Book Reviews

Online Communication in a Second Language: Social Interaction, Language Use and Learning Japanese

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The reviewed book aims at examining the processes of undirected language use in computer-mediated communication (CMC) settings. Rather than focusing on CMC interactions in tasks designed, monitored and assessed by teachers and integrated with the regular language learning curriculum, Pasfield-Neofitou decided to investigate unrestricted, unguided, free communication between users of the same language, Japanese, in this case. The researcher's purpose was to observe and analyse "natural" communication, one that is not triggered or stimulated in any way by the teacher, the coursebook or the classroom assignment. It was also interesting to see how natural CMC interaction evolves and in what social settings.

Another interesting issue is how learners autonomously select CMC modes, given a great variety of dimensions CMC actually encompasses (e.g., synchronous vs. asynchronous, text vs. audio vs. video), and whether there is any correlation between the implementation of particular CMC environments and the languages that are used within these. As the author herself writes in

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the introduction, "the volume serves to challenge traditional categorizations of 'synchronous' and 'asynchronous' CMC mediums, assumptions about the 'placelessness' of online domains, and previous characterizations of online conversations as 'haphazard' and 'unstructured'" (p. 1)

On top of all that, the process of learning Japanese is examined, in order to see how learners were using CMC in their L2 and how this communication provided opportunities for language acquisition. This area is particularly worth exploring due to the considerable differences between English and Japanese, mainly in terms of script, and the ways of handling the issue of script shift in different ways in a computer format.

The particular research questions posed by Pasfield-Neofitou were as follows:

1. How do learners establish and maintain relationships in which they use a second language online?
2. What is the nature of learners' CMC and in what combinations are they using CMC in their second language?
3. How does the use of CMC in conjunction with other resources provide opportunities for second language acquisition?

It is the aim of the present review to assess whether and to what extent the author has actually managed to accomplish the formidable task she set herself, in particular, whether the book offers "an alternate, sophisticated view of CMC interaction which highlights identity, the skilful management of communication, and user agency in interaction with technology" (p. 1), as claimed in the introduction. This was to be accomplished by researching a body of CMC data collected from 12 students studying Japanese at an Australian university and their 18 Japanese contacts who volunteered to communicate via different CMC modes (email, Skype, Mixi blogs/videos/comments/profiles, Facebook messages/wall/albums/apps/profiles, MySpace comments/profiles, World of Warcraft profiles, MSN convesations, phone emails, Ameba blogs/profiles or Mind map data). In total, 777 CMC data files were compiled into a corpus of 2,460 naturally occurring instances of communication collected over the period of three years.

The book is composed of six chapters (with the first being entitled "Introduction" and the last one "Conclusion"), a list of references and an index of names. The key chapters reporting upon different aspects of the study are Chapters 2-5: "Learner backgrounds and online L2 networks," "Social settings of situated CMC use," "Features of CMC use" and "Use of contextual resources and SLA opportunities."

The first chapter, "Introduction," in fact contains not only a statement of aims and purposes of the researcher that are to be realized throughout the book

but also contains the whole theoretical background to the field the author decided to explore. Thus, first of all, it contains a brief literature review reporting upon the findings of previous studies in such areas as the language of CMC (learner output produced in spoken vs. written, synchronous vs. asynchronous modes) and characteristic features of digital writing such as multiple punctuation, eccentric spelling, capitalisation, emoticons, rebus writing or nonlinguistic symbols. In particular, the researcher is trying to draw a distinction between spoken versus written and synchronous versus asynchronous communication, challenging the traditional distinctions of synchronicity by showing, for instance, how contemporary CMC applications blur the line by providing versatile forms of online presence (e.g., synchronous instant messengers allowing sending "offline" messages or hybrid tools like Google Wave and Facebook allowing multiple modes of online communication). The review of literature on the language of CMC continues in the areas of CMC genre selection, the way CMC language output is conceptualized and the extent to which the personalized language output allows one to create a personal internet (rather than the global, everyone's, Internet). Pasfield-Neofitou claims, after Miller and Slater (2000), that L2 language use in CMC settings allows one to construct a personal online domain, a property of the learner, which is evolving given changing patterns in language use or technology preference. This interesting concept is in close parallel to the notion of interlanguage (see, for instance, Selinker, 1972), which emphasizes learner ownership and active authorship of L2 language use. L1 perspectives in terms of development of language proficiency in English and in Japanese are also reviewed, with special attention devoted to the notion of identity: How previous studies report upon the performance/construction of online identity in the individual and group dimensions, instructed CMC L2 use as well as the effect of CMC use on intercultural competence development.

