Introduction

High-Level Proficiency and the Concept of Nativelikeness in Second Language and Multilingual Research Practice

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0.1 The Research Context of This Volume

This volume has its background in a large-scale research programme, *High-Level Proficiency in Second Language Use*, carried out at Stockholm University, the purpose of which was broadly to develop our understanding of the conditions for the attainment of highly advanced L2 proficiency: cognitively/psycholinguistically, linguistically/structurally and socio-psychologically/societally. The main idea of the volume is to provide a succinct and coherent picture of the empirically based theoretical knowledge that, to date, has been gained within the programme.

The programme had a staff of approximately twenty-five researchers and research assistants in all. It operated in two stages lasting seven years in total (i.e. 4 years + 3 years).[1] Among highly advanced second language users, particular attention was given to those who had attained such advanced L2 proficiency levels that they were not immediately identifiable as non-native speakers, i.e. situations where the two categories of first and second language users of a language cease to be easily distinguishable. Such high-level L2 users can often, more appropriately, be characterized as *near-native speakers*. By near-native speakers, we mean individuals who are perceived as native speakers in everyday oral interaction, but who can be distinguished from native speakers by some feature(s) of communicatively more demanding language use, or when analysed in greater linguistic detail (Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson 2003: 571). Proficiency levels are often measured in two different dimensions, namely 'low'/'intermediate'/'advanced' proficiency levels and 'non-native'/'near-native'/'native'

[1] For detailed information on the programme and its achievements, see www.biling.su.se/english/research/research-projects/high-level-proficiency-in-second-language-use-the-program-aaa-1.91576.

proficiency levels. For a discussion of how these two dimensions interact, see Hyltenstam (2016: 5–6).

A major part of the research programme (comprising seven individual projects) investigated a variety of *second language contexts*; each context, however, was quite traditional in the sense that, for the individual L2 users, just two languages were typically involved: in our case, L1 speakers of Swedish learning either English, French, Italian or Spanish as foreign/second languages (see Chapters 2–6), and L1 speakers of Spanish acquiring Swedish as a second language (see Chapter 1). However, several of the actual studies reported in Chapters 2–5 profited from synergy potentials within the programme and involved two, three or four L2s (English + French; English + French + Spanish; English + French + Italian + Spanish), and used parallel methodology in their design. Several groups of L1 Swedish participants investigated in these studies were long-residency L2 users (in London, Paris and Santiago de Chile), recently sometimes referred to by the label 'cultural migrants' (see Forsberg Lundell & Bartning 2015). For the L1 Spanish/L2 Swedish group, in addition to investigating the near-native proficiency in their L2 Swedish, both languages, L1 Spanish and L2 Swedish, were also investigated from a bilingualism perspective and, in the case of Spanish, also from an attrition perspective (again, see Chapter 1). As a special case of a second language context, the characteristics of people who learn a multitude of languages, as in the case of polyglots, were treated in a separate project (see Chapter 7).

However, as the programme was designed to investigate wider contexts in which the obvious or clear-cut distinction between nativelike and non-nativelike language usage is blurred, it also included projects on the subject of language development and use in *multilingual contexts*. The type of multilingual settings considered in this section of the programme results from globalization and massive transnational migration. In such cross-linguistically complex spaces, typically in ethnically mixed urban areas, the heterogeneous language use challenges many traditional linguistic concepts (native versus non-native speaker; L1 versus L2; monolingual, bilingual and multilingual language user). Language users in such contexts may have a bilingual or multilingual background, but they may also consider the dominant language of the setting in which they live – Swedish in our case – as their first or only language (their mother tongue). This may even happen in cases when they are typically perceived by the environment as non-native speakers or as speakers with a foreign accent in that language. In such cases, in school contexts specifically, irrespective of whether or not they are high-level-proficiency users in one or more languages, there is a risk of such speakers being judged linguistically or educationally as underachievers. These kinds of issues are accounted for in Chapter 8.

