linguistics ; 3)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-3-11-022447-4 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Multilingualism — Psychological aspects. 2. Psycholinguistics.  
3. Second language acquisition. I. Todeva, Elka, 1954— II. Cenoz, Jasone.

P115.4.M85 2009

404'.2019—dc22

2009045069

*Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek*

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN 978-3-11-022447-4

ISSN 1868-6362

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Cover design: Martin Zech, Bremen, using a photo by Roswitha Schacht/morguefile.com.

Typesetting: Meta Systems GmbH, Wustermark.

Printed in Germany.

ET – to my parents, Nevena and Boris Todev

JC – to my mother, María Victoria Iragui



## Preface

This book gathers personal stories of multilingualism and discusses the ways the authors of these stories have learned multiple languages, either purposefully or almost unintentionally. In some cases the authors wanted to learn the languages that they did; in other cases, they had to learn certain languages or learned them through sheer exposure. The narratives highlight diverse backgrounds of language acquisition, show various ways of learning, and provide the reader with highly interesting insights into the learning processes and their different outcomes.

The twelve autobiographies included in the book were written by linguistically oriented language learners who were willing to share their reflections on their individual multilingualism with a wider audience. All the contributors have at least six languages in their repertoire; most have had contact with and studied twice this number of languages.

This collection of personal narratives, along with the analysis of the introspective data from these narratives provided in two theoretical chapters in the book, marks the beginning of a new branch of multilingual research. We are sure that, combined with theory building in general and the development of appropriate research methodologies, the investigation of individual learning and acquisition stories will shed light on aspects of multilingualism and research in the field of applied linguistics which have not been explored to date.

Furthermore, we hope that this collection of personal stories will invite other multilingual storytellers to put their stories together along the lines suggested in the first chapter of this book and, at the same time, will encourage researchers to use these stories as sources of investigation in the study of multilingualism, exploring learning processes in their intricate complexity and studying the outcomes and the effects of multilingualism, as well as the factors that shape multiple language acquisition and learning. We see this volume, with its clear focus on the etic and emic perspectives on the dynamics of multilingualism, as an important first step along the way to a challenging and promising direction of research.

Britta Hufeisen and Ulrike Jessner



## Acknowledgements

Working on a project where both the editors and the contributors were “oceans apart”, residing on four different continents, was an endeavour requiring unwavering patience, flexibility and much good will. We are indebted to our contributors for dealing so graciously with the lengthy publication process and for giving us the gift of their stories. We are thankful to Ulrike Jessner and Claire Kramersch for recognizing the value of this anthology and for making it part of Mouton’s new series called *Trends in Applied Linguistics*. Many thanks to Diane Larsen-Freeman and Carl James, our internal reviewers, for their encouragement and extremely helpful feedback. We are also grateful to Ann Goodfellow, Lynne Feinberg, Francis Bailey and Sally Freedman for reading various parts of the manuscript and for gently pushing us toward better coherence and clarity of writing. Our gratitude also goes to Ursula Kleinhenz and Wolfgang Konwitschny from Mouton de Gruyter for their valuable help with the final editing of the book. The usual caveat applies that all remaining weaknesses are ours alone. Last but not least, we are indebted to the thinkers, data gatherer, data analysts, paradigm shifters, and earlier language learning diarists and multilingual writers, who have offered us broad intellectual and empirical shoulders to stand on, opening up new insights and directions of inquiry.



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# Chapter 1

## Multilingualism: Emic and etic perspectives

*Elka Todeva and Jasone Cenoz*

*“We see the world not as it is, but as we are.”*

*James Mapes, 1996: 72*

The last decade or so has witnessed promising shifts and exciting developments in the study of language learning and language use but the key players in the learning of languages, the learners themselves, still remain marginalized and essentialized in much of the research literature. Despite a more or less steady trickle of published larger linguistic autobiographies and shorter first-person language learning narratives<sup>1</sup>, the voices of millions of multilingual speakers around the world are still unheard or have not been given the attention they deserve. This volume offers introspective data from twelve individuals shaped by quite different contextual factors, all of whom reflected on the various forces and processes at play in the development and maintenance of their multiple languages. The book then analyzes these twelve first-person learning narratives against the background of existing language development research findings. The aim is to redress the imbalance between *emic* and *etic* studies by giving greater prominence to the emic, i.e. the insiders’ perspectives, while juxtaposing these insights with etic, scholar-generated, research priorities and findings.

This chapter makes the case that, rather than being an exception, multilingualism is a widespread phenomenon around the world. Given this

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1. Language learning personal narratives are stories based on the writers’/speakers’ personal knowledge and experiences with learning languages. The stories can be either spontaneous or elicited through various procedures. Personal narratives are variably referred to in the literature as *linguistic autobiographies*, *language learning protocols*, *language learning accounts*, *Sprachbiographien*, *language journals or diaries*, and *language memoirs* (see, for instance, Pavlenko 2007 and Pavlenko 2008 for a discussion of some of these terms). New technologies offer other possibilities, among them new hybrid forms such as blogs and discussion forums.

fact, we summarize existing trends and recent findings reported in studies on multilingualism. The chapter emphasizes the regrettable dearth of data on the development, maintenance and attrition of languages in multilingual speakers and learners, pointing out that information is particularly scarce with regard to learning and maintenance processes that involve more than three languages. Offering the introspections of learners with experience with seven (and more) languages, the narratives in this book are seen as an attempt to fill this important lacuna. The chapter then specifically addresses the importance, and current lack, of enough first-person, *emic* data reflecting the perspectives and insights of the multilinguals themselves, as opposed to *etic* data that captures the perspectives of researchers. The rest of the chapter is a detailed review of the significance of personal narratives in the field of language studies and other areas of research. We contend that with their holistic nature and emphasis on process, rather than solely on learning outcomes, personal learning accounts align well with more recent approaches to language development such as complexity and dynamic systems theory and various socio-cultural and ecological approaches. The final section of the chapter offers a description of how the present narratives differ from previous ones and sheds light on the logic behind the book's organization.

