

SLA for the 21st Century: Disciplinary Progress, Transdisciplinary Relevance, and the Bi/multilingual Turn

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The goals of this article are to appraise second language acquisition's (SLA) disciplinary progress over the last 15 years and to reflect on transdisciplinary relevance as the field has completed 40 years of existence and moves forward into the 21st century. I first identify four trends that demonstrate vibrant disciplinary progress in SLA. I then turn to the notion of transdisciplinarity, or the proclivity to pursue and generate SLA knowledge that can be of use outside the confines of the field and contribute to overall knowledge about the human capacity for language. I propose an understanding of transdisciplinary relevance for SLA that results from the ability: (a) to place one's field in a wider landscape of disciplines that share an overarching common goal and (b) to develop critical awareness of one's disciplinary framings of object of inquiry and goals and others' likely reception of them. Finally, I argue that it is by reframing SLA as the study of late bi/multilingualism that the remarkable progress witnessed in the last 15 years will help the field reach new levels of transdisciplinary relevance as a contributor to the study of the ontogeny of human language and a source of knowledge in support of language education in the 21st century.

Keywords SLA; bilingualism; multilingualism; monolingual bias; transdisciplinarity; framings; language ontogeny

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Introduction

In the 50th jubilee special issue of *Language Learning*, Wolfgang Klein (1998) offered a pessimistic appraisal of the place of the field of second language acquisition (SLA) among other fields in the language sciences. He recognized many achievements in 25 years of disciplinary existence and considered that SLA had reached maturity by most practical, theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary indicators—all in baffling opposition to the limited influence that it had thus far had on neighboring fields. According to him, the accumulated research was sufficiently relevant neither to offer guidelines for optimal language teaching nor to provide a knowledge base toward a general theory of second language (L2) acquisition. Furthermore, SLA researchers had imported theories from other fields one-way only, producing nonreciprocal insights which had had great internal but limited external value. His overall conclusion was that “among the various disciplines investigating the manifold manifestations of human language capacity, SLA research does not rank very high” and he described SLA researchers as “bottom dwellers in the language sciences” (p. 530). Klein blamed this bleak state of affairs on SLA researchers’ fixation with what he termed a *target deviation perspective*, or the tendency to consider L2 systems as failed approximations to the yardstick of native language systems. This perspective, he argued in 1998, hindered the field’s ability to study how second languages are acquired in their own right, and it ultimately hampered the generation of genuinely relevant knowledge about the human capacity for language.

In the present article, I will agree with Klein (1998) on the main culprit he singles out for his negative appraisal of SLA. But I am also interested in revisiting his wider observation that the large amounts of rigorous and interesting research generated by SLA research communities are not commensurable with the considerably lesser reach this knowledge exerts among the other language sciences. It seems befitting to engage in this exercise of critical disciplinary self-examination particularly now, not only because it has been long enough—about 15 years—since Klein’s (1998) indictment, but also because at the time of this writing SLA celebrates its 40-year anniversary, taking Selinker’s (1972) field-defining publication as a convenient official marker of its disciplinary beginnings. The notion of transdisciplinarity will be important in my arguments. Transdisciplinarity draws from a movement in the sciences (Pohl & Hirsch Hadorn, 2008) and humanities (Osborne, 2011) that offers the concept as a response to increasing academia’s capacity to solve problems in what applied linguists would call the real world and transdisciplinarity scientists call the

life-world. Transdisciplinarity ensues when scholarly communities attempt to solve complex knowledge problems with social impact by working across multiple disciplinary boundaries as well as with social actors outside academia, willing to integrate diverse and often discipline-internal perspectives into more than the sum of each discipline-specific fund of knowledge. The goal of transdisciplinarity, therefore, is to generate a theoretical unity of knowledge beyond any one of the disciplines or perspectives involved. Broadening knowledge bases in this way increases experts' capacities to meet complex contemporary demands for socially useful knowledge. Given the complexities of human language acquisition, as well as the serious consequences that such complexities carry for the lives of individuals and communities who learn to live with several languages, a transdisciplinary approach offers a valuable lens through which to evaluate disciplinary progress in SLA.

Currents, Tides, and Flows in SLA Research at Age Forty

Let me first appraise recent disciplinary progress. Many interesting developments have taken place in SLA over the last 15 years. Taking a bird's eye view, a few recent trends seem particularly noteworthy as SLA moves forward into the 21st century at age 40.