0.2 Previous Research on High-Level Second Language Proficiency

After more than fifty years of empirical research, the accumulated body of knowledge on second language acquisition is indeed impressive (see Doughty & Long 2003; Gass & Mackey 2012; Herschensohn & Young-Scholton 2013; Ritchie & Bhatia 2009). However, that knowledge is less extensive with respect to stages where the actual continued learning of the L2 becomes less obvious and the communicative use of it takes precedence. Even though learning is clearly still occurring in these phases, speakers may appear as if they have stopped developing their L2 proficiency. Focused study of advanced levels of language proficiency started only in the 1990s, yet it is possible to identify three areas in which high-level proficiency in second languages has nevertheless been reasonably well researched, which will be covered in this volume:

1. The extent to which the ultimate level of attainment in a second language is a function of age of onset, length of residence, aptitude and cross-linguistic influence (a cognitive and psycholinguistic perspective);
2. The developmental aspects of grammar, lexicon and discourse that characterize advanced stages of second language acquisition (a linguistic and pragmatic perspective);
3. The awareness, attitudes and practices present in currently developing sociolinguistic variation in multilingual contexts (a sociolinguistic perspective).

Research in the first of these areas has been based on questions and hypotheses generated by the notion of a critical period for language acquisition (for overviews, see Abrahamsson 2013; DeKeyser & Larson-Hall 2005; Hyltenstam 2012; Long 2013). Among the questions that have been asked here, the most prominent ones have concerned: 1. what the ultimate level of attainment actually is, given an onset of second language acquisition at different ages; 2. whether learners exist who started their second language acquisition after puberty and yet managed to reach a nativelike level of attainment; and 3. whether pre-pubertal or childhood second language learners uniformly attain a nativelike level in their L2. A debate has evolved on the possible causes for differences in ultimate attainment between younger/child or older/adult learners, and differences between native and non-native speakers (see Long 2007, 2013). In addition to the suggestion that maturational constraints are the cause of such differences (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam 2009), researchers have argued that such differences are an effect of bilingualism itself, i.e. a result of the existence of two languages in the mind of the learner (e.g. Birdsong 2006; Cook 1999; MacWhinney 2005). The question of what causes these differences has been followed up at a research methodological (or research ideological) level by other researchers (e.g. Ortega 2013). The issue remains controversial and is still far from solved, but see Bylund, Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam (2012)

and Bylund, Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson (2013) for empirical data and an indepth discussion.

The second of these areas is a continuation on the tradition of studying developmental stages and acquisition sequences in initial and middle phases of L2 acquisition. The questions asked here are, among others, what morphological, syntactic, lexical and pragmatic features, including collocations and other formulaic language, that are found in native use of a language are still frail – or different – at the very advanced level of second language use of the same language? Studies have typically dealt with the interface of information structure, meaning and linguistic form (Bardovi-Harlig 2000; Bartning, Forsberg Lundell & Hancock 2012; Carroll, Murcia-Serra, Watorek & Bendiscioli 2000). The methodological breakthrough made possible by large computerized second language corpora (Bartning & Schlyter 2004) has allowed for new insights into acquisitional sequences and developmental stages at this high proficiency level. Attempts have also been made to arrive at a general characterization of the linguistic features of near-native and native speaker proficiency (see, for example, Andringa 2014; Ringbom 1993; Sorace 2003).

The third area comprises research on developing youth varieties in multicultural contexts (Nortier & Svendsen 2015). What is particularly interesting here is that these varieties develop in the way they do for intertwined reasons, only one of which is the fact that some of their speakers are second language users (Bijvoet & Fraurud 2012). In actual fact, speakers who use such youth varieties may well be first language speakers, but because some of the characteristic features are perceived as non-native, or, in fact, have their linguistic origin in other languages present in the contact situation, speakers may be perceived as second language users. Much research in this area has focused on what significance and meanings are expressed through the use of youth varieties and how the speakers' identification and positioning are reflected in and shaped by their experiences and social interactions (see Eliaso Magnusson & Stroud 2012; Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004).

0.3 The Native Speaker/Non-Native Speaker Concept and Terminology

A question that is repeatedly treated in the chapters of this volume is whether high-level second language users can attain a level of L2 proficiency that is impossible to differentiate from native speaker proficiency. This is an entirely empirical question, but the answer is reliant on how the notion of 'native speaker' is conceived. We will elaborate on this issue at some length throughout this section.