### **The study of multilingualism**

Multilingualism is a common phenomenon around the world due to the influence of many factors, among which a growing trend to maintain and to promote the use of regional or minority languages, and a need for people to know other national or international languages in order to stay competitive in an increasingly demanding job market. As Hoffmann (1998) points out, we are witnessing a coexistence of two powerful and complementary trends: regionalization and internationalization. As a result, the presence of two or more languages in contact can be found in many countries around the world (Edwards 1994), particularly in the schools, where different types of multilingualism can be identified according to educational, sociolinguistic and linguistic variables (see Cenoz 2009, chapter 2). The study of multilingualism can be approached at either the societal or the individual level. Different studies have emphasized one or the other. However, the interaction of these two levels always needs to be taken into account when explaining the intricate processes of acquiring and using multiple languages.

As indicated in Grosjean (1985), Block (2003), Pavlenko (2005) and others, for years language acquisition research has shown a “monolingual bias” in the sense that learners of additional languages, second and beyond, have typically been judged by strict native speaker norms and have invariably been found lacking. Cook (1995) proposed that L2 users are fundamentally different from L1 users and should be examined in their own right. Because of the presence of more than one language in their repertoire, he argued, L2+ users develop a complex multi-competence, which is qualitatively different from the competence of monolingual speakers of a language (Cook 1992). In fact, some multilinguals achieve a very sophisticated, but different knowledge of a target language that goes beyond the common core mastered by many native speakers. Because of their richer experience with languages, bi- and multilingual speakers of a language can also manifest creativity and language playfulness elusive to monolingual speakers of the same language. Jessner (2006) highlights the specific characteristics of multilinguals by looking at the role of metalinguistic awareness.

For a long time, studies of second language acquisition (SLA) and bilingualism have been neglecting prior and simultaneous language learning experience. In the case of SLA, despite claims that the field covers not only second language acquisition but the development of any additional language as well, attention has been focused mainly on the acquisition or use of a second language and the influence of the first language on the learner’s developing interlanguage. In the case of bilingualism, the main focus has been on the cognitive outcomes of being proficient in two languages or on the development of competence in two languages in early bilingualism. Such approaches ignore the possible effect of additional languages and the interaction between languages. Fortunately, the study of multilingualism, understood as going beyond second language acquisition and bilingualism, to examine the acquisition and use of three or more languages, has made notable progress in the last few years (see Auer and Wei 2007; Aronin and Hufeisen, in press). Among the areas that have received recent attention are: early trilingualism (Barnes 2005; Cruz-Ferreira 2005), pragmatics (Safont 2005), grammar (Leung 2007, 2009), phonetics (Gallardo 2007), multilingual language processing (Gibson and Hufeisen 2006; Jessner 2006; De Angelis 2007), attitudes (Lasagabaster and Huguet 2006), emotions (Aronin 2004; Pavlenko and Dewaele 2004; Pavlenko 2005) and education (Sagasta 2003; García, Skutnabb-Kangas and Torres-Guzman 2006; Cenoz 2009). The publication of the *International Journal of Multilingualism*, a specialized journal focusing on the

processing and use of multiple languages, and the biannual *International Conferences of Third Language Acquisition and Multilingualism* have also contributed to the development of the field.

### **Trends in the study of multilingualism**

The shift in focus in recent years toward the acquisition of third or additional languages, as opposed to second language acquisition only, has followed some internal developmental trends. At the same time, however, this heightened interest in multiple language acquisition has been enhanced by the emergence of new approaches to exploring language and language development that apply more generally to any kind of language acquisition research.

One of these approaches is *Complexity Theory* (CT), which embraces holistic models and discourages reductionist explanations (see, for example, Larsen-Freeman 1997; Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008; De Bot 2008). CT looks at learners as self-reflective intentional agents and considers a wide range of learner and learning factors in their dynamic complexity in order to gain a deeper understanding of how the cognitive and the social interact. Involving more than two language systems, multilingual learning is by definition a complex phenomenon. It offers a great opportunity for researchers to examine the development and maintenance of multiple languages in a single individual as an intricate socio-cognitive trajectory that constantly reconfigures, adapts and evolves.

CT indicates that complex systems are very sensitive to initial conditions. The behavior of systems with different initial conditions, no matter how similar, diverges exponentially as time passes (Larsen-Freeman 1997: 144). This observation has significant implications for the study of multilinguals and their language development if we look at prior knowledge as an initial condition which defines future development. CT also argues against linear cause-effect reductionist models. Language acquisition, it contends, works as a nonlinear complex system because a cause of a particular strength does not result in an effect of equal strength (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008: 143). As will become clear from the narrative data in this volume, effects are often disproportionate to their cause and learning trajectories are indeed determined by a multitude of interacting factors.

