

*Book Review***Dynamic variation in second language acquisition: A language processing perspective, Bronwen Patricia Dyson, John Benjamins Publishing Company (2021). 274**

Arguably, second language acquisition has always been an interesting topic to discuss. It is proven by many existing theories that play an essential role and contribute to this field's advancement and proliferation. Among many is Processability Theory (PT), a prominent theory of L2 development and processing theory that predicts well-ordered, cross-linguistically valid stages in second language acquisition and provides language-specific predictions covering developmental and variational stages dimensions (Pienemann, 1998, 2005, 2015). It accounts for explicit prediction of the language elements in which L2 learners learn to process different morphological and syntactical structures productively regardless of their backgrounds.

As a key expert and an author who has extensively focused her research on the learning and teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) and second language acquisition (SLA) through the lens of Processability Theory (PT), Bronwen Patricia Dyson, in her latest book, *Dynamic variation in Second language Acquisition: A language processing perspective* manages to contribute to the body of knowledge in understanding how L2 learners develop their second language. In particular, Dyson describes, discusses, and examines the importance of the processability perspective as an innovative approach, to unfold L2 learner language processing and development in inter-language variation and language variation in general.

Prior to discussing the gap addressed by the book in the second language processing realm, it is essential to highlight how this book is organised. Being supported theoretically and empirically, this book is well-crafted into nine chapters that draw on relevant aspects of second language variation and its dynamisation of language acquisition through the eye of language processing. It is initiated by discussing the challenges of dynamic variation in language processing in chapter 1. This chapter primarily focuses on the challenges posed by L2 variation by discussing the recent debate on L2 variation alongside its research gap. The debates have concluded that variation can be viewed from two perspectives: (1) variation is inherent, systematic, and related to change. (2) systematic variation is related to waves of change. This chapter also briefly explains the discussion in the other eight chapters that follow.

Chapter 2 discusses L2 variation, which is believed as the core of L2 development. its definitions, methodology, and research findings are discussed by presenting how to scrutinise variation in SLA through four primary

theoretical lenses on L2 variation: Sociolinguistics, Usage-based linguistics, Dynamic system theory, and Complexity theory. Those lenses seek to answer four main questions on major findings of L2 variation and on how variation is defined, investigated, and explained as compared to the PT perspective. The chapter concludes with a brief comparison of PT and other approaches and reasonable arguments on how PT can potentially fill in the gap and draw a clear distinction between the concept of L2 “variation” and “development.”

Chapter 3 primarily concerns with the predecessor and descendant of PT: Multidimensional Model from Clahsen et al. (1983) and Meisel et al. (1981) and the Predicted Framework from Pienemann & Johnston (1987). These two models explain L2 variation as a dynamic linguistics system by creating “a dynamic interaction between the dimensions of L2 development and variation” (Dyson, 2021, p.63). However, as argued, the variational dimension remained theoretically and empirically limited in these two models. Moreover, it leaves some problems unresolved. Thus, the processability perspective comes into play.

The following chapters, chapter 4 and 5, outlines the theoretical framework and methodology, respectively. Chapter 4 gives a profound insight into the variational options hypothesis and its key concepts, followed by the developmental styles and developmental changes hypothesis. These hypotheses are thoroughly defined, described, and exemplified by the author, making the described concept easy to follow. Chapter 5 comprehensively describes how to conduct a study focusing on dynamic variation, which adopted and extended previous processability studies by employing a longitudinal approach involving non-English-speaking adolescents as the informants; it is considered as a novelty for a similar study. The task-based communication is employed to elicit the grammatical acquisition data.

As the extension of the previous chapter, chapters 6 to 8 are fully dedicated to reporting empirical findings on a year-long study on eight adolescent L2 learners’ variations, syntactic and morphological results, on three major psycholinguistics hypotheses: variational option, developmental style, and developmental change hypotheses. Chapter 6 summarises and discusses the results of eight adolescent L2 learners under PT standpoints, particularly for their variational options hypothesis, which falls into two conclusions related to learners’ variation options. Simplifying learners refer to those who are intent on communication or fluency and standardising learners refer to those who are intent on language accuracy. For the developmental change hypothesis, the same result of eight adolescent learners is further discussed and summarised in chapter 7, showing that “learners variably negotiate a dynamic and quite systematic interaction between implicationally ordered morphology and syntax” (Dyson, 2021, p. 216). This finding has resulted in the learner’s developmental change into two styles: core-meaning-elements-only style and

elaborated style. Learners with the former style tend to acquire the syntactic before the corresponding morphological structures. In contrast, learners with the latter style tend to acquire the morphological with the syntactic structure simultaneously.