As mentioned above, the distinction of native versus non-native speaker is blurred in the perception of listeners and interlocutors both in second language contexts and in multilingual contexts of the types mentioned above. The second language contexts comprise situations of the type focused on in this volume, i.e. situations in which language learners have attained a near-native level of proficiency in their second language, so that they are not easily identified as non-native speakers; they may simply pass for native speakers in everyday oral interaction. The multilingual contexts we are considering are those in which speakers may produce features from different languages and different varieties in their repertoire in constellations that are uncommon and unexpected to speakers of the larger society and therefore difficult to assess (Rampton 2015). Such language use, among other things, has a role to play as an expression of 'complex, fluid, changing, and even contradictory identities, with different languages playing multiple and varying roles in these identities' (Tollefson 2000: 46).

Prompted by this blurring of native/non-native language use, there is an ongoing debate about the ideological and methodological appropriateness or legitimacy of the native/non-native speaker terminology (e.g. Cook 1999; Davies 2003; Dewaele 2017; Rampton 1990). We will not review this debate to any length – its multifaceted and complex trajectory is far beyond the scope of this introduction – but rather, we will limit ourselves to formulating our own viewpoints on the matter and specify how the terminology is used in this volume (for an extensive discussion of the concept of nativelikeness, see Chapter 1).

Admittedly, the concept of (non-)native speaker is not suited as a research tool for purposes relevant to multilingual settings. The sociolinguistically oriented chapter in this volume, Chapter 8, presents examples of multilingual contexts in which it would not make sense to speak about such a distinction in accounting for the data. When the term 'native speaker' appears in these contexts, it is in analyses of how the concept is used among participants themselves, or in the participants' reports and perceptions about how the term is being used in society at large.

For the second language context, however, we do not agree that 'the traditional dichotomy, "native" versus "non-native speaker" has to be rejected because of the inherent ideological assumptions about the superiority of the former and inferiority of the latter' (Dewaele 2017: 4). Irrespective of how widespread such ideological assumptions indeed are, and what their practical consequences may be, the native speaker as a benchmark is so deeply rooted and central to second language theory that the distinction between second language learners and native speakers can be discerned in almost all existing research in the area, explicitly either with the native/non-native terminology or with alternative terminologies, or implicitly. Such alternative terminology, for

example, 'L1 user' for native speaker and 'L*X* user' for non-native speaker in Dewaele's case (Dewaele 2017) – terms that are both well-conceived and reasonable *per se* – does not necessarily change prevailing attitudes towards groups. They are, of course, only examples of the well-known process of substituting new terms for emotion-laden words that have become 'impossible' to use. The future will decide whether this will happen to the native/non-native terminology, but, in our view, we are not there yet. The use of this particular terminology is still the most common convention in second language research, and there is at present no widespread agreement on the substitute terms to use among the various suggested alternatives, should the prevailing terminology need to be abandoned.

This reasoning, however, does not imply that we see no problems in how the concept of native speaker is used methodologically in second language research. As many critics of the so-called standard language ideology have pointed out, the native speaker in much second language research is represented by an abstract standard language norm, reflected in the researcher's metalinguistic knowledge and/or intuition about the standard language. This downplays the role of variation in language use among native speakers (Milroy & Milroy 1985; Lippi-Green 2006) and sets a target standard that is often inadequate for specific second language learners. Second language acquisition – but not foreign language learning – occurs in linguistic interaction with real speakers of the target language, all of whom represent their individual and group-dependent variation in language use.