Another related approach, informed by Complexity Theory and based on an ecological perspective on foreign language education, has been

proposed by Kramsch and Whiteside (2008; see also Herdina and Jessner 2000; Kramsch 2002; Leather and van Dam 2003; van Lier 2004). What this approach promotes is viewing “language learning and language use as a nonlinear, relational human activity, co-constructed between humans and their environment, contingent upon their position in space and history, and a site of struggle for the control of social power and cultural memory” (Kramsch and Whiteside 2008: 390). Kramsch and Whiteside analyze the way multilinguals use languages in natural contexts and report that they have an ability to play with various linguistic codes that goes beyond linguistic and communicative competence. Kramsch (2006) calls this ability *symbolic competence*. She defines this notion as an ability not only to approximate someone else’s language but also to navigate between languages and dialects to ensure emotional connectedness and successful transactional outcomes. While emphasizing the fact that symbolic competence is not unique to multilingual speakers in multilingual settings, Kramsch and Whiteside (2008: 401) rightly point out that multilingual encounters “increase the contact surfaces among symbolic systems and thus the potential for creating multiple meanings and identities”.

A third Complexity Theory model also worthy of mention is Herdina and Jessner’s *Dynamic Model of Multilingualism* (2002). It explores the psycholinguistic dynamics of multilingualism and shows how the constant interaction between a speaker’s multiple languages creates new structures and emergent properties that are not found in monolingual systems.

When looking at the differences between monolinguals, bilinguals and multilinguals, one area that has received growing attention is the influence of bilingualism and multilingualism on the acquisition of additional languages. The folk wisdom is that bilinguals and multilinguals are more experienced learners and, as a result, have advantages over monolinguals when acquiring additional languages. Research studies focusing on this issue indicate that when learning an additional language, bilinguals do indeed have advantages over monolinguals in tests of general proficiency in the target language, particularly when L3 acquisition takes place in additive contexts and when bilinguals have literacy skills in their first two languages (see Cenoz 2003a, 2009, and De Angelis 2007 for a review). For example, research on the acquisition of English as a third language in the Basque Country has reported that bilingual learners obtained higher scores than their monolingual counterparts in the acquisition of English (see Cenoz and Valencia 1994; Lasagabaster 2000; Cenoz 2009).

Similar results were obtained by Bild and Swain (1989) with learners of French in Canadian immersion programs, by Thomas (1989) with learners of French in the US, and by Sanz (2000) with learners of English in Catalonia. These advantages can be related to a more developed metalinguistic awareness on the part of learners, which can be linked not only to their previous experience as language learners, but also to their knowledge of different linguistic systems and how these interact (see Jessner 2006).

The advantages associated with multilingualism have also been linked to a wider use of learning strategies (Kemp 2007). Bowden, Sanz and Stafford (2005: 122) observed that, “multilinguals behave like successful learners in the way they approach the task of learning a language. They look for more sources of input, make an early effort to use the new language, and show self-direction and a positive attitude toward the task”. The opportunity multilinguals have to build on their prior knowledge of languages is also reported by Stakhnevich (2005), who conducted a diary study on her acquisition of Spanish as a Russian/English bilingual. The study revealed numerous instances where the learner made cross-linguistic comparisons and used her bilingualism as an important resource for decoding input and encoding output. These observations support the conclusions made by Rivers (2001) that experienced language learners exhibit a higher level of learner autonomy and employ “self-directed language learning strategies to modify the learning environment and aspects of the learning process” (Rivers 2001: 287). Other studies have looked at the relationship between the number of languages known by the speaker and various aspects of language acquisition. For example, Gibson and Hufeisen (2003) reported higher accuracy rates for multilinguals in a translation task into a shared target language.

However, not all research on the effect of bilingualism on third language acquisition reports clear advantages. Some studies have analyzed the degree of proficiency achieved in the third language by bilingual immigrant students and majority language monolingual students and have found no difference (Sanders and Meijers 1995; Van Gelderen et al. 2003). These results can be explained by factors such as socioeconomic status and cultural identity, which can affect the acquisition process.

Another difference between second language acquisition and bilingualism as compared to the processes of acquiring and using multiple languages is diversity in terms of directionality and scope of influence. As Cenoz (2000: 40) points out, “when two languages are involved in the acquisition process, we only have two possible acquisition orders: the

*Table 1.* Examples of different possible orders of acquisition involving seven languages

---

1.	L1.....L2.....L3.....L4.....L5.....L6.....L7
2.	L1.....L2/L3.....L4.....L5.....L6.....L7
3.	L1.....L2.....L3/L4.....L5.....L6.....L7
4.	L1.....L2.....L3.....L4/L5.....L6.....L7
5.	L1.....L2.....L3.....L4.....L5/L6.....L7
6.	L1.....L2.....L3.....L4.....L5.....L6/L7
7.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4.....L5.....L6.....L7
8.	L1/L2.....L3/L4.....L5/L6.....L7
9.	L1/L2.....L3/L4.....L5.....L6.....L7
10.	L1/L2.....L3/L4.....L5.....L6/L7
11.	L1/L2.....L3/L4.....L5/L6/L7
12.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4/L5.....L6.....L7
13.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4/L5.....L6/L7
14.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4.....L5/L6.....L7
15.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4.....L5.....L6/L7
16.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4.....L5/L6/L7
17.	L1/L2.....L3/L4/L5.....L6.....L7
18.	L1/L2.....L3/L4/L5.....L6/L7
19.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4/L5/L6.....L7
20.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4/L5/L6/L7
21.	L1/L2.....L3/L4/L5.....L6/L7
22.	L1/L2.....L3/L4/L5.....L6.....L7
23.	L1/L2.....L3/L4/L5/L6.....L7
24.	L1/L2/L3.....L4.....L5.....L6.....L7
25.	L1/L2/L3.....L4/L5.....L6.....L7
26.	L1/L2/L3.....L4/L5.....L6/L7
27.	L1/L2/L3.....L4.....L5/L6.....L7
28.	L1/L2/L3.....L4.....L5/L6/L7
29.	L1/L2/L3.....L4.....L5.....L6/L7
30.	L1/L2/L3.....L4/L5/L6.....L7
31.	L1/L2/L3.....L4/L5.....L6/L7
32.	L1/L2/L3.....L4/L5/L6/L7