The most noticeable of recent trends is the remarkable epistemological diversity of the contemporary SLA landscape. This is an achievement fueled by a social turn initiated in SLA in the mid 1990s (Block, 2003; Firth & Wagner, 1997). What was different about this development was not just the call to place social dimensions at the center of research on L2 learning. After all, social factors have always figured in SLA explanations, all the way from the early foundational years (Beebe, 1988; Klein & Dittmar, 1979), through the identification of interaction as a key site for language development (Long, 1981; Pica, 1987; see Gass, 1997), up to a most recent revival of interest in studying the L2 acquisition of variational rules (e.g., Gudmestad, 2012). Unprecedented in the social turn was the convergence of, on the one hand, efforts to dissociate from the quantitative, cognitive, positivist epistemologies dominant in SLA until the mid 1990s and, on the other hand, to refocus empirically on variation rather than universals and on individuals as much as on groups, with the allowance and even privileging of nontraditional explanations involving noncausal and probabilistic perspectives (e.g., as in Bayesian statistics). These efforts have brought about social respecifications of many central SLA constructs (Ortega, 2011b). Thus, *cognition* has been respecified in at least two ways, as a socio-cultural phenomenon in Vygotskian theory, and as an embodied sociocognitive

adaptation in the usage-based family of SLA approaches; *grammar* has been reconstrued as social meaning making in Hallidayan systemic functional linguistics and as meaning construal in cognitive linguistics; *interaction* has been redefined as a socially distributed accomplishment in conversation analysis; *learning* has been investigated as social apprenticing in language socialization theory; and *sense of self* has been reconceptualized in identity theory as socially constructed and contested positionings for being in the world. The social turn seems completed by now. It has boosted the field's capability to study social dimensions of additional language learning by adding at least six new theoretical frameworks to eight existing ones (compare Atkinson, 2011, and VanPatten & Williams, 2007). The resulting epistemological diversity constitutes something of a disciplinary tidal change in SLA that has been watched by some as a worrisome theoretical proliferation, greeted by others as salutary intellectual ethos, and celebrated by yet others as a needed reconceptualization of the field.

A twin theoretical development has been the consolidation of usage-based thinking about second language learning, as reflected in the importation into SLA of an extended family of theories including emergentism, connectionism, construction grammar, cognitive linguistics, and dynamic systems and complexity theories. I like to think of this development (admittedly with a positive bias) as a sea current akin to the California Current, which makes the climate of the Hawaiian Islands pleasantly cool despite their tropical latitude. Functionalist linguistic theories have always been welcomed in SLA, as shown, for example, in work by Sato (1990), Klein and Perdue (1992), and Bardovi-Harlig (2000). New, however, is the application to SLA problems of novel functional approaches that are closely associated with the fields of psychology of language and cognitive science (e.g., Elman et al., 1996; Thelen & Smith, 1994; Tomasello, 1998). The beginning of the trend was marked in the mid 1990s by the publication of seminal papers by N. Ellis (1996), Gasser (1990), Larsen-Freeman (1997), MacWhinney (1997), and O'Grady (1996). A more recent period was spent in the task of adapting the theory to SLA concerns (e.g., Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Robinson & Ellis, 2008), occasionally marked by critical comparisons of usage-based linguistic versus generative linguistic approaches to SLA (e.g., a special issue in *Lingua* edited by Hawkins in 2008). A further development of this trend that can be forecast for the 21st century is that empirical accumulation of usage-based SLA research is imminent now, as a critical mass number of data-based studies is entering the published record (e.g., Collins & Ellis, 2009; Ellis & Cadierno, 2009; Eskildsen, 2012; Nelson, 2013; Tyler, 2012; Schmid & Lowie, 2011).

A third, noticeable trend in SLA looks more like a natural river flow. It pertains to research methodological prowess, reflected among many other indicators in the impressive variety of books devoted to covering research methods for the study of SLA data and topics. A far from exhaustive list includes the following: Blom and Unsworth (2010), Jiang (2011), Mackey and Gass (2012), McDonough and Trofimovich (2008), Norris and Ortega (2006), and Verspoor, de Bot, and Lowie (2011). The methodological advancement has occurred partly thanks to the first two theoretical developments already discussed. Namely, as part of the social turn, diverse empirical qualitative and interpretive methodologies were needed that would be appropriate for the study of not just language development but also social dimensions of L2 learning, including conversation analytical, ethnographic, and microgenetic methods, as well as combinations of them. Likewise, the recent wave of empirical usage-based studies has contributed new methods for the analysis of L2 data, with particular innovation in the three areas of developmental corpus analysis, dynamical systems techniques for formally gauging variation-centered changes, and computational simulations. Formal-linguistic (generative) SLA researchers have also expanded their experimental methods greatly and now regularly employ cutting-edge psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic methodologies (e.g., Marinis, 2003; Sabourin, 2009). This trend has been in response to the realization that knowledge of the L2 must be studied vis-à-vis processing effects (Bley-Vroman, 2009), a theoretical necessity also recognized by Chomsky (e.g., 2011) in the wider field of generative linguistics.