A separate part of the introductory chapter is a detailed presentation of the theoretical framework that Pasfield-Neofitou adopted for her study, namely, the social realist approach (see, for instance, Sealey & Carter, 2004). Social realism makes use of a broad definition of applied linguistics which encompasses not only the teaching and learning of additional languages but also aspects of language in use, thus resulting in an overlap of linguistics and sociolinguistics. In this framework, according to Belz (2002), the empirical world is viewed as highly complex and multifaceted, where social action is shaped by the interplay of macro (structure) and micro (agency) phenomena, which, in methodological terms, results in the view of the social world as stratified, comprising structure, agency, and culture, with language as a cultural emergent property (Sealey & Carter, 2004). In particular, Pasfield-Neofitou presents the stratified social world model, describing the four social domains of situated activity,

psycho-biography, social settings and contextual resources as influences constantly shaping language users' lives, with a complicated network of interrelations between them. The selection of domains as areas for analysis is the backbone of the book, reflected in the titles of the successive chapters.

The final part of the introduction contains a discussion of the methodological framework, the research procedure, sampling, data collection and analysis techniques. In particular, the research relies on ethnographic approaches to data collection, including interviews, qualitative surveys, focus groups, as well as such quantitative measures as calculations of post lengths. Data collected from 12 students of Japanese studying at an Australian university and their 18 volunteer Japanese contacts amounted to 777 CMC data files of different types resulting in 2,460 naturally occurring instances of communication. The researcher had access to archived text-based communication of the participants, which, however, they were allowed to censor if they did not wish the researcher to view material of sensitive or personal nature.

The remaining part of the introduction retells the data analysis framework which Sarah Pasfield-Neofitou uses to draw conclusions about language use and CMC patterns: comparative analysis of interviews and questionnaires, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis backed up by NVivo software and computer-mediated discourse analysis.

The decision to cover all the three crucial areas in a single introductory chapter, namely, the statement of aims for the book, literature review and presentation of research methodology does not seem to be the most fortunate. As a result, some areas of L2 CMC do not get sufficient coverage, especially the effect of instructed CMC on L2 acquisition. Even though this is beyond the major focus of the book, the body of literature is so immense that it could get a slightly more systematic coverage in the chapter. Similarly, given great attention devoted to the social aspects of language development in CMC use, the review of L2 acquisition in telecollaborative CMC settings seems inadequate as well, with only few works of O'Dowd and Belz acknowledged. Finally, greater acknowledgement of previous studies into CMC in tandem settings would have shed better light on how language acquisition patterns observed for Japanese in the work under review refer to the already established body of knowledge.

Chapter 2, entitled "Learner Backgrounds and Online L2 Networks," is an extended description of the participants of this longitudinal study, outlining their self- or psychobiographies with respect to language learning, internet use, and relationships with their Japanese-speaking networks. The accounts are given based on the descriptive coding of participants' attributes from their interview comments and the auto-coding of Japanese email interview responses. Obviously, much greater emphasis is laid on the Australian participants than

their Japanese counterparts, and the former's sociocultural backgrounds are thoroughly covered in the chapter. Pasfield-Neofitou first produces a summary of the learners' linguistic backgrounds indicating languages, trips to Japan, years of Japanese study and the like; then, a similar summary is made of their technological backgrounds (type of computer/operating system, total daily computer use, number of computers used, preferred online applications). In a way, the author produces an account similar to the language passport of the *European Language Portfolio* in the two areas of language use and computer use. A similar summary is made of Japanese contacts, though to a less detailed extent.

