

Book Review of Lifespan Acquisition and Language Change: Historical Sociolinguistic Perspectives

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Abstract: This review presents Israel Sanz-Sánchez's edited volume, which argues for integrating a lifespan language acquisition perspective into historical sociolinguistics. The book is structured in two parts: a theoretical foundation reviewing acquisition literature, and a series of empirical case studies demonstrating its application. The review highlights the work's comprehensive yet complex nature, concluding that it offers an innovative and influential framework for understanding language change.

Keywords: Lifespan Acquisition; Historical Sociolinguistics; Language Change

This paper is the Book Review of Lifespan Acquisition and Language Change: Historical sociolinguistic perspectives, edited by Israel Sanz-Sánchez, 2024, 334 pp., USD 158.00 (Hardback), ISBN 9789027214591; USD 158.00 (eBook), ISBN 9789027247070.

The study of language variation and change has long been rooted in the effects of acquisition at different lifespan points [2]. However, the use of language acquisition theories and data to help us understand how language evolves has not always been paid attention to. To illustrate the opportunities afforded by the integration of a lifelong developmental language acquisition lens in historical sociolinguistics, Israel Sanz-Sánchez organized his book Lifespan Acquisition and Language Change with two main parts—the existing literature that helps understand the application of acquisitional theories and data in language change and the specific cases that illustrates this application. Finally, the purpose is to provide new methods for a more comprehensive understanding and interpretation of language change from the language development perspective.

This book consists of thirteen chapters,

beginning with an introductory chapter. Chapters 2 to 6 form the first major part, while chapters 7 to 12 constitute the second major section. The final chapter provides an overview and synthesis of the entire book and discusses the risks and opportunities for future research.

In Chapter 1, Israel Sanz-Sánchez summarizes previous applications of acquisition theory in historical sociolinguistics and adopts an approach that integrates acquisitional insights into language variation and change. Under this approach, the author broadly understands acquisition as any form of learning resulting in changes to the linguistic repertoire of an individual throughout their lifespan. The author argues for the importance of this lifespan acquisitional perspective on theoretical, methodological, and heuristic grounds, demonstrating its potential to advance historical sociolinguistics.

The subsequent five chapters engage with current literature on age and acquisition, emphasizing the mutually reinforcing relationship between acquisition theories and historical sociolinguistic studies. The ultimate goal is to make it easier to understand how individual acquisitional trajectories contribute to language variation and change.

Chapter 2 reviews research on children's monolingual and bilingual acquisition of linguistic variation to consider children's role in language change. Researchers have found that in response to diverse linguistic input, children can standardize language by reinforcing certain forms or meanings [1] or introducing new linguistic structures [7]. Children's remarkable linguistic abilities not only form the core of language acquisition but also provide the cognitive foundation for their linguistic innovation. This is demonstrated in research [3]: by observing children in peer interaction settings, the study reveals their capacity to

flexibly employ diverse linguistic forms and engage in logical reasoning in non-testing environments. Furthermore, Three bilingual phenomena discussed—null objects, gender mismatching, and DOM omission, have also proved children’s innovations. Up to this point, the research has moved beyond whether children induce language change and further explores the conditions under which children’s linguistic innovations spread and permeate throughout the community. However, there are also some challenges regarding child language acquisition and the historical sociolinguistics of language change: what type of input results in child-initiated language change? What’s the role bilingual children play in initiating and spreading language change? Which innovations introduced by children result in change at the community level?

The third chapter primarily addresses the connection between historical linguistics and second language acquisition (SLA), building on the gaps in previous research. This chapter demonstrates that the patterns of language change lay a foundation for examining and comprehending developments in the language of second language learners. Furthermore, studies on second language acquisition share several similarities with the study of language shifts over time. Second language acquisition research demonstrates that language acquisition is influenced by numerous factors. For instance, study [6] on the role of grit in second language learning reveals that this non-cognitive trait interacts with other individual factors and background variables, collectively shaping learners’ ultimate language attainment. Historical language change, much like second language acquisition, is shaped by a complex interplay of social, political, individual, and linguistic factors. Given these resemblances, it is not surprising that the techniques of variationist sociolinguistics have been utilized in both disciplines. Based on these perspectives, collaboration between SLA and historical sociolinguistics is not only feasible but should also be reciprocal.

Chapter 4 explores research on dialect contact and lifespan linguistic changes among both stationary and mobile language users, providing insights into the human ability for continuous learning and adaptation. It begins with an overview of studies focusing on variations within the same language across a person's

lifetime. The discussion then moves to recent literature emphasizing the significance of considering a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire when analyzing dialect contact and variation. The chapter then applies these perspectives to a case study of dialect contact in Early Modern Dutch, linking historical changes to ongoing contemporary sound shifts. Finally, it underscores the potential and challenges that this acquisition research offers to sociohistorical linguists studying dialect contact and change.

Chapter 5 reviews the Bilingual Optimization Strategies inspired by [4], interpreting outcomes of language contact and bilingualism. It investigates whether language development can be influenced by language contact and the age of onset of bilingualism, exploring how age interacts with social factors to impact community grammar. The chapter highlights the importance of age in strategy selection, as learners of different ages may adopt varying approaches to language separation or integration due to cognitive differences. It concludes by discussing challenges and opportunities in acquisition research and historical sociolinguistics.

Chapter 6 provides an analysis of the role of acquisitional processes in the emergence of new language varieties, focusing on two main types of cases: multi-ethnolects in Europe and post-colonial dialects stemming from British colonialism. It highlights the contribution of different age groups and generations to these processes and emphasizes the importance of studying new variety formation in migration and contact situations to understand the interface between language acquisition and historical sociolinguistics. The challenges that will be met are also been talked about, but acquisition as a fundamental and contributing factor in change can't be ignored.