The fourth and final trend I would like to note is a steady broadening of the contexts and populations that contemporary SLA researchers investigate, together with the consolidation of instructed SLA as a burgeoning subdomain in the field. Over its 40-year history, a view of contexts and populations has prevailed in SLA that is essentially dichotomous, along a four-way distinction of naturalistic vs. instructed and, within the latter, foreign vs. second language acquisition. These dichotomies are too simplistic for many (Cook, 2009; Siegel, 2003). As of recent years, by contrast, variegated contexts for L2 learning involving distinct learner populations have begun to attract keen attention from theoretically diverse quarters. They include heritage language learners (Montrul, 2008; Valdés, 2005), preschool-age child L2 learners (Schwartz, 2004), international adoptees (Fogle, 2012; Hyltenstam, Bylund, Abrahamsson, & Park, 2009), school-age minority language learners (Ardasheva, Tretter, & Kinny, 2012; Schleppegrell, 2004), low-literacy and/or limited-education L2 learners (Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2012; Tarone & Bigelow, 2005; Schöneberger, van de Craats, & Kurvers, 2011), L2 learners with special learning needs

(Kormos & Smith, 2012; Sparks, Humbach, & Javorsky, 2008), college students studying abroad (Kinginger, 2009), missionaries serving abroad (Hansen, 2012), or healthy aging L2 learners (Lenet, Sanz, Lado, Howard, & Howard, 2011; van der Hoeven & de Bot, 2012). The affirmation of interest by SLA researchers to contribute knowledge about language education and language teaching (e.g., R. Ellis, 2008; Long & Doughty, 2009; Spada, 2011) is likely related to this very increase in attention to diverse learner populations, because across contexts acquisition of a new language later in life often occurs in conjunction with formal instruction. In the long run, attention to some of the recently added contexts and populations may prove to be ephemeral, similar to surface ocean currents that are driven by seasonal winds. Other context- and population-specific interests, however, may be more sustainable and become deep sea currents that, given favorable upwelling conditions, can at times bring up deeper, nutrient-rich insights to the rest of the field. The conduct of SLA research across a broad spectrum of populations and contexts is likely to foster reconsideration of taken-for-granted knowledge and germination of new ideas; it may also challenge researchers to search for ever innovative methods, and it will hopefully increase the willingness to think ethically, engaging with the societal impact and educational consequences of the knowledge generated within SLA. The continued coverage of language education issues by the instructed SLA community is crucial to meet the potential for the field to be a central source of knowledge in support of language education in the 21st century that fosters bilingualism as a societal asset not only to elites but also to linguistic minority populations (see Dixon et al., 2012).

Transdisciplinary Relevance

The four trends reviewed above suggest impressive disciplinary vibrancy and strong interdisciplinary predispositions. SLA is moving forward into the 21st century with a glowing record of disciplinary progress. As Klein (1998) noted, however, disciplinary achievements may result in high internal worth for the knowledge generated by a field while nevertheless buying only limited outside influence. That is, in addition to disciplinary progress, it is worth considering transdisciplinarity, or the proclivity to pursue and generate knowledge that can be seen as relevant across many disciplinary boundaries and can contribute to overall knowledge about a given object of inquiry and its associated real-world or life-world problems (Pohl & Hirsch Hadorn, 2008). Thus, I would like to pose the question of whether SLA's remarkable disciplinary progress has been accompanied by commensurate transdisciplinary relevance. To what extent do

the positive trends observed help make the field's contributions useful and relevant to the other language sciences?

There is strong indication that the perceived outside value of SLA has considerably improved in the last 15 years. For example, all major international publishers seem to be eager to include SLA in their offerings, which has led to a wealth of textbooks and handbooks (in both cases too many to cite here), together with at least one encyclopedia (Robinson, 2012), one anthology (Ortega, 2011a), and a dictionary of key terms (VanPatten & Benati, 2010). In addition, increasing communication between SLA researchers and researchers in fields such as psycholinguistics and bilingualism is seen, as reflected in the number of SLA-influenced publications in journals like *Applied Psycholinguistics* and *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, coupled with a mirror rise in publications influenced by cognitive science in journals that are home to SLA research, such as *Language Learning*, *Second Language Research*, and *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. The vibrancy and sophistication that has been reached inside the field of SLA speaks well for even greater outside relevance of SLA knowledge in the future, and we will hopefully see two-way flow of theories from SLA to other fields and vice versa, with SLA generating rich reciprocal insights that enjoy great internal as well as external value in the future. But how is the steady increase in transdisciplinary relevance to be supported and maximized?