What follows is a descriptive account of the learners' biographies, with rich data on their learning context, professional situation, proficiency in Japanese, preferred learning habits, contacts with the Japanese language and culture and the like. Each description is a vivid and in-depth account of one's psychobiography, which makes the next three chapters a truly interesting read. Moreover, thanks to establishing the networks and relationships of CMC use and providing clear data on the nature of the relationships between Australian participants and their Japanese partners (who are, for instance, a former tutor, a friend from a bar, a MySpace friend, a boyfriend or a museum boss), one can fully see and understand the complex nature of foreign language interaction occurring in CMC settings.

The description of participants shows at the same time both stronger and weaker sides of the study. On the one hand, the 12 Australian participants exhibit an immense range of learner profiles as far as age is concerned (ranging from 18 to 28 years of age), additional languages (ranging from 2 to as many as 6), level of proficiency in Japanese (from beginner levels of 1-2 to very advanced levels of 11-12), length of study of Japanese (1-17 years) and length of stay in Japan (from none to as many as 13 months in total). Collecting a rich body of data from participants across such a wide spectrum of sociodemographic and learning variables enabled the researcher to come up with examples of interactions with their corresponding linguistic and technological contexts. On the other hand, the body of data is quite naturally skewed towards the more proficient participants. For instance, out of 777 data samples as many as 294 (more than 37%) were produced by one particularly prolific and proficient participant, while 2 participants out of 12 account for almost 60% of the total number of data samples. Some participants contributed very little to the corpus: Hyacinth, 7 samples (6 blog entries and 1 blog profile); and Noah only 4 (1 blog post, 1 comment, 2 profiles). As a result, it is difficult to make generalisations about the whole group as such; rather, individual cases need to be interpreted in relation to their sociocultural settings.

Chapter 3, "Social Settings of Situated CMC Use," is the first out of the three chapters recounting the results of the empirical work conducted by Sarah Pasfield-Neofitou in her study. More specifically, the author identifies here the ways in which the participants' experiences of sociocultural nature shape CMC use in a variety of computer environments. The three focal issues of management of identity, maintenance of interest, and nonuse/lapsing/lurking are discussed in great detail, with example incidents proving particular points. It turned out that there exist language- or nationality-specific online domains, specific places on the Internet which are characteristic for particular linguistic/cultural communities. The participants in the study, in their substantial part, were shown to actually shape these Japanese-language domains to personalise them. An important part of this chapter is also an attempt at investigating the effect that engagement in CMC interaction with Japanese contacts had on the lives of the Australian participants in a somewhat broader communicative context. Data on, for instance, the increase in the number of Facebook contacts, the ratio of actual "active contacts" to "all contacts" and the number of Japanese-language environments used for everyday purposes, the characteristics of code-switching and medium-switching, all seem to demonstrate that involvement in CMC interaction does exert an effect on the way that learners use computers for work, study and leisure purposes. It is, thus, an important finding of Pasfield-Neofitou's study that the L1-L2 computer use is bi-directional: What we do in digital environments in L2 shapes the way we use computers and the Internet in L1.

Chapter 4, "Features of CMC Use," is presumably the most significant part of the book reporting upon research in second language acquisition. This chapter examines the features of participants' CMC use, focusing on the way in which learners use CMC in their L2, for what purposes and in what combinations. The situated CMC activity is analysed in terms of conversational organisation, language choice, orthography and code-switching and types of language use. As demonstrated with qualitative data, participants' patterns of turn-taking are related to their language choice in terms of orthography and code-switching. Since, as Pasfield-Neofitou proved in Chapter 3, specific online domains are language/culture-specific, language choice analysed in Chapter 4 shows how participants identified particular settings as either English or Japanese in nature. Their language choice was also influenced by interpersonal relationships, interlocutor's status and learner's motivations. Quite interestingly, the analysis in the chapter touches upon the question of whether text-based communication is "talking" or "writing," and challenges the notion of synchronicity of online communication. Participants proved to distinguish between the two modes in terms of degree of synchronicity, based

on use rather than solely on medium choice, and they did not label particular media (such as MSN, MySpace or email) as clearly synchronous or asynchronous. Thus, Sealey and Carter's (2004) view of CMC as emergent from speaking, writing, technology and human behaviour is reinforced through the data from two case studies thoroughly described in the chapter.