As a way of avoiding the standard language bias, Hulstijn's Basic Language Cognition theory (Hulstijn 2015; see also Andringa 2014) suggests that the native speaker benchmark be defined empirically on external and internal grounds: externally in relation to the circumstances under which the language has been learned (during early childhood, in a monolingual or bilingual context, etc.) and internally on the basis of lexical items and of phonological and grammatical structures that are shared by *all* native speakers and that can occur in any type of communicative situation. Hulstijn calls this 'Basic Linguistic Cognition' in contradistinction to 'Higher Linguistic Cognition', which comprises much of the often literacy-related knowledge that native speakers possess to varying degrees. The idea is that if L2 learners were indistinguishable from native speakers in terms of basic linguistic cognition, they would be considered nativelike. We would avoid requiring L2 speakers to have knowledge of aspects of the language that not even all native speakers have access to in order to label them as nativelike. However, research results – to be recurrently reported in the chapters of this volume – show that remaining differences between near-native and native language users quite often tend not to be found in the areas of complex or literacy-related aspects of the L2, but instead often occur in quite simple and very frequent morphology that would

doubtless be part of 'basic language cognition' in Hulstijn's model. This predicts that empirical research on the basis of these notions would not change the incidence of nativelikeness among L2 users.

In our view, the only methodologically sustainable research procedure is to incorporate native speaker controls that are matched with the group of L2 users under investigation on relevant social and educational background factors. We argue that native speakers develop their native L1(s) in a variety of contexts. Specifically, a person may develop nativelikeness in one or more languages from birth and does not cease to be a native speaker of his/her L1 if foreign or second languages are added later in life (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam 2009; cf. Hulstijn 2015). This does not deny that the various circumstances surrounding one's L1 development may contribute to the variation that we see among native speakers of the same language (Cook 2002). Even in situations in which reduced exposure to a first language leads to L1 attrition, those speakers who continue to use their L1 are still native speakers, albeit producing constellations of linguistic features not found among speakers with full exposure to that language. In such cases, though, there is a limit somewhere between 'continued use' and 'ceased use' in which people would not even see themselves as the native speakers they once were.

In most discussions about the term 'native speaker', in contradistinction to what we just proposed, reference is made to 'monolingualism'. Indeed, we believe that the restricted view of native speakers as monolingual – at least partly a legacy of Chomskyan conceptions of a native speaker as 'ideal' and 'monolingual', and as operating in a 'homogeneous speech community' – has been harmful to second language research. Let us remind ourselves of Chomsky's original formulation of this issue:

> Linguistic theory is concerned with an ideal speaker–listener in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. (Chomsky 1965: 3)

Obviously, Chomsky was not referring to flesh-and-blood language users here. His theoretical construct was conceptualized in his specific theoretical framework with a specific purpose of specifying what the possible utterances in a language are and what they are not; it is highly alien to the idea of a real native speaker in sociolinguistically or usage-based theorizations. The latter would be closer to a lay perspective on the native speaker and closer to real speakers who could act as native controls in studies of second language use. Irrespective of the theoretical influences, the concentration on monolingual native speakers – rare phenomena in many parts of the world – has biased the debate about comparisons between native and non-native speakers.

With respect to lay native speakers of a language, it is important to underscore that they are able to recognize other native speakers. Apart from the fact that laypeople often claim to be able to tell native speakers apart from non-native speakers, there is research evidence to support this. One example is a listening experiment (see Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam 2009) in which speech samples, 20–30 seconds in length, from 195 near-native L2 users of Swedish, randomly mixed with speech samples of the same length from 20 native speakers of Swedish, were assessed by 10 linguistically naïve native speakers of Swedish. These judges were required to mark, for each sample, whether they believed it was produced by a native speaker of Swedish or not. The results showed that the 20 native speaker samples were effectively identified by the judges as originating from native speakers. Out of 200 judgements of native speaker samples (20 native speakers × 10 judges), only two samples were claimed to come from a non-native speaker: something that can easily be explained by inevitable noise in such an experiment. This 99 per cent correct identification of the 20 native speaker samples mixed in with 195 samples from near-native speakers – i.e. speakers who are not obviously distinguishable from native speakers – is a remarkable result. Among the 88 near-native speakers with age of onset of 12 or more, only 5 were deemed native by all 10 (or at least 9) of the judges; among the 107 near-natives with age of onset of no more than 11, 67 were judged as native speakers to the same extent as the native speakers (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam 2009: 269; see also Chapter 1). Interestingly, when this test procedure, adapted to French, was used in one of the programme studies with Swedish L1 long-residency users of L2 French in Paris, with the randomly mixed-in samples being from native speakers of French, the result in terms of identification of the French native speakers was exactly as in the L2 Swedish study: all native speakers of French were correctly identified by the native French judges (Forsberg Lundell, Bartning, Engel, Gudmundson, Hancock & Lindqvist 2014; see also Chapter 2).

