

# Preface

The primary goal of this volume is to shed more light on the ecosystem of the foreign language learner. The term *ecology* relates to interactions among organisms and their environment, focusing on their pursuits of homeostats and continuous development. They can be analyzed from the point of view of the individual, the community, or the *ecosystem*. The latter encompasses a holistic view of complex interrelations among and within organisms and their milieu. Complex interactions between people, within them, and their physical environment can also be described through the principles of ecosystems. Along these lines, the ecosystem metaphor can be applied to many spheres of life, the foreign language learning process being one of them (Brown, 2000). The main reason is that “every setting in which learning takes place involves a learner, a teacher, a setting, and information to be learned. ... Learning, therefore, occurs in an ecosystem (Doyle & Ponder, 1975) in which there is a series of inputs, a series of teaching and learning processes, and a series of outputs” (Ashman & Conway, 1997, p. 2).

In this volume, we therefore propose viewing selected aspects of the foreign language learning process from an ecological perspective. Accordingly, the learner constitutes an organism in which learning takes place, inducing the interaction of various powers within and outside him or her. First of all, we suggest taking into consideration the internal or personal ecosystem of the learner, whereby two powerful influences interlock: the cognitive and affective. It follows that the learning space formed by the individual learner is largely shaped by his or her affective states, coexisting in conjunction with the cognitive processes. Although emotion is long accused of clouding rational judgment, recent advances in social cognition and social psychology have identified new, interesting patterns. It now seems clear that affective states often create significant assimilative or consistent effects on the way information is acquired, remembered, and interpreted. On the other hand, these effects do not appear to be universal, but dependent on an array of situational and contextual variables (Forgas & Eich, 2012). In general, in the learning situation “emotions are results of appraisal of academic success and failure, of pleasant or unpleasant personal and social experiences in educational encounters. On the other hand, they energize but also restrict their achievement and

achievement motivation” (Fiedler & Beier, 2014, p. 36). For this reason, we propose analyzing selected aspects of the foreign language learner’s ecosystem from the point of view of the affective and cognitive interconnections placed within the personal sphere of the student.

Moreover, from the point of view of the ecosystem perspective, the learning space is formed not only by the individual learner, but by a wider community of other personal ecosystems, or those of cultures. As Vygotsky (1978) in his socio-cultural approach proposes, the individual’s mental development should be viewed as an interaction between them and their sociocultural environment. The quality of these interactions influences the nature of subsequent mental processes. Hence, the ecosystem of the foreign language learner is also subject to the external influences of sociocultural leverage that can be represented by significant others, such as parents and language teachers, who can both directly and indirectly manipulate this specific ecosystem. Also, other important forces, such as culture, as a ubiquitous element of the foreign language learning process, have a robust power in controlling it.

This book is divided into two parts covering a range of topics related to these basic dimensions of foreign language acquisition (the cognitive, affective, and sociocultural), analyzed from the point of view of personal and external forces interacting within the ecosystem of the foreign language learner. Part I, called *Internal Processes*, focuses on the body of research into the affective domain of the L2 language learner, as well as on their linguistic processing and cognitive representations of concepts. The second part, *External Processes*, aims to increase our understanding of the role of some social and cultural factors, such as foreign language teacher characteristics and skills, parental influences, and the leverage of the foreign language.

The first part of this volume scrutinizes learner internal affective and cognitive influences on the ecology of the process of L2 learning. A daring and pioneering perspective on language learner linguistic choices made while dreaming is proposed by Danuta Gabryś-Barker. The study, qualitative in nature, provides evidence of the value of exposure to linguistic and attitudinal factors resulting in involuntary use of L2. Additionally, the article raises the issue of the role of conscious and sub-conscious processes in defining a multilingual person. The attitudinal perspective affecting language acquisition is taken in the following chapter by Martin Hinton, who argues that the attractiveness of the target language may affect mimicry ability in L2 pronunciation. The *Cecily Effect*, a term proposed by the author inspired by one of Oscar Wilde’s characters, is seen as an affective component that determines the learner’s linguistic performance. Another affective variable, willingness to communicate (WTC), is put in the spotlight of the next chapter by Małgorzata Baran-Lucarz, who investigates whether WTC in and outside the foreign language (FL) classroom might be perceived as two separate constructs. This author explores students’ perceived levels of FL skills in order to determine their relationship with L2 learners’ WTC in the classroom and naturalistic settings. The concept of an autotelic learner, whose experience of foreign language learning is perceived as worth it for its own sake, constitutes the subject area of Beata Telązka’s interest.

In her study, she investigates the differences in attitudes and achievements of autotelic and non-autotelic English philology students. The Flow Scale is used to identify the two groups; moreover, the participants' attitudes are elicited with the help of two other instruments: the Intrinsic Motivations Inventory and Experience Sampling Method. Although no significant difference in linguistic achievement is found between autotelic and non-autotelic respondents, the author draws a range of interesting and insightful conclusions referring to flow-inducing language learning activities experienced by autotelic learners.