Chapter 5, "Use of Contextual Resources and SLA Opportunities," is the last chapter reporting upon empirical work. It strives to examine how participation in online communication provides opportunities for language acquisition. The author draws on analytical coding of the interaction and interview data, reflecting upon such aspects as gaining an audience, facing interactional challenges, patterns of dictionary use and the use of other supplementary resources (paper-based printed resources, non-computer-based digital resources such as Nintendo DS hand-held game system, software-based and Internet-based digital resources). The use of multiple resources proved to be common, with online dictionaries being a popular resource. However, the use of resources appeared to be influenced by participants' psycho-biographies, the social contexts in which communication with their Japanese partners was taking place, as well as the very nature of the situated activity. A major part of Chapter 5, though, is a discussion of how situated CMC activity planned in the study makes affordances for discourse repair, peer editing and feedback giving. Participants were found to use the linguistic capital of their native-speaker partners to obtain feedback, with some, more proficient ones, engaging in peer editing. Repair was rather infrequent and self-correction was more prevalent due to the informal nature of conversations; however, in some cases delayed repair was undertaken even after change of the topic, which testifies to the awareness of learners and their willingness to improve.

The final part of the book draws a conclusion concerning the findings presented in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. The research questions posed in the introduction are revisited and the most salient points are extracted from analysis.

To sum up, the book by Sarah E. Pasfield-Neofitou is a highly interesting and comprehensive monograph on the topic of social interaction in CMC settings, based on the particular example of learning Japanese by Australian students. The author makes a number of very important claims about participating in online domains and virtual communities, entering CMC networks and maintaining relationships, code-switching and turn-taking, as well as acquisition opportunities in CMC. The book attempts to cover such a vast area that it would be impossible to exhaust the topic completely. In fact, it should be treated as an invitation to undertake further research, in more controlled settings, with more systematic and principled sampling, not only in order to verify the claims made by Pasfield-Neofitou, but also, perhaps even more importantly,

to see to what extent the observations about the nature of learning Japanese by Australian speakers can be generalisable to foreign language acquisition as such.

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Multiple perspectives on the self in SLA

The collection of papers *Multiple perspectives on the self in SLA*, edited by Sarah Mercer and Marion Williams, is devoted to the multiplicity of ways in which the self can be viewed and the contribution which these different conceptualizations can make to the process of second language acquisition (SLA). The book has been divided into twelve chapters, the first of which constitutes an introduction and includes explanations concerning the theme, purpose, audience, and organization of the volume.

The first perspective is provided by Nicole Mills in Chapter Two, titled "Self-efficacy in second language acquisition." Having situated the construct within the framework of social cognitive theory (e.g., Bandura, 1997), she indicates its impact on academic achievement and goes on to contrast it with three other self-related constructs, that is linguistic self-confidence, self-concept and self-regulation. She then provides a brief overview of studies that have demonstrated a relationship between self-efficacy and attainment in second language learning, both in general and with respect to reading and listening, language anxiety, language learning strategy use and self-regulation. Mills also emphasizes the

fact that empirical investigations into self-efficacy should be conducted with the help of instruments that are specific in relating self-efficacy to a particular area and tasks that students are expected to perform. The chapter closes with guidelines on how self-efficacy can be enhanced with regard to four main sources of information on the basis of which such beliefs are constructed, that is mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasions and affective indicators (Bandura, 1997).

In Chapter Three, Sinthujaa Sampasivam and Richard Clément set their sights on the concept of second language confidence (2LC), understood, after Clément (1980), as "a lack of anxiety when communicating in the second language (L2) coupled with positive ratings of self-proficiency" (p. 23). First, they provide an overview of the development of the construct and resolve definitional issues, emphasizing the composite nature of 2LC, its dependence on context and relationship with anxiety. Then they offer a taxonomical framework for organizing different learning situations which rests on a distinction between learning inside and outside the classroom, the former of which includes foreign language settings and computer-mediated communication, while the latter involves long- and short-term stays abroad. The innovative character of the chapter, however, lies in the fact that different types of contexts in L2 learning are redefined in terms of Harwood's (2010) contact space theory, which discusses different types of intergroup contact with regard to two dimensions, that is *involvement of self* (i.e., involvement and participation in interaction), and *richness of self-outgroup experience* (i.e., multiplicity of channels and senses as well as the immediacy of feedback). They propose an integrated framework in which L2C is affected by richness of contact, mediated by frequency and proficiency, as well as self-involvement, hinging upon richness and perceived importance, and moderated by the quality of the available contacts.