Because native speakers are not homogeneous, every individual second language study that makes use of native speakers as controls needs to operationalize the category of native speaker for matching purposes and for selection of controls purposes. This needs to be carried out on the basis of fundamental language-external characteristics. In studies presented in this volume, operationalizations mainly involve ‘having been exposed to the language since birth’, ‘having been raised in the language throughout childhood’, ‘having had the language as a means of instruction throughout schooling’, ‘having lived throughout the lifespan in a society where the language is widely used in the environment’, etc.

Several of the chapters in this volume, with research results from parallel but widely differing settings, come to similar conclusions with respect to whether L2 users can attain proficiency levels that are indistinguishable from those of

native speakers. The chapters typically report near-native proficiency levels, but not proficiency levels 'in the range of native speakers' across the board, i.e. in all aspects of the L2. The notion of 'across the board' is important (see Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson 2003: 555). The L2 users of the various studies discussed in this volume are quite often in the range of native speakers on some features of the second language, but this does not answer the question of their ability to become nativelike. Nativelikeness makes little sense if it is not attained across the board. This is because L2 learners at *any* level of proficiency may be nativelike in some features at the same time as they are not at all nativelike in most, many, some or a few other features, respectively, depending on the level of L2 development at which they find themselves. Certainly, no single study can cover all aspects of any language, but a number of features can be selectively chosen on theoretical grounds and based on developing knowledge about near-native characteristics. And, as always, new knowledge develops cumulatively on the basis of multiple research efforts, not from the results of one study.

Similarly, in some of the chapters, results show that L2 users are in the range of native speakers in some communicative tasks, but when the communicative demands are increased, they are no longer in that range. An example of this is that participants appear to be nativelike in a role play task, but when the same participants are completing an online retelling task, requiring efficient retrieval of highly specific vocabulary, their results are significantly different from those of native speakers (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5). A related finding is revealed in an analysis of the information structure of participant utterances. The theme part, which includes known information, contains far fewer non-targetlike forms than the rheme part, the explanation being that the production of the rheme is cognitively more demanding, which in turn means that the cognitive resources left for language processing are reduced (Bartning, Forsberg Lundell & Hancock 2012; see also Chapter 2).

0.4 Theoretical and Practical Implications

The chapters in this book recurrently describe the differences that exist between native speakers and near-native L2 users; differences that are sometimes described as microscopic. Readers may ask whether such an enterprise is really worthwhile, when differences are so small and in many situations of no practical consequence. And, indeed, the kind of research we present is sometimes criticized for being unhelpful to learners, deterministic and pessimistic. We see it differently. To begin with, the L2 users whom we describe constitute the most successful second language learners to be encountered. Presenting them in research, therefore, could just as well be taken as motivating and quite positive examples for all second language learners. They have reached such

levels in their L2 that they are often indistinguishable from native speakers in their everyday life, most of them actively using the L2 in educational, professional and social settings. One could claim that the small differences that do exist do not matter at all in practice, and this is probably true in many, even most, situations.

Yet, there are several other reasons why this kind of research is worthwhile in and of itself. First, for some of the high-level L2 users, there may be situations where, in spite of their excellent abilities, they actually do encounter difficulties. This may, for example, be related to perception in noisy environments (see Chapter 1) or in literacy-related contexts (see Chapter 6). Secondly, we argue that the field of second language acquisition suffers from an empirical deficit when it comes to the most advanced levels of L2 proficiency. Research, and not least the debate among researchers, would profit from having a more detailed and exhaustive descriptive inventory of the most advanced stages. Reducing the empirical gap in knowledge is one main purpose of this research. There is no justification in having a more detailed and clearer picture of early and intermediate stages than of the most advanced stages of second language development. In actual fact, it may be claimed – as we and other researchers have previously done – that the most advanced stages are theoretically decisive, as this is where second language theory can be claimed to be ultimately put to the test. Finally, increased knowledge of the characteristics of these stages of L2 development would also have educational implications. Language teaching at the most advanced stages is probably more difficult than language teaching at lower levels just because so little is known about what characterizes language use and language development at high-level-proficiency stages. Therefore, the prospects of both theoretical and practical outcomes are the principal motives behind this book.