In chapter 8, the same longitudinal dataset of the eight adolescent L2 learners' is further discussed by only focusing on a group of four Chinese L1 learners for their developmental change style. This chapter mainly discusses the emergence and underpinned variation. From PT's perspective, it shows that free variation is entirely constrained by processability, and that emergence drives change. As the epilogue, chapter 9 primarily concludes the whole discussion of the book, where the readers are encouraged to view and value variation in a more fluid and root-to-apex hierarchy of PT; the term refers to describe the learner's developmental change from the lowest morphosyntactic stage (1 word) to the highest morphosyntactic stage (subordinate clause-level). This epilogue is closed with the contribution and implication of dynamic variation toward SLA for further study.

The first contribution of this book is that the author starts the book by providing clear definitions for important terms that are mainly discussed throughout the book's content, such as the definition of "variation," "developmental," "dynamic," and "systematic." These terms are essential to define as there is no single agreement among SLA researchers, making SLA literature not generally establish a clear distinction among those terms or leaving the blurring definition unanswered. By having those definitions in the first place, Dyson has helped to minimise the possible misconceptions and confusion among readers regarding the topic being discussed. It also helps the readers understand the concept of variation and development quite easily, regardless of whether they are new or seasoned academics in the SLA field.

Another main contribution of this book is that it explains the intertwin the past and present debates of leading theories and kinds of literature about the concept of development and variation in L2 learners. It then draws a vivid explanation, through an innovative approach, on how PT stands out among the crowd in capturing dynamic systems of acquisition, variation in learners' language variation and development. Three main psycholinguistic hypotheses are examined systematically and comprehensively: the variational optional, developmental style, and developmental change style hypotheses. All the presented discussions and findings may enlighten the readers that learner variation is not entirely systematic; It can also navigate SLA researchers on what gaps need addressing for further research.

As a contemporary reference, this book not only presents a solid theoretical overview but is also robustly illustrated by legitimated findings with the innovative approach to language processing. The Monograph, which is heavily discussed in this book, has pointed out how English learners vary in

their language development timing without skipping the hierarchical stage proposed by PT from bottom to apex language structures; it could help the wider audience to get the context and comprehensive understanding of language processing.

As an auxiliary contribution, this book has uncovered the potential existence of unsystematic (or free) variation through the lens of the developmental hypothesis, where variation is viewed from root to apex development. It concludes that learner variation is dynamic and not entirely systematic. This finding gives benefit to other L2 variation theories such as Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) (de Bot et al., 2007; Lowie & Verspoor, 2015) and Complexity Theory (CT; Larsen-Freeman, 2012). In many ways, this book's content complements recent books on the SLA topic.

Apart from its merits, this book has its limitations, particularly in the diversity of the participants' language backgrounds which is limited to a few languages. In addition, the pedagogical implication, which is considered crucial to L2 learners' acquisition, is excluded from the discussion. Although this limitation is not a significant issue, and the author has clearly justified and acknowledged it, it appears that more cross-linguistic data and the intersection between dynamic variation with pedagogical language implications might be considered and have a portion in a future edition. By considering those factors, it is arguably believed that the book would be able to reach a wider audience and touch more relevant readers, especially the readers, teachers, or researchers in the EFL context who may find more benefit from this book.

As a research-based textbook, this book provides informative and profound arguments on how the language processing perspective can be utilised to see variation and development in L2 language acquisition more distinctly and give a detailed understanding on how 2 learners vary in the path of their second language development. The book may also help the readers understand various usages and practices of processing theory, generates insights, and informs SLA researchers in using this theory for foreseeable research on L2 variation. Therefore, this book is a hidden gem and would be worth adding to the library of anyone interested in dynamic variation in the second language (L2) acquisition and development study employing a language processing perspective. Particularly for Linguists, SLA researchers, and EFL/ESL teachers who want to get in touch and are eager to unfold the learners' morphosyntax variation from a processing viewpoint.

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