In Chapter Four, Fernando D. Rubio considers the role of self-esteem and self-concept, constructs that, in his view, have to a large extent remained on the sidelines of research into the role of affective factors in SLA. One major contribution of the paper is that it successfully tackles the difficulties involved in defining the two overlapping concepts, without recourse to the vague distinction between cognition and affect. Accordingly, self-esteem is seen as "a process of evaluation and the emergent evaluation," and self-concept is understood as "the perceived entity that is evaluated" (p. 42). Rubio then goes on to discuss theoretical perspectives on the two constructs in the field of educational and social psychology, placing emphasis on the contributions of psychodynamic, sociocultural, behavioral, humanistic, cognitive and phenomenological approaches, and to stress the dynamic character of self-esteem and self-concept, accounted for in terms of the findings of research in neuroscience. This is followed by an overview of studies that have investigated the constructs in SLA,

the ways in which they can be explored and implications for classroom instruction. This last part is particularly insightful as it considers ways in which positive self-esteem and self-concept can be fostered, taking as a point of reference the model proposed by Reasoner (1992), which aims to simultaneously foster learning and personal growth. Rubio demonstrates what can be done to attain this goal in the classroom with respect to the five dimensions of the model, namely security, identity, belonging, purpose and competence.

In the next chapter, Bonny Norton discusses the contribution of poststructuralist theory to the study of identity in SLA, both inside the classroom and outside. She argues that this theory allows to define identity as "multiple, changing, and a site for struggle, frequently negotiated in the context of inequitable relations of power" and that "identity signals the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (pp. 60-61). She provides an overview of the main arguments why such a perspective is of relevance to SLA as well as highlights ways in which recent work in this area has been informed by poststructuralist theories of language, postulating that language is a tool for creating meaning and shaping power relationships; poststructuralist theories of subjectivity, which emphasize that a person can be placed in different positions within social networks, with these positions being constantly negotiated through language; and poststructuralist theories of positioning, which stress the role of context in shaping identities accorded by social structures. She illustrates such claims by discussing three individuals, one of whom attempts to construct her identity outside and the other two inside the classroom, showing that learners can opt for more beneficial identity positions, that text meaning is subject to negotiation, and how the concept of investment (Norton, 2000) may explain why learners will or will not be committed to classroom practices. Norton argues that adopting the poststructuralist stance can enhance instruction on condition that teachers, administrators and policy makers ensure that multiple learner identities are recognized and that classroom practices are negotiated to trigger greater investment.

The discussion of the self in terms of identity is continued in Chapter Six by Chantel Hemmi, who applies this concept to bilingual individuals and reports the results of a small-scale study involving six cases of Japanese women learning English. She discusses the main tenets of postmodernist and sociocultural views on identity, stressing, among other things, that identity is temporal, context-dependent and socially-constructed, and highlights the role of power relationships in different communities of practice. Subsequently, she focuses upon the existence of competing identities in bilinguals, listing, after Pavlenko (2006), some negative emotions that they can experience and the differences in the perceptions of

the world, ways of thinking as well as verbal and nonverbal behaviors when switching between languages. The study aimed to explore the ways in which the six participants learnt English, how they viewed their sense of belonging in their society and how they constructed their identities in first and second languages. The data obtained through a questionnaire and in-depth interviews constitute a fascinating read, showing that most of the women are indeed caught between different identities, but also that they are able to see more benefits than drawbacks of this situation. This being said, one has to wonder whether some of the conclusions do not go too far given the fact that they are based on a one-off interview and that an individual's ability to reflect on such issues in such circumstances is at best limited. Can we really take seriously, for example, the comment from one of the women that there are four different people within her: "I think there are three . . . No, I think four" (p. 86), when no further evidence is provided.