---

second language can be acquired after the L1 or at the same time as the L1". The number of languages involved in multilingual acquisition multiplies the possible acquisition orders. For example, in table 1 we can see examples of possible acquisition orders involving seven languages, which is the minimum number of languages in the multilingual narratives in this volume. We can see that languages can be acquired consecutively (for example L1 ... L2 ... or L5 ... L6 ...) or simultaneously (for example, L1/L2/L3 or L5/L6). Simultaneous language acquisition can involve sev-

eral languages but the thirty-two different possibilities included here do not go beyond the simultaneous acquisition of three languages, reported in several of the narratives. The examples in table 1 are in fact a simplification because they represent the acquisition of languages linearly without taking into account the dynamic nature of multilingualism and phenomena such as attrition or the relearning of languages. This diversity adds complexity to the study of multilingualism with exciting theoretical and practical implications. It shows, for instance, that learning several languages is potentially different from the sequence L1 ... L2 commonly used in studies of second language acquisition.

Research on the acquisition of a third or additional languages has also focused on cross-linguistic influence (CLI) in order “to explain how and under what conditions prior linguistic knowledge influences the production, comprehension, and development of a target language” (De Angelis 2007: 19) and to see how any subsequent language(s) may influence one’s earlier languages, including the L1 (see, for instance, Jarvis and Pavlenko 2008 and the references therein). The main CLI areas of investigation cover the effect of different factors such as typological distance, language status, characteristics of the context, proficiency and recency of use of the language(s) influencing the target language. In general, speakers borrow more from the language which is typologically closer to the target language (Cenoz, Hufeisen and Jessner 2001, 2003; De Angelis 2007; Ringbom 2007). For example, Cenoz (2003b) observed that learners used Spanish more often than Basque as the source language of borrowings into English, both when Spanish was the first and the second language. Another factor that can predict cross-linguistic influence is the so-called foreign language effect or L2 status (Hammarberg 2001). Several studies have reported that learners tend to use the L2 or languages other than the L1 as the source language of cross-linguistic influence (Clyne 1997; Williams and Hammarberg 1998). De Angelis (2005) proposes the existence of two interacting constraints that trigger the use of languages other than the L1 as source languages: perception of correctness and association of foreignness. Learners perceive that L1 information is often unhelpful when learning an additional language and, at the same time, non-native languages are cognitively associated as different from the L1. So far there are not enough studies to compare the relative weight of the effect of typological distance vs. foreign language effect/L2 status. Cenoz (2001, see also 2009) reported that when telling a story in English, Spanish L1 students who had learned Basque and had Basque as the language of instruction used Spanish as the main source language. It seems that in

this case, typology has more weight than foreign language effect/L2 status. These learners seem to perceive linguistic distance and realize that Basque, a non-Indo-European language, is less likely to work as a source language of transfer. Thus they choose the language that is “less different” rather than “less foreign”, a choice similar to the ones reported in other contexts (cf. e.g. Odlin and Jarvis 2004). However, as Cenoz (2001, 2009) points out, there may be an additional factor that can favor the use of the L1 Spanish rather than the L2 Basque as a source language, the relative strength of Basque and Spanish in the sociolinguistic context. Basque is a minority language and even though it is the main language of instruction for participants in the study, Spanish is highly activated at all times as the default language. The interaction of sociolinguistic factors, such as language vitality and status in the community, is not often taken into account in studies of cross-linguistic influence, but it cannot be dismissed.

Cross-linguistic influence in the acquisition of a third or additional languages has also been related to the level of proficiency in the target language; and less proficient learners have been reported to transfer more elements from their L1 than more advanced learners (Ringbom 1987; Williams and Hammarberg 1998). Another factor that can potentially affect cross-linguistic influence is frequency of use. It can be hypothesized that learners are more likely to borrow from a language they actively use than from other languages they may know but do not use. However, here again the interaction of other factors can change that.

Dewaele (1998), Hammarberg (2001), and Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008) report results related to the role of recency of use. Their evidence seems to suggest that the language that was learned just prior to the target language is the most likely candidate for transfer. This is a somewhat different position from Poulishse (1999) who also acknowledges the effect of recency but defines it as the language most recently used.

Other factors that can determine the presence of cross-linguistic influence are related to the specific context in which communication takes place, including the interlocutors, the setting and the topic of the conversation. Grosjean (1998, 2008 chapters 4 and 5) believes that these factors determine whether the speaker is in a bilingual or a monolingual mode. Some L3 studies have confirmed Grosjean’s stance. For example, Dewaele (2001) found that the level of formality affects the total number of mixed, dual or triple language utterances, which proved higher in informal contexts.