In part, transdisciplinary relevance is about SLA research communities being able to ask themselves what SLA can do for the other language sciences. Other things being equal, it is those contemporary SLA programs that are able to attune themselves to wider interests among the language sciences which are more likely to command attention and relevance outside SLA. Thus, I would argue one way in which the ethos of transdisciplinarity can be supported is by understanding the place of one's discipline in a wider landscape of fields that share an overarching common goal. In addition, transdisciplinary relevance is also about developing critical awareness of one's disciplinary framings of the objects of inquiry and the goals for the field and others' likely reception of them. This other way to support transdisciplinary relevance is more akin to the corresponding research communities being able to ask themselves whether the chosen insider justifications for demonstrating the value of disciplinary knowledge are effective in convincing neighboring research communities of that same value. This second strategy, therefore, requires cultivating an awareness of how SLA's object of inquiry, the goals of the field, or the value of knowledge generated, are explained and justified by insiders within SLA and whether, by comparison, these may be—for good or for bad, rightly

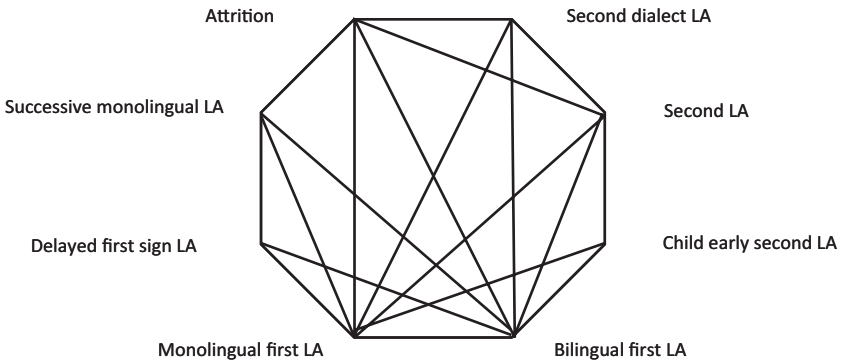


Figure 1 Types of nonpathological language acquisition (LA) and attrition in the study of language ontogeny. Each line joining two types represents present or potential intersection of research interests.

or wrongly—recognized by neighboring fields as central to the wider goal of understanding the ontogeny of the human language capacity. In the remainder of this article, I explore these two ways in which the transdisciplinary relevance of SLA can be cultivated and taken to new, unprecedented levels in the 21st century.

The Place of SLA in the Study of Language Ontogeny

The scope of SLA is well known to *Language Learning* readers: SLA investigates L2 acquisition, or how humans can learn additional languages later in life, subsequent to having acquired a language or languages from birth. The object of inquiry in SLA must thus be understood as *late learned*, that is, a type of acquisition that begins late enough to qualify as coming after the first language(s) (L1), namely at a wide variety of ages other than from birth, and *bi/multilingual*, that is, a type of acquisition that involves more than one language. But L2 acquisition is only one of many types of language acquisition, and SLA is only one of several fields devoted to the study of language ontogeny. Figure 1 shows eight different types of nonpathological, individual acquisition/loss of language. As it turns out, all eight can be said to vary along the two parameters already observed to be relevant for describing L2 acquisition: whether language learning happens from birth or later in life, and whether it involves one or more than one language.

This two-parameter variation along the timing of learning and the number of languages involved is reflected in the arrangement seen in Figure 1.

Monolingual and bilingual child language acquisition are located at the bottom of the octagon and share the definitional feature of early (from birth) learning. To the left are listed other types of acquisition that involve one language only and can be later learned, while to the right are types of acquisition that involve two or more languages under conditions of later learning. When the study of L2 acquisition is situated in this larger context, a complicated place arises for SLA, but one that is full with opportunities for cultivating transdisciplinary relevance.

A first observation to be made is that child language acquisition from birth can involve one or more than one language (see accounts in Saxton, 2010, and De Houwer, 2009, respectively). Nonetheless, it is often only monolingual L1 acquisition that appears to be taken as the default against which the study of L2 acquisition (and all other kinds of acquisition, for that matter) might be justified. This tendency is true of discussions by lay people as much as by acquisition researchers. It is possible, however, to reject the privileged juxtaposition of adult L2 acquisition with child L1 acquisition, on the grounds that they are not directly comparable because the former is bi/multilingual and the latter is monolingual in nature. Furthermore, I would argue, as have others (e.g., Singleton 2003), that L2 acquisition should be contrasted not only to monolingual L1 acquisition from birth, but also and foremost to bilingual L1 acquisition from birth. Attunement by SLA researchers to the goals of the field of bilingual L1 acquisition is desirable in the future.

A second observation can be made by moving up to the right of the octagon in Figure 1: The parameter of timing of learning seems more open to ambiguity than the parameter of number of languages involved in the learning task. Namely, children can be extremely young when an additional language enters their lives (e.g., see Pfaff, 1992, for a study of children starting their L2 at age 2 and Paradis, 2011, for a study of children starting their L2 between 4 and 7 years of age). The nature of this successive but very early learning of two languages eludes an easy definition of what should count as L1 or L2 for a given young speaker. It also makes the juxtaposition of first bilingual acquisition versus very early second language acquisition look like a continuum. This complexity may explain the terminological indeterminacy seen across relevant fields, with researchers alternating among “early sequential bilingual acquisition,” “early second language acquisition,” and “child L2 acquisition” when they describe what may be the same object of inquiry. Thus, both SLA and bilingual L1 acquisition may share (and at times compete for) disciplinary claims of relevance upon the study of multiple language acquisition with onset at very early childhood ages.

