

# Bridging Language Acquisition and Language Policy

## Keynote Abstracts

(in order of presentation)

### Language Policy and Planning from a Complexity Theory Perspective

Diane Larsen-Freeman

In this talk, I adopt Complexity Theory (CT) as a transdisciplinary relational metatheory. A theory of language acquisition (or what I prefer to call language development) in keeping with CT is emergentism. Emergentists see language development as a complex, dynamic process. Regularities and systems emerge from the [semiotic] interaction of brains, selves, institutions, societies, and cultures using languages in the world (Beckner et al., 2009). These domains are mutually constitutive (Hult, 2010). At one time and over time, variability is pervasive (Verspoor, de Bot, & Lowie, 2011). Thus, in light of the significant uncertainty, it would seem that any planning must be contingent. I also imagine that any planning will have to establish the optimal conditions for language development, while simultaneously recognizing that such development is nonlinear, uncontrollable, and not identical from context to context nor from individual to individual (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). Affordance, as opposed to input, is what is important. Moreover, any sort of language assessment needs to be self-referential in order to counter the ideology of deficiency (Larsen-Freeman, 2015). Finally, it should be recognized that language in use is neither homogeneous nor static; therefore, language development of such has no end state.

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## **Critical Perspective on Language in Education Policy in France: Understanding the Role of Ideology**

Christine Hélot

Six months after the terrorist attacks of Jan 11 2015 in Paris, I would like to focus my presentation on language education policies (LEP) in France and use as a background to my analysis the marginalisation of the Arabic language. With an estimated 3 million speakers of Arabic in France and another 1 or 2 million speakers of Berber, these two languages are the most widely spoken “languages of France” (Cerquiglini, 2003) after French, and most speakers are multilingual French nationals.

I wish to propose a critical analysis of the different models of language education in place for languages other than French and show how macro policies do give a place to Arabic in the institutional discourse, including in bilingual education, but in such a way so as to reinforce the hierarchy between the standard variety and Maghrebi Arabic (Caubet, 2013). While on the surface the policy looks inclusive, the provision at the local level for courses in Arabic has remained so limited, the language is given very little visibility in schools and the bilingualism of its speakers is deligitimized through the sole choice of the standard variety (Du, 2014). This lack of institutional support for real practices of the language and the lack of valuation of the language by the school system has also had an impact on its transmission in the family context and on attitudes of learners, therefore on language acquisition (Barontini, 2013).

Research on language education policy has shown the extent to which policies are interwoven with historical, political and economic issues and how they participate directly or indirectly into discriminatory practices towards marginalized minority language speakers. It has also pointed to the danger of essentializing a language and its speakers as is the case with Arabic in France, which continues to be seen as the language of a specific community rather than a world language like English. Recent research on the interface between language policy and political theory (e.g., Ricento & al, 2014) provides an interesting avenue to probe into the complexity of French LEP towards minority languages and Arabic in particular.

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## Family Matters: Bridging Multilingual Acquisition and Language Policy

Elizabeth Lanza

The study of child multilingual acquisition has been the domain of developmental psycholinguistics, with a focus on the language-internal and individual cognitive mechanisms at play in the acquisition process. Studies of bi/multilingual acquisition in children have increasingly addressed the impact of social factors and variation in the child's linguistic environment on the child's development of two or more languages (cf. Pearson, 2007; Ghimenton, Chevrot & Billiez, 2013; Bridges & Hoff, 2014). Some developmental psycholinguists bridge the gap between their discipline and sociolinguistics by studying variation and social meaning as an inherent part of the acquisition process (cf. De Houwer 2011, Chevrot & Foulkes 2013). The burgeoning interdisciplinary field of family language policy aims to draw on anthropology, sociolinguistics as well as developmental psycholinguistic approaches to studying childhood bilingualism and multilingualism (King & Fogle, 2013). Nonetheless, the majority of studies in family language policy are sociolinguistically oriented. The ultimate question is why do some children exposed to two or more languages acquire these languages while others do not? An important issue in this regard concerns the input these young children receive and what characterizes the nature of this input, particularly within the family.

In my talk I will examine the explicit and implicit epistemological assumptions in the study of childhood bilingualism, particularly in regard to the study of input. My focus will be on bi-/multilingual first language acquisition although I will also bring in early childhood second language acquisition. This critical overview will assess what we currently know about why some children exposed to two or more languages in the family acquire these languages while others do not. In conclusion, a projection will be made of the current potentials for bridging the gap between more psycholinguistically/cognitively-oriented approaches and more sociolinguistically oriented approaches to the study of early bilingualism in children. This will involve bridging language competence, language practices and language policy.

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## The 3 Fs of Bilingual Language Development: Fact, Factoid, and Fiction

Virginia C. Mueller Gathercole

Recent research on language development in bilingual children can provide rich sources of information concerning the processes of development and a range of phenomena having to do with language and cognitive skills in bilingual populations. Language acquisition in normally developing bilingual and multilingual children is influenced by a multitude of factors including exposure (Hoff et al., 2012; Thordardottir, 2011), age of acquisition (Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003), distribution of exposure (Oller, 2005), birth order (Bridges & Hoff, 2014), socioeconomic variables (Calvo & Bialystok, 2014; Gathercole, in submission), and characteristics of the languages being learned (Bosch & Ramon-Cases, 2014). Such research provides a backdrop for evidence-based policies and practices regarding assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of speech abilities of bilingual children in educational, clinical, political, and familial settings. But policies rely crucially on reliable evidence as the cornerstone of such practices. This talk will discuss common (mis-)conceptions about bilingualism and will examine recent work regarding commonalities and variation in bilingual language development, including what is known about lexical, syntactic, and semantic development, cognitive performance, and socio-economic factors. I will also discuss factors important to assessment practices (Gathercole, 2013a, 2013b) as they relate to bilingual children and adults.

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