The last trend in the area of multilingual studies we would like to comment on is the much richer research agenda we are witnessing today

with regard to questions related to language development and emotions (see, for example, Pavlenko and Dewaele 2004; Pavlenko 2005). Wierzbicka (2004) considers this a significant development since emotions are an essential aspect of human cognition. While the study of some affective variables such as attitude and motivation has a long tradition (see, for example, Gardner and Lambert 1972; Gardner 1985; Baker 1992), other factors such as anxiety have become the object of serious exploration only in more recent years (Horwitz and Young, 1991; Dewaele 2002, 2007). Importantly, attitude, motivation and affect are currently seen as dynamic, ever-changing complex phenomena, rather than as static personal attributes. In an interesting study focused on anxiety, Dewaele (2002) found that learners show higher levels of anxiety when learning a second language than when learning additional languages.

Looking at the field as a whole, Pavlenko (2006) subdivided the inquiries concerning multilingualism and emotion into three groups. The first one is centrally concerned with multilinguals' *emotional experiences*. These are some of the key questions there: "Are some emotional concepts experienced in culturally unique ways, as argued by Panayiotou (2004) with regard to physical correlates of the Greek 'stenahoria' (discomfort/sadness/suffocation)? And if this is the case, does second language socialization reroute 'the trajectory of feeling' (Hoffman 1989: 269) and engender new forms of emotional experience?" (Pavlenko 2006: 312).

The second group of questions addresses multilinguals' *preferred language of expression*. The common assumption has been that the dominant language, which in most cases is the first language, is typically the language of emotion. Sifting through the existing evidence, Pavlenko (2005: 236) cautions that to think of the first language as the language of emotions or the self and of the second or an additional language as the language of detachment is to oversimplify the relationship between languages, emotions and identities in bi- and multilingualism.

The third distinct area of research regarding emotions looks at the way the same *emotions are expressed in different languages*. Wierzbicka (2004: 102) contends that a language is "a conceptual, experiential and emotional world" and therefore there are different ways of thinking and feeling associated with different languages. This can explain the difficulties multilinguals experience in identifying certain emotions when there is a great distance between cultures (Dewaele 2005).

The new approaches to emotions and multilingualism are not only richer in their theoretical orientation; they are also methodologically much more diverse, using different types of data. These include *introspec-*

*tive data*, such as self-reports and linguistic autobiographies, *experimental data*, such as electromagnetic recordings of skin conductivity amplitudes, *performance data*, such as oral narratives and interviews, *ethnographic data*, combining direct observations and field notes, and *clinical data* from case histories and sessions with patients who speak more than one language (Pavlenko 2006: 314).

Despite the diversity of data described with regard to emotions, research on multilingualism as a whole remains primarily based on *etic* data. In the next section we discuss the importance of providing another perspective on multilingualism in its intricate complexity, namely the inside *emic* perspective of users and speakers of multiple languages.

### **Narratives as valuable and legitimate data in multilingual studies**

In recent years there have been growing appeals in the field of SLA to open a new discursive space where first-person narrative introspections can productively supplement third-person, researcher-generated accounts of language learning (cf. e.g. Firth and Wagner 1997; Pavlenko 1998; Marx 2002; Block 2003; Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008). This section will highlight the significance of personal narratives in various disciplines, focusing in particular on the ones related to language development studies. While written more or less in a classic review format, this overview can be looked at as a mini narrative itself, which depicts unfolding “substories” in the evolution of narrative use, presents various “protagonists”, i.e. different researchers with their dissenting or consenting voices, and reveals “plots” with challenges, dominances and possibilities. Our role as narrators will be to facilitate a journey of inquiry, offering different perspectives, pointing out biases, and identifying lacunae as well as potential for richer explorations. Not unlike the experience of the characters in Kurosawa’s classic movie *Rashomon* (1950) about the subjectivity of perception, the narrative told here is no more than a strand in a much richer story demanding multiple voices.

#### **The backdrop of the story**

Personal narratives have always been an important meaning-making tool at the core of human experience, giving us a holistic understanding of the contributions that actions and events make to particular outcomes (Polkinghorne 1988). Their potential for making sense of things and for

cross-fertilization has only grown stronger with the introduction of new media and the opportunities created by cyberspace for millions of people to be part of much bigger and more flexible communities<sup>2</sup>. Recognized as a fundamental cognitive activity, narratives are being accepted as a valuable source of information in various disciplines and research efforts as well: psychology, history, medicine, musicology, cognitive science, immunology, pedagogy, political science, disaster management, anthropology, law, gender studies, sociology, neuroscience, teacher education and media research (cf. e.g. Hunter 1991; Cortazzi 1993; Liebllich et al. 1998; Johnson and Golombek 2002; Rogoff 2003; Groopman 2007; Sacks 2007; Doidge 2007). In some of these disciplines, such as medicine and anthropology, it is perhaps more accurate to talk about a renewed interest in narratives, which are now collected and analyzed in more sophisticated ways than before.

### The pro-narrative voices

Personal narratives were marginalized under the influence of rationalist epistemology and experimental methodology with their preoccupation with objectivity and powerful generalizations rather than individual experiences (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000). Their rediscovered value is reflected in the epithets different scholars have used to describe them. Narrative is “a primary act of mind” (Hardy 1987: 1); “the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful” (Polkinghorne 1988: 11). Narratives are “overt manifestations of the mind in action: windows to both the content of the mind and its ongoing operations” (Chafe 1990: 79).<sup>3</sup>

In the field of multilingual studies, first-person language learning narratives are a critical source of data, well aligned with different newer theoretical frameworks and approaches such as Complexity Theory, poststructuralist SLA, and various ecological models, for instance (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008; Herdina and Jessner 2002; van Lier 2000). This alignment comes from the fact that narratives offer a holistic, qualitative type of inquiry, which moves us away from more traditional

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2. Suffice it to mention the burgeoning blogosphere and the unprecedented opportunities it offers for patterned narrative analysis of the type offered in Harris (2007).