In Chapter Seven, Florentina Taylor directs our attention to the multiplicity of selves that individuals can manifest in different social interactions. She thus emphasizes the relative nature of the self, building her discussion around the concept of *relational context*, seen as "a given social situation where the individual interacts with other persons in a particular social capacity, responding to particular social expectations" (p. 92). She makes a distinction between the *private self*, or what a person really thinks about himself or herself, and the *public self*, intended for encounters with others, which can in itself be multiple. She then goes on to outline three approaches to the study of the relational nature of the self in SLA: synchronic, diachronic and an integration of these two. The first is related to the gap between how individuals view themselves and the ways they would like to be perceived, and the different images they would like to project, with the possibility that such *presentation sets* may become internalized and become part of the self-concept. The second is connected with the changes in individuals' selves in time and embodied in the theory of possible selves and self-discrepancy theory, which stress the need to reduce the gap between the actual self and the ideal and ought-to self, and have provided a basis for L2 motivational self-system (Dörnyei, 2005). The third places a premium on the role of multiple selves both at a specific point in time and over time, and is manifested in research on negotiated identities of immigrants. Taylor concludes that an important lesson that comes from the relational view is that language learners should be recognized for who they really are, together with all their imperfections, and supported in their transition to who they would like to be with respect to a particular foreign language.

The issue of possible and future selves is also the theme of Chapter Eight by Stephen Ryan and Kay Irie, who emphasize the role of imagination and stories individuals create about themselves, as both of these greatly contribute to the

construction of self-concept. They single out the vital role in this process of past experiences and attributions of successes and failures, readiness to reduce the distance between the actual self and the ideal and ought-to self, and the need for agency in pursuing possible selves. This is followed by the description of the ways in which imagining can be fostered, such as identification of proximal and distal goals as well as problem-solving strategies needed to attain them, focus not only on the expected outcome but also the process required to arrive at it, need to distinguish between fantasy and expectation, and contribution of third- rather than first-person perspectives. Then, the authors demonstrate how the concept of imagination is considered in the SLA literature, concentrating primarily on the notion of imagined communities, L2 motivational self-system and self-determination theory, and highlight the methodological challenges involved in the investigation of imagined selves, singling out the contribution of Q methodology and narrative inquiry in this respect. The paper closes with pedagogical guidelines, which include fostering internal explanations of outcomes, ensuring that imagined selves are not too removed from the current self-concept, encouraging the process of imagining, as evident, for example, in Dörnyei and Kubanyiova's (2014) *possible selves program*, and enhancing third-person perspectives.

In Chapter Nine, Ema Ushioda adopts a motivational perspective on the self, stressing in particular the developmental nature of motives to learn second languages and the intensity of engagement in this process. As she puts it, her aim is to "explore the processes whereby language learning motivation becomes (or does not become) an integral part of the self, and how such processes of integration and internalization relate to the interactions between the self and the surrounding social context" (p. 128). She illustrates how motivation can change over time as a function of both forward-looking and historical and experiential dimensions, exerting positive and negative influences in this respect and being internalized to varying degrees within a specific learner's self. She then goes on to consider internal (e.g., self-related cognitions, attitudes, individual characteristics) and external (e.g., significant others, learning environment, educational context) factors, as well as presenting theoretical positions seeking to explain the relationships between them. The focus is then shifted to two theoretical frameworks that seek to elucidate the distinction between more and less internalized forms of motivation, that is self-determination theory and L2 motivational self-system, and metacognition, thanks to which the learning process can be successfully self-regulated. Thus, opportunities should be created for learners to engage in problem-solving interactions in which their thoughts can be articulated and modified, while future research should focus on a fine-grained analysis of interfaces between motivational and metacognitive processes in interactions concerning specific cognitive and linguistic issues.