Third, yet another complication is that late-learned languages are not always L2s, but they can also be L1s (see left side of Figure 1). In fact, L1 acquisition regularly occurs later in life for a population such as deaf signers: L1 sign language is late learned for 90% of deaf children who are born to hearing parents (Ramírez, Lieberman, & Mayberry, 2012). Furthermore, any acquired language (whether learned late, early, or from birth and whether L1 or L2) can be forgotten (and relearned again) on a variety of time scales over the life span. Evidence about the loss of language (see upper left side in Figure 1) thus offers another unique window into language ontogeny. Appreciation of this perspective can illuminate bi/multilingual processes in the reverse, as shown in the burgeoning field of language attrition (Köpke, Schmid, Keijzer, & Dostert, 2007; Murtagh, 2011), which offers many reciprocal connections with SLA (Bylund, 2009). Both fields study acquisition versus loss under situations of late learning and bi/multilingualism. Evidence of language loss also sheds light on monolingual learning processes in extreme cases of abrupt attrition due to language replacement at young ages, as in the recent interest in the study of so-called successive monolingual language acquisition by international adoptees (Hyltenstam et al., 2009; Snedeker, Geren, & Shafto, 2012). (The latter situation is such a unique case of language attrition that I have included it as its own type in Figure 1.) There appear to be intriguing empirical parallelisms across types of acquisition that begin later in life, regardless of whether one or more than one languages are involved. For instance, a reported advantage in rate of learning has surfaced as a consistent finding in studies across the various acquisition types characterized by late learning: delayed L1 acquisition of sign language (Ramírez et al., 2012), successive monolingual acquisition by international adoptees (Snedeker et al., 2012), and early successive bilingual acquisition (Paradis, 2009, 2011). A faster rate of learning, of course, has also been well established in studies of SLA as an initial advantage that adolescents and adults enjoy over children (Krashen, Long, & Scarcella, 1979; Muñoz, 2006). In sum, there are important insights to be had from comparing empirical evidence from late language learning, specifically, across situations that are monolingual and bi/multilingual.

Finally, for many people, the additional language learning task that must be undertaken later in life is not exactly that of learning a new L2, but a new dialect (D2), that is, a new variety of a language they already know (shown in the upper right of Figure 1). This object of inquiry has given way to the new field of second dialect acquisition or SDA (Siegel, 2010). In studying L2 versus D2 acquisition, SLA and SDA exhibit many shared disciplinary interests. First, what counts as an “L2” vs. a “D2” can be blurry, as notions of language and dialect are

social constructions by linguists and laymen rather than linguistically bounded objective entities (Klein, 1998, was outspoken on this). Heritage language teaching in the USA constitutes a good example of this complexity. For instance, Mandarin is taught in classrooms to many heritage language students whose home exposure is not to Mandarin but to a so-called (mutually intelligible or unintelligible) Chinese dialect (Wang & Xiao, 2010); likewise, the school varieties of Spanish that are taught in classrooms to most heritage language students likely differ from the national and/or regional varieties these students experience in the home (Lacorte & Leeman, 2009). Who then among Chinese or Spanish heritage learners offers evidence for SLA and who for SDA? Further, many L2 learners may be in a context where they need to become bidialectal in their L2. Such is the case of many immigrant children who are schooled in the official or majority variety within a bidialectal society (Ender & Straßl, 2009) and of young people who may choose as their target a stigmatized variety of the L2 with high covert prestige in the peer communities they wish to affiliate with, rather than the standard variety of the majority (Schleef, Meyerhoff, & Clark, 2011). Acquiring socially meaningful L2 variation is something that SLA researchers have shown to be possible (e.g., Hansen Edwards, 2011). But becoming bidialectal in an L2 also requires learning to differentiate between two varieties of the same language, something that SDA research shows to be difficult even in an L1 (Siegel, 2010). Two additional socioeducational intersections between SDA and SLA are also striking. Both L2 and D2 learning may position learners as linguistic minorities who learn a socially more powerful language/variety spoken by the surrounding majority speech community. And the onset of both L2 and D2 learning can often coincide with the onset of formal schooling, introducing self-regulation of learning, explicit and metalinguistic awareness, formal instruction, and literacy as factors to be considered in both types of acquisition. All these shared interests bring to the fore fruitful areas for mutual disciplinary relevance, creating opportunities for transdisciplinary, bidirectional flows of knowledge between SLA and SDA that may be seized in the future.