3. These three quotes are all cited in Cortazzi 1993: 1–2.

subject manipulation and focuses instead on learners in their natural environments, with all their complexities and interconnectivities.

Being more process than product oriented, personal narratives of language learning are valued for adding a longitudinal, historical perspective on things and for revealing the multitude of infinitely complex factors which shape learning outcomes and multilingual learner/speaker positioning: from race, social status, age, ethnicity, sexuality, to (dis)ability and culture (McGroarty 1998: 598; Pavlenko 2001). Furthermore, since they present the voices of language learners and users, narratives are believed to offer insights with greater psychological reality. This is arguably the case because the same observable outcomes can be attributed to different underlying processes. Hence, by getting the perspectives of those actually juggling a multilanguage system, as opposed to relying solely on the conclusions and observations of researchers, we gain greater plausibility.

Language learning diarist Stakhnevich comments that “as authors of our own personal stories, we have a unique perspective on what our specifics are in time and space, both of which might not be shared by others” (Stakhnevich 2005: 217). This is, she reminds us, what Bakhtin calls the “surplus of seeing” – each one of us sees processes, critical experiences and interconnectivities that others may overlook or not have. By adding the “surplus of seeing” that one person possesses to the surplus of another, a better and richer picture of reality emerges.

Countering those who view first-person narratives with skepticism as subjective, unreliable, or at best as capturing individual differences and idiosyncrasies more than commonalities, Benson similarly argues that perhaps the “growing visibility of such ‘atypical’ learners in research could lead to a new view of the more ‘typical’ learner” (Benson 2004: 20). He further points out that narratives nicely capture the dialectic between learner and situation, allowing mental actions to transpire as a “synchronized mechanism of the internal and the external” (Benson 2004: 43). Lantolf and Pavlenko also see the mental and the social as intimately connected. To them, social context is not merely a backdrop to mental development; it is the very source of this development (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001: 144). Analyzing a number of published post-modern personal accounts of language and culture border crossings, Pavlenko (1998) draws attention to the fact that this brand of narratives takes us into a new universe where the metaphor of language is drastically different. Instead of “language acquisition” we are dealing with a metaphor of “participation” and of “becoming- and being-in-language”; acquisition sug-

gests that the self is “in control” (it possesses the language) while the metaphor of participation presents languages as separate worlds that shape and transform us with each border crossing (Pavlenko 1998: 15, see also Sfard 1998).

### The cautionary voices

While having undoubtedly gained in stature as a unique way of externalizing inner experiences, narratives are still being viewed as somewhat suspect data by some, while other scholars only warn that they need to be treated with caution. A common caveat is that what narratives report is subjective, already “filtered through the perceptions and biases of the learner, especially important when the learner is a linguist professionally interested in SLA theory” (Schmidt and Frota 1986: 238). There is no such thing as an innocent eye, Bruner observes, “the brain is never free of precommitment” (2004: 709).

Others make the point that we should consider personal narratives as discursive constructions, much more than factual representations (Johnson and Golombek 2002; Bruner 2004; Pavlenko 2008). What this means is that what we choose to tell in our own story is always influenced by what we already know about other people’s stories and experiences, and what we say or do not say is shaped by what we believe to be of interest to particular audiences. To capture the phenomenon of narratives always influencing other narratives, Julia Kristeva coined the term “intertextuality”, a succinct way to indicate that from the onset every text “is under the jurisdiction of other discourses” (Kristeva 1980: 69).

Importantly, narratives are also susceptible to influence from the language in which they are told. As languages tend to segment reality in different ways, it does make a difference which of our multiple languages we use to tell our story of language learning. Also, it matters if the language of the telling and the language of the experience coincide or not (Koven 1998; Marian and Neisser 2000). Because of the unavoidable effect of these linguistic and intertextual influences, what is not said in particular first-person narratives may be more interesting and telling than what has been articulated (see Pavlenko 2007).

A further caveat mentioned in the literature on narratives is the untenable nature of a “learner as a linguist” position since, more often than not, things are too complex to be understood by linguistically naïve learners and language users. Schmidt (1995) offers some counterevidence to this stance of untenability and invites researchers to consider the possibil-

ity that learners may be aware of more than they are being given credit for. “It is misleading”, Schmidt points out, “to assume ignorance when ignorance has not been demonstrated”(Schmidt 1995: 40).

Others have argued that since much of our learning and language use happens below the level of conscious awareness, people are perhaps unable to remember the actual processes of acquiring rules and various language components, from their vocabulary development to their mastery of target language pragmatic and pronunciation norms<sup>4</sup>. Again, keeping in mind Schmidt’s objection above, one can say that while we may not remember most or many of the specific reconfigurations of our developing multilingual competence, what we do remember is significant, despite its subjectivity. Benson (2004: 14) makes the argument that the inevitable memory deterioration that occurs between a language learning experience and its description is counterbalanced by one’s intimate knowledge of the contexts of one’s own learning and by the insights that are gained from a more longitudinal view of the learning process.

### Narrative clusters

Probing deeper into intertextuality, one can identify certain clusters in the language learning narratives that have emerged in our field over time. The early introspections focused almost exclusively on single aspects related to learning, typically anxiety, competition and motivation (Schumann F. and J. Schumann 1977; Bailey 1980, 1983; Schumann 1980). Two early diaries (Rivers 1979; Schmidt and Frota 1986) offered much more comprehensive data but they stayed with the learning as “acquisition”, rather than “participation” metaphor (Sfard 1998).