After a detailed introduction and review of the relevant literature, chapters 7 through 12 demonstrate via concrete cases how acquisition theories are applied to actual language change. Chapter 7 introduces a study that explores the historical development of informal second-person singular forms in Rioplatense Spanish, emphasizing the role of children’s language acquisition in this change. It suggests that including contemporary child speech data is essential for a fuller understanding of linguistic evolution, particularly regarding the interplay

between voseo and tuteo forms. The research underlines the challenges in studying voseo due to its perceived impoliteness and calls for a combined approach of historical and modern linguistic data.

Chapter 8 examines the emergence of Light Warlpiri [5], an Australian mixed language, focusing on the roles of adult and child speakers in its development. The study reveals a direct link between the sociohistorical context of colonization and the birth of this new language. Through comparative analysis of Warlpiri and Light Warlpiri, it illustrates how children attune to the variations in adult speech and reproduce them, either mimicking the adults or introducing quantitative differences. The chapter emphasizes the benefits of integrating perspectives from child language acquisition and historical sociolinguistics. This integration enhances our understanding of the mechanisms behind the emergence of a new language and the introduction of linguistic innovations. All in all, the case study underscores that children play a significant role in language change in specific social situations.

Chapter 9 investigates the historical sound change of /æ/ in Missouri English from 1880 to 2000, focusing on transmission and incrementation processes. The study uses a dataset from archival recordings and modern sociolinguistic interviews to analyze changes in the acoustic qualities of /æ/. It reveals a shift towards a nasal /æ/ system through children's acquisition of their speech community's norms and subsequent innovations as they mature. It also explores the influence of social categories on this change, linking historical and recent developments in Kansas City. The research underscores the value of historical sociophonetics in understanding language acquisition and change.

Chapter 10 examines the variation of voice onset time (VOT) and final obstruent neutralization (FON) in Wisconsin German and English varieties, focusing on how language acquisition in heritage communities and shifts in language dominance have influenced these features. The study combines written and spoken data from historical and modern sources to analyze phonetic variations in VOT and FON. It is found that bilingual production of VOT often differs from monolinguals, and FON is a common area affected by bilingual acquisition. Results indicate that non-standard forms

suggesting variation both syllable-initially and syllable-finally are most prevalent among English-dominant bilinguals.

Chapter 11 explores the semantic extension of “mano” (hand) and “pie” (foot) to mean “upper limb” and “lower limb” in Spanish dialects of Antioquia, Colombia. It suggests that social factors allowed adult L2 learners to significantly influence the development of new language varieties. The study reviews the languages spoken by Amerindians at the time of Spanish colonization, early colonial interactions facilitating linguistic change, and the West African population's role in this process. It concludes that contact-induced changes, such as the redefinition of “mano” and “pie”, stemmed from interactions among Europeans, Amerindians, and Africans, leading to the adoption of these terms for limbs in Antioquian Spanish.

Chapter 12 focuses on the phenomenon of for-complementation in Chinese Pidgin English (CPE) and Hong Kong English (HKE), two distinct varieties of English. Despite different contact situations and periods, both varieties exhibit similar uses of “for” to introduce purposive clauses. The study delves into the sociohistorical background of CPE and its sentential complementation forms. It then examines various complementizers in CPE, including the emergence and origins of “for”. The paper also investigates the use of for-complementation in HKE, comparing it with CPE and underscoring the role of L2 acquisition as a shared sociohistorical foundation for this feature. Finally, it discusses the broader relationship between language acquisition and historical sociolinguistics, offering insights into the development of specific constructions in historical language varieties like those examined here.

This concluding chapter of the volume, as expected, underscores the importance of integrating acquisition theories and data into historical sociolinguistics to better understand language variation and change. It highlights the potential applications of this approach, treating language learning as a continuous process that drives innovation across communities. The chapter acknowledges the challenges and opportunities in applying acquisitional insights to historical studies, emphasizing the need for further research in underexplored sociolinguistic contexts and encouraging

interdisciplinary collaboration to advance the field.

In summary, this book presents a clear narrative and engaging content that logically explores the possibility, significance, and future challenges and opportunities of combining acquisition theory with language change. It not only provides us with a new perspective for a better and more comprehensive understanding of language change but also offers specific considerations for putting this new perspective into practice.

The strengths of this work lie in its comprehensiveness, combining thorough literature reviews with case studies to cover both child and adult language acquisition, bilingualism, and cross-generational language variation. Its integration of theoretical frameworks with real-world examples enhances our comprehension of the intricate processes of language evolution. The multidisciplinary approach, encompassing second language acquisition, dialect contact, and sociolinguistics, showcases the author's profound expertise across disciplines. Moreover, the introduction of a lifespan perspective on language acquisition introduces an innovative methodology for examining language variation and change, highlighting the lifelong impact of individual language learning on linguistic evolution. However, the book does present some challenges. Its complexity, stemming from the multitude of theories and cases examined, may prove daunting for non-expert readers. The extensive literature review and detailed case analyses contribute to a lengthy volume that could overwhelm some with information density. Additionally, the empirical focus on select regions and languages might limit the representation of global linguistic phenomena. Finally, although the author lists various challenges faced by the studies mentioned, these challenges and the overall theme proposed by the book currently have no solutions and require further research in the field.

Despite these potential hurdles, *Lifespan Acquisition and Language Change* stands as a seminal contribution to the study of language evolution. It encourages scholars, graduate students, and educators to adopt fresh perspectives on language change and stimulates further inquiry into this fascinating area of

research. Overall, Sanz-Sánchez's work sets a benchmark for future explorations in the intersection of acquisition theory and language change.

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