In Chapter Ten, Georg Northoff tackles the self from a neurophilosophical perspective, seeking to explain how this construct is represented in the brain. First, he considers the definitions of the self from the point of view of philosophy, distinguishing between the *mental self*, viewed as distinct from the physical substance of the body, the *empirical self*, which stresses the role of the neuronal activity in the brain, the *phenomenal self*, equated with an individual's consciousness and experience, and the *minimal self*, referring to a particular point in time, an experience that a person may not be aware of or able to reflect upon. He also deals with the complex issue of investigating the self, stressing the need for the use of objective and quantifiable measures that can be examined from a third-person perspective and focusing on the *self-reference effect* (SRE), or events that are related to one's own self. The importance of SRE had been confirmed in studies that have relied upon functional magnetic resonance imaging and provided evidence for the role in the neural processing of the self of both domain specific and nondomain specific regions of the brain. Northoff also delineates future directions for the study of the self from a neurolinguistic perspective, arguing at the same time that "a high degree of personal relevance and importance, for example, self-reference of the new language, may ease and facilitate subsequent learning and acquisition" (p. 157). While considerations of this kind are enlightening, it is not entirely clear how they can enhance the understanding of the self from an educational standpoint, all the more so that the author shies away from providing concrete pedagogical implications.

In Chapter Eleven, Sarah Mercer looks at the self from the perspective of complex systems theories, attempting to combine different theoretical stances and give justice to the intricate, situated and dynamic nature of this concept. She first draws our attention to the integrative perspectives on the self, both within the field of psychology (e.g., Mischel & Morf, 2003) and SLA (e.g., van Lier, 2004). Subsequently, she demonstrates how the self manifests the key features of complex dynamic systems, such as the existence of multiple interrelated components, the fact that it is in a constant state of flux, with changes in some of components triggering changes in others, or the quality of emergence, as an individuals' self-efficacy or self-esteem are an outcome of an interplay of variables. As a result, the self "can be thought of as a coherently organized dynamic system encompassing all the beliefs, cognitions, emotions, motives and processes related to and concerning self. This implies the self can be understood as an ongoing process that is never completed, but is continually in a state of development and self-organizing emergence" (p. 163). Mercer also reports the results of a study in which the dynamic nature of the selves of four female tertiary-level students was investigated at the macro-scale, through autobiographic accounts, and concurrently, through three in-depth interviews, as well as at the

micro-scale, through the application of speaking tasks and subsequent stimulated recall sessions. She offers evidence for the dynamic nature of self beliefs about L2 learning and the fluctuations in the participants' self-confidence during the performance of the speaking tasks, which were ascribed to a variety of factors (e.g., the interlocutor, task type, knowledge of vocabulary). She also makes recommendations for the methodology of future research on the self (e.g., the adoption of a holistic perspective and qualitative methods) and offers guidelines for classroom practice (e.g., paying attention to the choice of conversational partners or selecting engaging topics).

Finally, in Chapter Twelve, the editors make an attempt to bring together some of the themes that have emerged in the different papers, dividing their reflections into five sections, devoted to definitional issues, the role of contextual and temporal factors, methodological considerations and pedagogical implications. They argue, among others, that is it necessary to focus on the interconnectedness of the different facets of the self, acknowledge ways in which the self-system can interact with context at different levels, recognize changes in the self at both the macro- and micro-levels, with reference to the past, present and future goals, employ a combination of different methods and techniques in the study of the self, and encourage a positive sense of self among learners. Mercer and Williams also consider the future directions of the study of the self in SLA, pointing out that "given the centrality of the self in all things we do, we must make it a priority to seek to better understand how the self, as experienced by learners and teachers, can facilitate or inhibit effective language learning."

The main strength of the volume lies without doubt in its diversity as the editors have successfully managed to bring together a multiplicity of perspectives on the self in SLA, show the ways in which these perspectives can be reconciled and illustrate how they can provide a point of reference for future empirical investigations in this area. As a result, the book will be a real eye opener to many readers, just as it has been to me, since it will help them realize the ways in which a number of seemingly separate constructs are in fact closely related and how reconciling the different approaches in research can help us better understand the nature of the self, the ways in which it can contribute to language learning, and the steps that can be taken to ensure that this influence fosters rather than impedes this process. Although the contribution of some of the chapters is far from obvious, either due to somewhat unwarranted interpretation of the data (Chapter Six) or lack of tangible pedagogical implications (Chapter Ten), this can hardly be avoided in an edited collection. I am fully confident that, on the whole, the book constitutes an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the study of the language learner's

self, be they graduate or doctoral students, or researchers seeking to gain further insights into this fascinating domain.

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