Four published individual learning accounts and one collection of personal narratives show marks of, or acknowledge, being influenced by feminist and postmodern/poststructuralist theories with their emphasis on language not only as a symbolic capital but as a site of identity construction and negotiation, where gender, age, ethnicity, class and race grow or diminish in role in an intricately fluid web of social relationships (Pavlenko 2002; Kramsch 2008). The authors of the individual publications are all women – Lvovich (1997), Ogulnick (1998), Marx (2002), and Stakhnevich (2005) – each providing a richly contextualized description of her language learning experiences and concomitant linguistic identity transformations. All white, middle-class academics, the authors nev-

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4. See, e.g. the sources in Schmidt and Frota (1986).

ertheless offer precious variety in terms of the context of their experiences, respectively Italy/France/USA, Japan, Germany/Canada, and Mexico.

The narrative collection, entitled *Language Crossings* (Ogulnick 2000, ed.), contains significantly shorter pieces whose aim is to offer insights into the complicated interplay between gender, social status, nationality, race, class and language learning. It is interesting to point out that if one conducts a detailed analysis of the tenor and the language of these narratives, a well defined semantic field will emerge, densely populated by words such as “displacement”, “loss”, “painful journeys”, “struggle”, “dislocation”, “regret”, “severed roots”, “fragmentation”, “shy and broken languages”, “outsider”, “stranger”, “identity crisis”, “confused”, “humiliated”, “hopelessness”, “helplessness”, “exasperated”, “exhausted”, “shame”, “guilt”, “frustration”, “anger”, “difficulties”, “disappointment” and “humiliation”. Only four of the twenty-five narratives included in the collection foreground the authors’ enrichment rather than their painful repositioning and difficult identity re-negotiation. In a fascinating personal narrative called *Split Self*, Nicholas Papandreou also offers an exploration of the wounds one suffers from multiple language allegiances. He, however, dwells equally, if not more, on the innumerable treasures of one’s split as a multilingual and multicultural person (Papandreou 2004).

Within the “language as participation” framework, the literature on narratives has given particular attention to linguistic autobiographies by acclaimed multilingual and multicultural writers and scholars, such as Rodriguez (1982), Hoffman (1989), Kaplan (1993), Todorov (1994), Wierzbicka (1997). Some of these autobiographies are longer, book size, literary pieces. Like the narratives from Ogulnick’s collection, these also depict the pains of an immigrant’s initial “displacement” and “life on the hyphen” (Pavlenko 1998: 3). They all are, at the same time, astounding records of remarkable social repositioning and linguistic accomplishment.

Two recent collections, published just three years apart – Belcher and Conner (2001) and Benson and Nunan (2004) – have their own distinct profiles as well. Belcher and Conner’s book contains narratives written by outstanding academics from various disciplines, many of them well-known language specialists, who all offered their reflections on how they developed literacy in multiple languages. Benson and Nunan’s collection, on the other hand, is all about stories from the classroom with a focus on motivation, affect and strategies. Despite the book’s title, *Learners’ Stories. Difference and Diversity in Language Learning*, these are re-sto-

ried experiences with the researchers rather than the learners being the principal narrators.

Not unlike the collections mentioned above, the narratives in the present anthology also show some intravolume intertextuality. The latter is not so much the result of a process of editing or revision, but is more due to the backgrounds of the contributors included. These and the organization of the book are described in some detail in what follows.

### **This volume**

In a series of articles, Pavlenko (2001, 2002, 2007) points out that narrative analysis offers our field much more than ethnographic and linguistic data. It pushes us to analyze our own roles in privileging certain narrative voices and styles while marginalizing others.

The personal narratives in this volume depict the learning trajectories of twelve multilingual individuals, affected by quite different contextual factors and representing a wide range and combination of dialects and languages from both similar and very different linguistic families. The combinations explored include some lesser-known languages that come from under-researched areas, such as the African continent and certain parts of Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

As a genre, the narratives offered here belong to the more global introspective and retrospective type, called either linguistic autobiographies or language memoirs, as opposed to the more synchronous in nature diaries and journals (Pavlenko 2007). Because this is a collection of narratives, they are naturally all shorter pieces compared to the book size global introspections one sees in Hoffman (1989) and Kaplan (1993), for instance. Content-wise the narratives explore in some detail the acquisition of the various components of language (grammar, lexicon, pronunciation and pragmatics), while offering insights into the ways one creates a more fluid and complex identity when positioned in various speech and learning communities. The voices of the individual contributors were completely honored through no editorial interference with regard to terminology and narrative organization.

### **The contributors**

The contributors to the present volume have listed from seven to up to twenty-one languages as part of their repertoires. These numbers call for

an immediate methodological clarification. Many have written about the lack of agreement concerning the way we define multilingualism, from full native-like mastery of two or more languages to a minimal knowledge of additional languages (see, e.g. Baker 2006).

For the purposes of this anthology, namely to allow researchers, and anyone else interested in language development, to get a glimpse of some of the processes of language acquisition and maintenance in a multilingual mind as well as to get a sense of what determines one's investment in learning multiple languages, the methodological challenges around the definition of multilingualism are, to some extent, a non-issue. We will use multilingual competence as a neutral term, in the sense of Cook (1999) where it is defined as knowledge of more than two languages, free from any judgment of good or bad according to some outside criterion. As will become clear from some of the narratives, even a minimal knowledge of a language, limited to a particular aspect of its syntax or phonology, for instance, can prove critical for the activation of what Ringbom and Schmidt call "system learning", as opposed to "item learning" (Ringbom 1982; Schmidt 1995).