The present discussion has offered but a glimpse of a global view of the study of language ontogeny, against which SLA can place itself transdisciplinarily. Nevertheless, the points to be made are that acquisition types vary along the two parameters of timing of learning and number of languages involved in the learning and that this two-fold variation creates fruitful areas of convergence and divergence across disciplinary interests. The common goals in the study of language ontogeny should be to clarify the nature of constraints (i.e., biological, cognitive, linguistic, environmental, social, and educational)

that are operative in developing human language, and to show when and how the relative contribution of constraints and forces may differ in different types of acquisition and their evolving contexts. Imagining SLA as a piece of this larger global view unveils opportunities for future bidirectional flow of ideas and fine attunement toward differences and similarities in the objects of inquiry and in disciplinary goals. This flow and this attunement, in turn, make it more likely that the knowledge one field generates will reach new levels of outside relevance among neighboring disciplines in the future.

The Importance of Disciplinary Framings

Having argued that SLA's transdisciplinary relevance can be greatly enhanced in the future by understanding the place of SLA in the wider landscape of fields that study language ontogeny, let me now turn to the second strategy for cultivating the ethos of transdisciplinarity in the 21st century, namely, the evaluation of chosen and available disciplinary framings. I understand framings as recurrent explanations and justifications of the value of the discipline's object of study, goals, and overall *raison d'être*, which come to be recognized, expected, and anticipated inferential models by others exposed to them; this definition is related to the uses of the concept in cognitive linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1998).

Different framings of the goals and scope of a given research program are likely to command attention from different disciplinary neighbors, thereby resulting in different loci for inside and outside value and thus different kinds of potential transdisciplinary relevance. For example, researchers studying later-learned types of acquisition involving only one language frame their contribution as distinctly valuable to the overall study of language ontogeny by arguing that evidence from late learning of language affords the opportunity to disentangle linguistic development from development in cognitive and social domains. To use an illustration from Snedeker et al. (2012), nouns have been found to be easiest to learn in child monolingual and bilingual acquisition, whereas the corresponding inventory of verbs and adjectives is initially smaller and slow-growing by comparison. Is the initial predominance of nouns in first-word inventories a reflection of some human-language specific property of this word category vis-à-vis verbs and adjectives, or an artifact of infants being unable to conceptually process relations, states, and processes until a later age? Snedeker et al. argued that evidence from later acquisition of one language by international adoptees allows for the investigation of this question, given that in such evidence linguistic development is independent from cognitive

maturation. The question, they argued, is by comparison essentially unanswerable on the basis of traditional child L1 evidence. The disentangling argument has had broad applicability as a positive framing that adds value to the study of late learning of various kinds, including the value of studying delayed first sign language acquisition (Ramírez et al., 2012) and adult literacy (see Carreiras et al.'s 2009 interesting framing of the value of recruiting former Colombian guerrilla members who become literate after their 20s and comparing them to age-matched adult illiterates as well as early literates).

It begs pondering why the same positive framing has been unavailable in SLA, even when studying young L2 acquirers—as Paradis (2009) has also noted—whose timing of learning is similar to that of international adoptees and delayed first sign language acquisition. In fact, SLA researchers more often than not choose instead a negative framing in which cognitive and social maturity are portrayed as confounds that on the one hand complicate the study of SLA and on the other hand hinder any linguistic development that may happen later in life. Thus, for example, SLA models and theories abound that link adults' neural and physiological maturity to a posited irreparable atrophy of the human capability for new language learning, that identify linguistic maturity of the already acquired language as a road block to learning the L2, and that connect cognitive maturity to an overreliance on explicit cognition that is deemed inefficient for the task of language learning. There are also abundant SLA theoretical accounts volunteering social maturity as the culprit for affective, motivational, and attitudinal forces that negatively impact on adult learners' willingness or ability to learn from the input and from others.

Available and chosen (positive and negative) disciplinary framings can be evaluated so as to achieve self-awareness of how SLA's object of inquiry, the goals of the field, or the value of knowledge generated are explained and justified by insiders within SLA and whether, by comparison, each framing may be—for good or for bad, rightly or wrongly—read by neighboring fields as making SLA knowledge central to the wider goal of understanding the ontogeny of the human language capacity. If so, SLA's transdisciplinary relevance in the 21st century would be greatly aided by asking: What is the relative outside appeal or exportability of knowledge that obtains from available framings of the goals, scope, and overall *raison d'être* of a given research program? Further, if framings of the value of disciplinary knowledge are all-important for supporting and cultivating transdisciplinarity and outside relevance, it follows that the research collective of a field may from time to time agree that a rather large reframing of some disciplinary issue may be desirable.