Two consecutive chapters exploring cognition in foreign language learning conclude the first part of the volume. Pedro Luis Luchini follows L2 cognitive processing from the perspective of the language learner. Backed up with the cognitive load theory and its redundancy effect, the author provides the results of an experimental investigation in which two groups of young EFL learners pursue two different procedures: single and dual mode reading comprehension instructions. Following the former, group A learners concentrate on reading alone, whereas group B is requested to simultaneously read and listen. The results support the assumptions of cognitive load theory that the dual reading comprehension instruction constrains cognitive processing by imposing an additional load on working memory. Next, Marek Kuczyński investigates cognitive associations between representations of the same concept in L1 and L2. In particular, the author is interested in the way cognitive content is conceptualized in two languages by the language learner and what determines the activation of different associative patterns of one concept in a bilingual person.

The second part of the volume shifts the reader's attention to the external processes moderating the ecosystem of a foreign language learner. These feature investigations into teacher, parent, and cultural domains. The opening chapter in Part II initiates a discussion on the role of affect within a group of non-native L2 teachers. Nina Barłożek delves into the emotional intelligence (EI) of the language teacher and investigates the interplay between teachers' different levels of EI and L2 learners' perceptions and evaluation of teachers. Another correlational study in the chapter by Małgorzata Marzec-Stawiarska gives evidence of affective interconnections between in-service teachers' speaking anxiety and factors, such as perceived and actual speaking competence, self-efficacy, age, and gender. The results indicate that non-native L2 teachers who boast a high proficiency level are not devoid of anxiety while speaking in L2, particularly when they have high expectations connected with striving for native-like speaking abilities. In the subsequent chapter, Joanna Nijakowska describes the objectives, the life cycle, and the outcomes of the international, educational DysTEFL project, whose aim was to equip foreign language (FL) pre- and in-service teachers as well as teacher trainers with didactic materials relevant to the needs of FL learners with learning differences, dyslexia in particular. A detailed account of the project's preparation, management stages, the responsibilities of the participants, and verification procedures depicts the project's coordinator's attention to the final product's quality and adaptability to a range of contexts within the diverse European EFL teacher training schemes. The role of parental involvement in the L2 learner's education is

the focal point of the chapter by Joanna Rokita-Jaśków, who argues that a mother's knowledge of a foreign language has impact on her decisions regarding early enrollment of her child in a language learning course, whereas a father's level of L2 is related to his long-term aspirations concerning his child's L2 learning. Furthermore, the environmental support provided by the L2 teacher is indispensable to the proper functioning and intellectual development of any foreign language learner. Following this premise, Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska presents high proficiency learners as a subject of interest. In her chapter, rhetoric is used as a tool for developing the critical literacy of EFL students, consciously manipulated by their FL instructor. The author looks at rhetorical instruments used for training, whose purpose is to raise EFL learners' sensitivity in approaching culture-specific texts. Finally, cultural problems in L2 learners' linguistic processing are addressed in Wafa abu Hatab's closing article. Hatab delves into advanced EFL students' difficulties in translating from English into Arabic, languages reflecting two social realities and representing two different cultures.

This volume is intended for an array of readers. First of all, it adds a new dimension to the existing body of research, and therefore may inspire scholars in pursuing further scientific designs connected with a more advanced "complexity-informed pedagogy for language learning" (Mercer, 2013, p. 1). Inquisitive teachers, who may want to augment their knowledge about complex and dynamic, internal and external factors that determine L2 learning processes, will also find much to offer within these pages. And finally, this book is particularly useful to L2 learners studying for a degree in applied linguistics and language acquisition, or those who are simply interested in the workings of the foreign language learner's ecosystem with respect to internal affective and cognitive processes, as well as external sociocultural interconnections. Ultimately, therefore, we hope that this volume will contribute to a better understanding of the intricacies that mark the foreign language learner's ecosystem.

Ewa Piechurska-Kuciel  
Magdalena Szyszka

## References

- Ashman, A. E., & Conway, R. N. F. (1997). *An introduction to cognitive education: Theory and application*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson Education.
- Doyle, W., & Ponder, G. A. (1975). Classroom ecology: Some concerns about a neglected dimension of research on teaching. *Contemporary Education*, 46, 183–190.

- Fiedler, K., & Beier, S. (2014). Affect and cognitive processes in educational contexts. In R. Pekrun & L. Linnenbrink-Garcia (Eds.), *International handbook of emotions in education* (pp. 36–55). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Forgas, J. P., & Eich, E. E. (2012). Affective influences on cognition. Mood congruence, mood dependence, and mood effects on processing strategies. In A. F. Healy & R. W. Proctor (Eds.), *Experimental psychology*, Volume 4, in I. B. Weiner (Editor-in-Chief), *Handbook of psychology* (pp. 61–82). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Mercer, S. (2013). Towards a complexity-informed pedagogy for language learning. *Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada*, 13, 375–398.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

The Ecosystem of the Foreign Language Learner  
Selected Issues

Piechurska-Kuciel, E.; Szyszka, M. (Eds.)

2015, XV, 200 p. 2 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-14333-0