Review of
Language Learning Environments: Spatial Perspectives on SLA

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Based on one of the central tenets of chaos/complexity theory (Larsen-Freeman, 1997) indicating the "interconnectedness of a variety of variables," numerous contextual elements come into play in any discussion of the evolving field of SLA and learning environments. There has been a rich variety of research in the literature over the past two decades on the role of the environment in second language acquisition, serving as an effective entry point to approach the study of the SLA process. Concerning the role of context, Larsen-Freeman's chaos theory indicates that internal and external elements interact with learning; this emphasizes the intricacy of spatial, contextual, interdisciplinary, and intra-disciplinary factors and the effect they exert on language learning, thus laying the basis for SLA. The general underlying concept of the book is to clarify the move from the state of being to one of how complex spatial and environmental elements affect the whole body of SLA. It is a readable 165 pages filled with rich academic insights. I would like to elaborate on the main tenets of various chapters and outline the benefits that may be gained from reading the book.

As the book's title indicates, it examines SLA through the lens of spatial perspectives and is inclusive of disciplines affecting SLA. Starting from the *where*, *what*, *why*, and *how* of SLA, the book provides a general framework for the field and captures a full range of specific details regarding the origin and impact of the learning spaces on the learning process. The book argues that second language learning begins with the global mobility of language-bearing assemblages (people, goods, and information), and learning happens due to the interplay and interaction among these variables. More explicitly, the book is based on a foundation of SLA and globalization in space, considering the locality of the learning. Therefore, moving from globalization to localization, the book provides a vivid basis and justification for how language research and practice interact and act

within the mentioned areas and are then triggered to the local needs, serving finally as the starting point for SLA. Given the complexity of language learning at both local and global levels, many spaces—rather than one fixed space—are considered. For example, considering individual and contextual differences, spatially located resources and spatially globalized resources can go hand in hand, the latter can be triggered by the former and vice versa. This justifies the universality of research findings. In a nutshell, what the book generally indicates is that despite considerable progress made in SLA, the four walls and the globally and locally specified spaces of the classroom require further research, practice, improvement, and innovation. At the same, the field includes a number of interacting parts in the black box of various spaces, all of which are at length explained in the book.

Regarding the book's various parts, the book consists of six chapters, organized around thematic and interrelated parts. Chapter one, "The Where of Second Language Learning," deals with spatial theory in SLA; the theory considers space as a container with unique features of its own and provides the background to learning factors. As a more postmodern viewpoint, in space theory, space matters because it accounts for the how and why of learning. The chapter deals with the production of the space perspective which struggles to connect globalization to localization, so that the individuals create individualized environments from the raw materials of much wider globalized spaces.

The second chapter deals with the "Theories of Space," specifically on spatial theory and critical spatial theory referring to a space broader than postmodernist theory and elaborates more on the other side of space associated with human geography. This section, in general, deals with the historical and philosophical details of space and the physical and social aspects of the space; on this basis, space is the product of social relations and this can be connected to the social and integration-based nature of language learning; it is not focused on the geographical aspects of the learners. More vividly, the general view is that powered by socio-cultural theory, second language learning takes place in a social context and is a social process. This scaffolds the reality that the dispersed geographical nature of language includes interconnected networks and events which are mobilized into globalization. A final point explained is that the ideological and cultural aspects of the environment must be embodied in the physical manifestation of the space.

Chapter three is on "Linguistics and the Spatiality of Language," specifically the spatiality of language in modern linguistics and the various schools of thought in linguistics. Based on a number of prominent historical figures in linguistics, such as Chomsky, Saussure, Halliday, the chapter is a move away from the theories of space to the philology, philosophy, and history, as well as the structure and development of language and implicit linguistic theories as a basis for SLA. The fourth chapter, "Language-Bearing Assemblages," is concerned with flat ontology theory, assemblage theory and mobilities. Assemblage theory indicates that language becomes spatially present in the particular forms of language-Bearing Assemblages, such as people, goods, and information. The way language interacts with social context accounts for the theory of flat ontology and assemblage theory. Consequently, language is not an assemblage in itself; it is rather a product of social assemblage. According to mobilities theory, the mobility of the people puts language in motion. This chapter in brief indicates that, from spatial perspectives, one of the roots of SLA lies in the extraterrestrial circulation of language-bearing assemblages. Drawing on philosophical speculations, Phil Benson relates the three to SLA and that the three can be one of the basis for SLA.

Chapter five, "Language Learning Environments," includes "areal" environments (as a geographical demarcated area) and "individual" environments (as the individual features assembled by the learner) (p. 7). This enables discussion on the kinds of environments from an ecological perspective, providing a conceptual toolkit serving as one of the integral bases for SLA. In fact, the four chapters

above were concerned with the spatiality of language in general. However, chapter five deals with the spatiality of second language learning environments. Here, the how and where of language learning are elaborated from an ecological point of view which connects in-class learning to out-of-class learning, demonstrating how they are inseparable from each other. In other words, an ecological view of language learning indicates that learning is environmentally constrained, so that the totality of the learners, their environment, and all other related and effective factors can interact with each other. This is a view firmly supported by Larsen-Freeman (1997). In the final chapter, "Space and SLA Research," Benson brings the findings of SLA researchers into the "where" of second language learning environments; here he touches on sociolinguistic issues and SLA, and formal and informal language learning settings, and finally, the author provides an autobiographical account of the studies affecting his point of view and ideology concerning language learning environments.

One of the main plus points of the book is that it is concerned with both empirical findings and theoretical justifications, and its inclusiveness in including a wide range of issues relevant to SLA makes it appealing to a broad audience. A nice addition to the book is that it includes a detailed index which makes the book more user-friendly. Moreover, every chapter includes a specific summarized review which makes the relationship between every chapter and SLA clearer to the reader. I did feel that the inclusion of a chapter on language assessment would have been useful, as language testing and assessment can in effect serve as an engine for the development of the field. Another point that may be considered is the inclusion of a chapter on virtual environments and the way they have revolutionized SLA, specifically since the beginning of COVID-19. There are currently five figures in the book, but further explanation for the figures and their relationship with SLA would be of assistance to readers. While each of the chapters clearly are related to one another, a separate conclusion chapter could serve to bring the whole discussion of the book together. These are, of course, very minor points, and the book provides excellent insights for students, teachers, and SLA researchers alike.

Reference

Larsen-Freeman, D. (1997). Chaos/complexity science and second language acquisition. *Applied Linguistics*, *18 (2),*141−165. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/18.2.141