My final argument in this article is that a reframing of SLA is needed, one that helps the field embrace the late-learned, bi/multilingual nature of L2 acquisition. For 40 years now, SLA has engaged in the pursuit of explaining the vexing question of how different L2 adult acquisition is by comparison to the acquisition of an L1 by monolingual children. This is a narrow approach to defining the purview and goals for the field. It contents itself with asking a self-directed question: What is L2 acquisition? It also limits itself to a comparative dialogue between two fields, one investigating the monolingual acquisition of an L1 in the first years of life and the other investigating the bi/multilingual acquisition of a new language later in life. In this dialogue, SLA runs the constant danger of accepting a subordinating role that hampers any hopes for transdisciplinary relevance. The narrow approach also gives short shrift to other fields that investigate other equally relevant types of acquisition exhibiting important connections with L2 acquisition in the focus on late learning, bi/multilingual learning, or both. In sum, the narrow view fails to connect with an all-encompassing vision of the study of human language ontogeny to which SLA contributes.

I believe it is the ability for SLA researchers to invest in future positive reframings of the late-learned, bi/multilingual nature of L2 acquisition that will most radically impact on the field's continued and growing transdisciplinary relevance in the 21st century. Moreover, I predict it will take a bi/multilingual turn in SLA, one of similar depth and magnitude as the earlier social turn SLA experienced (Block, 2003), for these reframings to flourish. The argument comes full circle back to Klein (1998) and engages with his charge 15 years ago against the target deviation perspective in SLA.

Three Reframings of L2 Acquisition

Indeed, the disciplinary reorientation I am calling for has several illustrious precedents within SLA. That some kind of reconsideration of disciplinary goals is needed has been suggested in at least three SLA guises: Bley-Vroman's (1983) comparative fallacy, Cook's (1992 and *passim*) multicompetence, and Klein's (1998) target deviation perspective. (Remarkably, all three articles were published in *Language Learning*.) However, these powerful calls, based on markedly different arguments by seminal scholars, have left most of the field's framings and practices untouched.

Bley-Vroman (1983) brought attention to the fact that "work on the linguistic description of learners' languages can be seriously hindered or sidetracked by a concern with the target language" (p. 2). However, he did not offer a

concrete solution except for recommending that SLA researchers analyze learner language in its own right and concentrate “on the construction of linguistic descriptions of learners’ languages which can illuminate their specific properties and their own logic” (p. 16). Furthermore, the criticism of the comparative fallacy is of a limited scope; it is just (although importantly enough) about the need to find new ways of analyzing L2 evidence that are not enslaved and distorted by a constant subordinating comparison to the competence assumed of monolingual native speakers.

Klein’s (1998) criticism was more ambitious in that he identified negative framings explicitly as part of the problem, including the fallacy of believing there is “real” language and that learner language is a deficient version of it. He summoned SLA researchers not to produce so much knowledge about “where and why our species-specific capacity to learn and to process languages does not work under particular circumstances” (p. 537) and instead to use L2 evidence as revealing of the utmost principles that can be taken to govern the human capacity for language. Klein also opened up the following positive framing of SLA’s object of study. Just as in biology the study of elementary forms of life like bacteria and molluscs are of equal importance as the study of advanced forms of life, he reasoned, so should SLA researchers be able to see that learner varieties—although perhaps not enjoying the same social and normative reputation as early-acquired languages—reflect the normal manifestation of human language, stripped from the additional but not essential adornments of other language varieties. Learner varieties, Klein argued, are in fact important because, like elementary forms of life in biology, they “do not show everything possible in the evolution of living organisms, but they are more transparent in their structural properties and processes” (p. 543). This comparison of L2 learner language with elementary forms of life—the point being that both are uniquely informative about the phenomena in need of scientific explanation—is helpful in suggesting positive framings that can undo existing deficit framings.

Cook’s (1992, 2008) proposal offered an even more encompassing reframing that engages with not only the nature of the object of inquiry but also the goals of the field, thus calling for a reconceptualization of the very *raison d’être* for SLA. In terms of SLA’s object of study, he argued that monolinguals and bilinguals are different, and hence the nature of the linguistic competence they possess is qualitatively different. This led Cook to coin a distinct term for a needed new construct: multicompetence. In terms of disciplinary goals, he contended SLA should pursue knowledge about what is unique in learning a new language later in life. This new goal Cook framed as superior to the present disciplinary goal of seeking knowledge that explains the differences and

similarities between nonnative and native speaker, an approach that, he argued, asks why nonnative speakers are what they cannot be and thus is doomed to focus on deficiencies in addition to being tautologically circular.