0.5 The Chapters

Chapter 1, *Age Effects on Language Acquisition, Retention and Loss: Key Hypotheses and Findings*, asks to what extent the ultimate attainment in an L2 differs from that of native speakers, and why the rate of nativelike ultimate attainment differs between child and adult second language learners. A related issue is the role of language aptitude for the attainment of high-level proficiency. The chapter addresses these questions on the basis of extensive empirical findings and discusses their implications for our understanding of age-related/maturational, bilingualism-related/cross-linguistic and aptitude-related determinants of language acquisition and their complex interrelations. The methodology includes a strict selection of participants and native controls, a large battery of elicitation techniques with demanding language tasks (covering aspects of phonology, grammar and lexical idiomaticity in both production and perception) and an aptitude component. The findings privilege an

interpretation of the lack of nativelikeness in L2 ultimate attainment in terms of maturational constraints rather than primarily as the effect of cross-linguistic (bilingualism) factors. Further, they suggest a role for aptitude as a contributing factor behind nativelike proficiency, strongly so for adult L2 learners, but also in L2 acquisition among bilingually developing children.

Chapter 2, *The Last Barriers in High-Level L2 Speech: Morphosyntax in Focus*, addresses the mastery of morphosyntax in L2 French in relation to the speakers' command of formulaic sequences, information structure, low-frequent vocabulary and fluency. The studies underlying this chapter were all based on the InterFra corpus of oral production by highly proficient L2 speakers (university students and 'cultural migrants', and by native controls). Possibilities of nativelikeness according to a 'pass-as-a-native' perception test are presented, as well as a proposal for establishing differentiated high-level-proficiency stages. A major finding is that highly proficient non-native speakers' mastery of morphosyntax clearly differs from that of native speakers in cognitively challenging contexts. In addition, linguistic criteria are provided that discriminate between different highly proficient levels of L2 mastery and between L2 mastery and L1 acquisition. These criteria are: non-targetlike morphosyntactic forms, formulaic sequences and low-frequent vocabulary in contrast to fluency and information structure, which become nativelike.

Chapter 3, *Discourse and Interaction in Highly Proficient L2 Users*, addresses pragmatic features in the speech of highly proficient Swedish users of L2 English, French, Italian and Spanish in comparison with native speaker production. Three domains of pragmatic competence representing an increasing scope constitute the focus: use of pragmatic markers, implementation of specific speech acts and variation with regard to socio-cultural alignment. Two aspects are highlighted: which is the role played by transfer in L2 performance and which of the three domains represents the strongest challenge to the learner. Results concerning pragmatic markers show that, although sophistication increases with higher proficiency, the level of native use is hardly ever attained, even in near-native users. Regarding speech acts, the L2 users closely resemble their native counterparts, except in one respect: the L2 users tend to make less conventional choices. With regard to socio-culture, alignment to native speaker behaviour clearly increases with cultural proximity. While transfer stands out as an essential factor in explaining how high-proficiency L2 users deal with the pragmatic challenges of their target language, no support can be lent to the hypothesis that high-scope domains are less effectively acquired than low-scope domains.

In Chapter 4, *Formulaic Language in Advanced Long-Residency L2 Speakers*, findings from different studies on L2 speakers' use of multi-word structures (MWSs) are presented. Most of these studies draw on the so-called 'Multi-Task' corpus, the Swedish participants of which all can be classified as 'cultural migrants' who had settled in Chile, France and the UK, motivated by their interest in these

countries. Two of the oral tasks in the corpus are in focus: a role play negotiation and an online retelling task. Multiword structures are categorized into four classes. Results show that, among lexical MWSs, phrasal structures are more difficult to master overall than clausal structures. Yet, a subcategory of the latter, the SBUs ('situation-bound utterances'), is not used in a targetlike manner. The online retelling task, because of its higher number of low-frequency phrasal MWSs, represents a stronger challenge to the L2 participants than the interactive and more 'pragmatic' role play. A corollary study addressing the relationship between MWS command, command of grammar, certain personality traits and language aptitude showed a positive correlation between MWS command and 'open-mindedness', 'cultural empathy' and also some aspects of aptitude.