In this volume we use the term *multilingualism* both for its individual and societal dimensions, following the definition given by the European Commission: "the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives" (European Commission 2007: 6). The term *plurilinguism* (from the French *plurilinguisme*), used only for individual, as opposed to societal, multilingualism, has been gaining ground in Europe since the publication of some important Council of Europe documents (e.g. Council of Europe 2001). This term is connected with an important shift in the way language learning is conceptualized. Instead of projecting learning outcomes as a final state, it promotes a dynamic, emergent or process view (Larsen-Freeman and Freeman 2008). With its emphasis on the close nexus between language and identity, the term *multilinguality* proposed by Aronin and Ó Laoire is also very close to the spirit of this anthology (Aronin and Ó Laoire 2004). At this point, however, we decided to stay with *multilingualism* as the more familiar term in most parts of the world.

A brief terminological note on *polyglot* vs. *multilingual*. The former is typically defined as a generic term for a multilingual person, not infrequently in reference to people with an impressive number or mastery of languages ([en.wiktionary.org/wiki/polyglot](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/polyglot) – "one who masters, notably speaks, several languages"). We prefer the term *multilingual* because of its phonological closeness to *multilingualism* and more neutral nature with regard to level of proficiency and number of languages involved.

The contributors to our anthology were selected according to the following key criteria: 1) the number of languages in their repertoire, 2) the linguistic distance between the languages and/or dialects involved, 3) the way the languages were developed – simultaneously or consecutively, in naturalistic vs. instructed settings etc., 4) age of language development – from birth, young learners, younger and older adults, 5) the types of writing systems and literacy skills involved, 6) patterns of language maintenance and language attrition, 7) types of multilingualism – incipient, coordinate, compound, active, passive, etc. We aimed at both maximum language and regional diversity as well as varied types of multilingualism. All the selected contributors have seven or more languages in their language repertoire. Though privileged in some ways, these individuals do not represent some sort of an exceptional language achievement. They all reveal rich multilingual competence, a not uncommon phenomenon around the world, which still remains underrepresented and undertheorized in the language development literature.

The contributors to this volume have not only acquired multiple languages but they also work with languages as teachers, translators, or academics. Clearly, this specific background is not shared by many other multilingual speakers, which means that their language learning experiences may reveal somewhat different patterns. The plus side of the contributors' background, however, is that it allows them to explain certain things in a more precise technical way than that of a layperson. The writers in the anthology are people who are keenly aware of the manner in which they use and study languages and the narratives in the following chapters show the depth of their reflections.

Not many of our contributors had to learn languages because of forced displacement, which triggers its own dynamics of linguistic identity negotiation and learning. The narratives in the anthology deal more with empowerment and enrichment rather than loss. They are different from the old "success" stories of assimilation, however (cf. Pavlenko 2007). In a way, this leaning towards enrichment may be viewed as a counterpoise to the already mentioned recent narratives around displacement and loss. Having more varied learning narratives is beneficial not only for research, but, through intertextuality, more variety will impact positively on future writers of personal narratives as well.

We would like to invite the readers of this anthology not only to savor its narratives as sources of fascinating glimpses into how individuals develop and maintain multiple languages, but also to look at the book in their hands as an opportunity to think about their own experiences with

managing different dialects and/or additional languages. By engaging more people to reflect on their multilingual experiences and by inviting them to join the public discourse around multilingualism, its processes, benefits and impact on the way we perceive the world and others, we can have outcomes that go far beyond the advancement of language development theory and practice. Through more introspection and discussion, we can gain openness, enrichment and flexibility that facilitate better cross-cultural communication, cooperation and understanding.

In the spirit of TED's mega projects<sup>5</sup> exploring school and media stories, and along the lines of Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) "story constellations approach", we would like to encourage our field to consider creating an open-ended electronic database where bi- and multilingual learners and speakers from around the world, with different professional backgrounds and life experiences, can post their stories. The idea is to make an unprecedented amount of data accessible for analysis, free for anyone interested in language. Such a database will be one way to ensure that no languages or language combinations will be unduly favored in mainstream language acquisition research, nor whole regions of the world unjustifiably ignored, as has been the case for so long. Another factor to consider when setting up such an international open-ended database is the language of the personal narratives. These days, English is undeniably the international language of choice, but as mentioned earlier, studies have repeatedly shown that memories become more accessible when the linguistic environment at retrieval matches the linguistic environment at encoding, i.e. multilinguals remember different aspects of their experiences to a varying degree depending on the language they use for their narratives (Marian and Neisser 2000: 361). The project we are proposing should encourage multiple language narratives, as well as narratives written in their entirety in a language other than English. This may seem at first blush impractical, particularly to "inner circle" re-

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5. TED, which stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design, was founded in 1984 with the intention to bring together outstanding thinkers from these three worlds and make them part of a global community which seeks, and freely disseminates, knowledge. Since then, its scope and membership have become much broader. For more information on TED and their mission, see [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com). For TED's stories projects, see Harris 2007 and <http://www.onceuponaschool.org/stories>. The "story constellations approach" can be described as a type of exploration which takes into account multiple clusters of stories, and many versions of stories narrated by multiple tellers (Craig 2007).