A Bi/multilingual Turn for SLA

With such distinguished SLA advocates, and with such powerful and increasingly comprehensively articulated arguments, why has SLA had such difficulty breaking away from the straightjacket of the comparative fallacy, the target deviation perspective, and the monolingual native speaker bias? As in any field, time may be needed for changes in SLA to take effect. One might also wonder if Cook's (1992) strategic move to cast a light of uniqueness on nonnative speakers (e.g., as multicompetent L2 users), despite the obvious benefit of redressing the deficit portrayal of nonnativeness, might not entail some counterproductive dangers of disciplinary isolationism. Framings that capitalize on disciplinary uniqueness rather than on transdisciplinarity inspired by common goals, in other words, may be less likely to connect with outside fields that also study language ontogeny. Perhaps a more profound and complete reframing for SLA in the 21st century is needed, one that targets a deeper renewal of disciplinary goals and harnesses the unique benefits of studying bi/multilingualism and late learning, all while making transdisciplinary connections of relevance. I have come to think of this encompassing reframing as a bi/multilingual turn in SLA (Ortega, 2010, in press).

The vantage point that is earned by placing SLA in the wider landscape of fields which share the overarching common goal of studying language ontogeny (cf. Figure 1) affords the certainty that SLA is not alone in investigating the late learning of languages or the learning of more than one language. It also makes it possible to insist that, because "the human mind is as prepared to acquire two L1s as it is to acquire one" (Werker & Byers-Heinlein, 2008, p. 144), bi/multilingualism is the quintessential phenomenon that all disciplines studying the ontogeny of language should seek to explain. Cook (e.g., 2002, 2003) himself has also touched on this available framing of disciplinary goals:

Any theory about the acquisition of languages by ordinary human beings has to account for the fact that many of them acquire two languages simultaneously from the beginning, and that many others acquire one or more other language consecutively at a later time. (Cook, 2002, p. 24)

Under this view, it would behoove all fields that study types of acquisition involving more than one language to empirically and exhaustively investigate

the working hypothesis that the human language faculty is potentially by default bi/multilingual. SLA researchers should add the stipulation that the possibility of bi/multilingualism remains true all along the life span, from birth and across all ages, and thus is also true of late learned bilingualism. In this light, L2 acquisition becomes as worthy of study as any other type of acquisition—neither more unique nor less interesting or less pure—and full with opportunities for reciprocal flows of knowledge and transdisciplinarity. Explaining how late bilingualism is possible and even normal, not impossible or exceptional, would be part of this overarching research program.

In forging a disciplinary alliance with the study of bi/multilingual acquisition in all its manifestations, other new positive framings and greater transdisciplinary relevance would ensue for SLA in the future. Harnessing and embracing the study of L2 acquisition as the study of late bi/multilingualism would help SLA research communities to generate knowledge that contributes to overarching research goals in the study of language ontogeny. But SLA researchers will first need to convince themselves of the value of generating knowledge about the pathways to developing late bilingualism before they are able to sway others.

Conclusion

I began my review of recent trends in SLA with optimism, and I noted that at age 40 the field looks to have expanded and be healthy in at least four ways. Studies of SLA are epistemologically more theoretically diverse and interdisciplinary than ever; within this diversity has appeared a thriving line of empirical activity into usage-based views of language and acquisition; unprecedented sophistication in research methods has been reached; and the research community is gradually embracing the task of investigating L2 development in a complex constellation of diverse contexts inhabited by distinct populations of learners, many of whom resort to formal instruction for much-needed support to achieve their learning goals. A field engaged in such vigorous disciplinary progress must also aspire to ever higher levels of transdisciplinary relevance. Fifteen years ago, Klein (1998) identified the target deviation perspective as the main culprit for SLA's lack of disciplinary impact on the other language sciences that he perceived at the time. While great strides have been made since then, I agree with Klein (as many others outside SLA do too, e.g., May, 2011) that a deficit approach to studying late bilingualism is a liability that limits the field's full potential for generating knowledge that is internally valid as well as valued and valuable beyond its disciplinary bounds (Ortega, 2010).

SLA researchers have been very good at asking what the other language sciences can do for SLA. As the field enters the 21st century, it is time now to ask what SLA can do for the other language sciences. Knowledge about the nature of bi/multilingual and late learning of languages has maximal potential for shaping answers to fundamental questions that are of central interest to the overarching study of language ontogeny. Both disciplinary progress and transdisciplinary relevance will continue to rise in SLA in the future. But progress and relevance will be maximal if, instead of always (only) asking how adult L2 acquisition is different from monolingual child L1 acquisition, and instead of invoking negative framings surrounding the daunting complexity of factors that allegedly explain the lack of success in L2 acquisition, SLA invests in a range of broader-looking, more positive framings of disciplinary goals for the field in the 21st century. It is not the accomplishments over SLA's disciplinary history, as impressive as they are, but the rethinking of goals for the field, with awareness of how different framings of those goals impact on outside research communities, that will be helpful in fulfilling SLA's contributions in the 21st century to the study of language ontogeny and the support of language education across contexts. If such a disciplinary investment is made and a bi/multilingual turn is embraced, I predict the returns will be worthwhile.

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