Drawing on oral production data from highly proficient learners of English, French and Italian, Chapter 5, *Developing Lexical Complexity in Oral Production: Limitations and Possibilities of the Advanced L2 Learner*, presents findings from a number of studies on lexical complexity, a concept seen as being divided into two classifications: 'lexical sophistication' and 'lexical diversity'. The results show that attaining nativelike levels of lexical sophistication is very rare, even after massive exposure to the target language in combination with instruction. Thus, a group of Swedish longtime residents in the UK only reach native levels on one out of three tasks; in this group, however, a few individuals stand out as being equal to the native controls in the test. Also, no highly proficient users of L2 Italian attain native levels, whereas a few highly proficient users of L2 French do. In contrast, a longitudinal case study of one Italian L2 learner shows success within native range. With regard to lexical diversity in comparison with lexical sophistication, the analysis shows even lower targetlikeness both for speakers of L2 Italian and of L2 English.

Chapter 6, *Reading Comprehension in Advanced L2 Readers*, explores L2 reading in English among Swedish university students in comparison with British matched students. Results show that students of both backgrounds are equally able to learn from textbooks in English in naturalistic learning situations in spite of the fact that L2 readers are slower. When reading time is limited, L2 readers, in fact, span the whole range of reading comprehension bands covered by the L1 readers, but their distribution as a group is different, with the majority of the Swedish readers under a certain score and the majority of the British students over this score. A proportion of L2 readers match the performances of L1 peers on non-situated but contextualized tests of reading comprehension. However, only a share of those who perform at L1 levels on these tests reach L1 performance levels on tasks such as tests of vocabulary knowledge and (aural or reading) single-word identification reaction times or accuracy rates. L2 readers who achieve levels of comprehension as high as their L1 peers do not seem to read, problem-solve or process sentences more slowly. By contrast, such L2 readers have consistently smaller vocabularies than their L1 peers.

Chapter 7, *Polyglotism: A Synergy of Abilities and Predispositions*, observes that although anecdotal information abounds on polyglots' perceived exceptional language abilities, these issues have not previously been systematically researched. A polyglot is operationalized here as a person who, after puberty, acquired/learnt minimally six new languages, who commands at least six of these languages at an intermediate/advanced level of proficiency and who can presently use them relatively unimpeded in oral interaction. The chapter presents a picture of polyglot characteristics in three dimensions: motivation, language learning aptitude and systemization/empathization skills. The presentation is based specifically on a controlled investigation of 10 polyglots who have been extensively interviewed and tested. Results for each individual show high aptitude scores, a focus on linguistic form, a preference for explicit learning, average to high systemizing ability and a high level of language awareness. Empathization skills are more variable within the group. Results also show extremely high motivation, especially in terms of choice and executive motivation. It seems that the combination of an extremely strong motivation and high levels of language aptitude and language awareness is what makes polyglots such successful language learners.

Chapter 8, *What's the Target? A Folk Linguistic Study of Young Stockholmers' Constructions of Linguistic Norm and Variation*, challenges the question of what people are actually targeting in their language development and use, particularly in multilingual contexts. In a folk linguistic listener study involving 343 high school students, a range of data types were analysed: attitude scales, variety labelling and assessments of speakers' social and linguistic backgrounds. The chapter highlights some results pointing to a considerable divergence in the listeners' perceptions, with particular regard to speech representing what is here characterized as migration-related social dialects, where the speakers distance themselves from the multilingual slang. The results taken together offer a complex picture, where the listeners diverge considerably with regard to how they perceive such new non-standard varieties, as well as regarding what they conceive of as 'good Swedish'.

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