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REVIEWS

Richard Young, *Variation in Interlanguage Morphology*. New York: Peter Lang, 1991. xv + 279 pp.

This is Volume 1 in the series *Theoretical Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, edited by Simon Belasco. In general, the book deals with the important question of the systematicity of learners' language. The author endeavors to present "a new descriptive model for handling what other investigators have claimed to be random variations in performance." Morphology, in general and the plural inflections in the English interlanguage of Chinese learners, in particular, are chosen to test this model. An adaptation of a Ph. D. dissertation in Educational Linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania, the study examines how various factors like the social context of speech, the linguistic environment of a variable, and the tendency to omit redundant information, influence the learners' interlanguage. The book contains seven chapters, two appendices, a long bibliography, an author index, and a subject index. In addition, it has 19 illustrative tables and 12 explanatory figures scattered throughout the text.

An introduction, chapter 1 purports to locate the study of variation in interlanguage included in the book by presenting and clarifying some basic assumptions such as the distinction between the static and dynamic models of language and the relationship between variation, on the one hand, and systematicity, second language development, social context, and linguistic environment, on the other. A large number of works dealing with these topics are scrupulously presented and weighed. Consequently, the author bases his study on the following position: "The proper object of interlanguage research is the

situated speech of second language learners and the contexts in which that speech occurs.”

Chapter 2 is basically a review of the previous approaches to variation in second language acquisition as well as in creole and urban speech communities. In addition, the tools used by investigators to analyze variation, previous studies of variation in second language acquisition, and the theoretical frameworks concerned with the relation between variation and the process of second language acquisition are discussed in sufficient detail. The chapter concludes that “Variable rule analysis is the most theoretically neutral way of analyzing variation, since it does not make any of the assumptions of linearity inherent in implicational analysis” in addition to a higher degree of reliability.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to a skillful discussion of several theoretical issues related to the problem of methodology in second language acquisition research. While exploring the principles of methodology choice in his study, the author has made several judgments and evaluations. He has, for example, determined that introspective approaches to interlanguage (IL) are “inadequate” to study variation, that a quantitative approach to data analysis is “superior” to a qualitative approach, that a direct technique of data collection such as uncontrolled interviews “is superior to an indirect means,” that “the most appropriate linguistic level” to analyze IL variation is that of inflectional morphology, and that “a cross-sectional design for data collection and analysis will give an adequate picture of second language development only if contextual factors are carefully controlled.”

Chapter 4 describes in clear detail the design of the study. First, it justifies the choice of the (s) plural as a dependent linguistic variable. Then are given details concerning the language background and biographies of Chinese informants, the biographies of interviewers (Chinese and American), and an assessment of informants’ English proficiency by means of TOEFL scores and their division into high or low proficiency groups. Finally, information concerning data collection procedures is given.

In chapter 5, the nature of variation in (s) plural found in the data collected, along with possible explanations consisting of testable hypotheses, is described. A particular emphasis is given to the role of transfer from the informants’ first language. However, since transfer alone has been deemed “an inadequate explanation” for variation in (s) plural marking, other hypotheses are suggested. Among these hypotheses are those related to the effects of psychosocial factors, developmental factors, the linguistic environment (semantic, syntactic, and phonological factors), and communicative redundancy. It is concluded that “no one factor alone will account for all the variation in the data but rather that the four main groups of factors will simultaneously condition variation.”

Chapter 6 is a detailed description of the coding of the data, of the procedures for a “multivariate analysis” of the data using VARBRUL, first used by Cedergren and Sankoff (1974), in its latest formulation by Rousseau and Sankoff (1978), implemented for the IBM personal computer by Pintzuk (1987), and of the results of this analysis. It is

noticed that variation “is influenced by a complex of different independent contextual factors” among which are interlanguage development, linguistic environment, and communicative redundancy. It is also shown that the ethnicity of the interviewer has no bearing or influence on (s) plural marking. It is finally indicated that at the lower levels of proficiency, the phonological environment is “the most important determinant of (s) plural marking,” whereas at the high proficiency level, the most important determinant is “redundant plural marking elsewhere in the NP.”

In chapter 7, the results reported in chapter 6 are critically discussed and practical implications of the study for the teaching of English as a second language are presented. In general, it is reported that the results arrived at “confirm some of the hypotheses concerning variation in second language acquisition, fail to confirm others, and in some cases provide evidence of an effect on variation which is in the opposite direction to that hypothesized.” Details about each hypothesis are given in the main text or/and in table-form. It is concluded that what initially appears to be random linguistic variation “is in fact constrained by phonological and syntactic features of the linguistic environment, most especially in prototypical expressions of plural.” In addition, it is maintained that in terms of IL theory, this variation “is systematic.” The chapter ends with suggestion of new ways to teach plurals to learners of English as a second language in a more effective manner.

In sum, the book presents a “richer, more complex and more descriptively adequate” representation of learners’ interlanguage than has previously been offered. The presentation is clear and all difficult or unfamiliar terms are adequately explained. Several crucial hypotheses related to variation in interlanguage, especially morphological interlanguage, have been tested to the satisfaction of many a linguist and second language theoretician. The implications of the study for the teaching of morphological markers to learners of other languages are invaluable. The abundance of tables and illustrative figures, despite an occasional complexity, contribute to the understanding of several basic issues and results of the study. In short, the volume is of great benefit for linguists and people interested or involved in second language teaching.

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