

Review Article

Application of Variationist Sociolinguistic Method in SLA: A Research Overview of China and Abroad

Meng Yu^{1,2}¹Linguistics Research Institute, Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, China²School of Languages, Harbin Institute of Technology (Weihai), Weihai, China**Email address:**

mengyuemma@hit.edu.cn

To cite this article:Meng Yu. (2024). Application of Variationist Sociolinguistic Method in SLA: A Research Overview of China and Abroad. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 12(1), 7-15. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijll.20241201.12>**Received:** November 5, 2023; **Accepted:** December 22, 2023; **Published:** January 18, 2024

Abstract: Combining insights from variationist sociolinguistics and SLA, the present paper is situated within the SLA research which applies variationist sociolinguistic method. The quantitative research method in sociolinguistic variation theory provides a new perspective for the research of SLA. This paper expounds and analyzes the SLA research in the light of variation theory, particularly focusing on the variation research of interlanguage both in China and abroad, and further presents the application of variationist sociolinguistic method in interlanguage research. The combination of variation theory and SLA research is crucial to deepen the development of SLA research, specifically, in L2 learning and teaching to provide suggestions to L2 learners and teachers. In so doing, L2 learners do not use or underuse the appropriate form in context, such that there is a form-function mismatch in their interlanguage. Specifically, first, although the quantitative research methods in sociolinguistic variation theory provide a new perspective for second language acquisition research, it should not be regarded as the only effective way to study interlanguage variation. To accurately analyze the interlanguage of learners, sometimes other methods such as oral reports and participant ethnography are also needed. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods can help obtain more reliable research results. Secondly, the phenomenon of variation should not only remain at the level of pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, etc., and the writing system can also be studied as a phenomenon of variation. In the process of acquiring the target language, it is also worth exploring whether learners will imitate the writing habits of native speakers, or whether learners will be influenced by their own mother tongue to create new forms of writing. Finally, although the research findings on interlanguage variation have implications for classroom teaching, when applied to second language acquisition classrooms, teachers need to carefully consider their classroom applicability.

Keywords: Variationist Sociolinguistic Method, SLA, Interlanguage, Sociolinguistic Variation Theory

1. Introduction

The beginnings of SLA are usually dated in the late 1960s or early 1970s. It was established as an independent discipline marked by “*The significance of learners’ errors*” and “*Interlanguage*” [71, 10]. The leading figure in SLA for generation, Corder, in his article constituted the origins of SLA as a field of research. A theoretical base for examining SLA had been proposed and the field of SLA was born. In the mid-1980s, second language research focused on its ontology, and discussed its characteristics and development direction. Then, second language research began to explore

the internal factors affecting SLA (e.g. psychological factors, native language transfer, learning strategies, etc.), external factors (e.g. society, culture, education, information technology, etc.) and individual differences of learners. Many scholars devoted to this field and contributed greatly to theoretical establishment of SLA research. Such as Chomsky’s legacy is clearly evident in groundbreaking SLA work, including Selinker’s (1972) on the notion of interlanguage, and Dulay, Burt, and Krashen’s (1982) model of SL speech processing.

SLA research involves three major fields as interlanguage, internal factors and external factors of L2 learners. Its

fundamental concepts principally include non-native speaker (NNS), learner, and interlanguage, which are prefigured as monolithic elements in SLA. In the past two decades, the influence of sociolinguistic theory on SLA has been increasing. It was believed that social environment affects SLA in every corner. [4] This trend makes researchers turn their attention to the impact of sociocultural factors on SLA gradually. Sociolinguistics focuses on influence of social environment on language use, that is, one's language use would differentiate with changes of social factors (e.g. social class, gender, age, speech style, etc.) or other language factors (e.g. context, register, etc.). Sociolinguistic variation theory further explores the variation phenomena as well as influencing factors in second language use and pays attention to dynamic changes of second language ability. [37] As for sociolinguistic variation theory in SLA research, it is to research the relationship between variables in social environment and interlanguage output, namely, the interdependence between social environment of interlanguage use and L2 learners' cognitive processes. [91]

During the past 50 years, SLA research method has been developing fast and plays a prominent role in promoting SLA research. Previous studies on SLA mostly applied the method of native language research, pedagogy research or other related disciplines research. In the 1970s, Selinker's article "Interlanguage" was agreed that universal grammar was not as same as generative grammar. Some important principles like structure dependency principle, subadjacency principle and binding principle were put forward. Moreover, parameters including null-subject parameter, wh-parameter and verb raising parameter were set; from late 1980s to 1990s, more methods were applied in SLA research, namely, linguistic method, psychological method, educational method, sociocultural method and neurological method. With the in-depth research of SLA, its research methods have gradually expanded. Cumming (1994) introduced seven different research methods, including Cohen's (1984) self-oral-report-learning strategy, Connor's (1984) discourse analysis, Tarone's (1985) interlanguage variability analysis, Hornberger's (1987) ethnographic research, Spada's (1990) classroom activity analysis, Auerbach's (1993) participatory action research and Pennycook's (1994) critical education act. Since the beginning of this century, psychological cognitive method and neurocognitive experimental method have been gradually becoming the forefront of second language research.

In summary, second language research has experienced the transformation from theoretical construction to theoretical verification, from description to interpretation, from qualitative method to quantitative method, and from single discipline to cross-discipline.

Since the 1980s, language variation has become a new paradigm in SLA research by describing impact of language and sociocultural factors on second language output to explain the variability of second language. [3] L2 scholars and teachers increasingly agree that second language teaching should enable learners to use the target language in

various social environments [43], and further point out the significance of sociolinguistic perspective over L2 learning and teaching. Variationist sociolinguistics in the past two decades or so has brought its theoretical and methodological apparatus to bear on L2 research, for example, by Bayley (1996), Regan (2004), Preston (1989) and Young (1991). Variationist sociolinguistic method has been applied in SLA research to explore, to be more exactly, learner, interlanguage or variation in invariable contexts such as Adamson (1989), Bayley (1996), and Young (1991). Thus, the specific role of variation in SLA has been addressed [23] and the nature of SLA as a domain of research and the way in which it contributes to the teaching and learning of foreign languages is explored. The research of sociolinguistic variation has provided a range of insights, which are related to use of sociolinguistic variants by learners in different learning contexts.

2. An Overview of Sociolinguistic Variation Theory

Sociolinguistic variation theory can be traced back to the 1960s. [68] Sociolinguists represented by William Labov (1927-) pioneered the research of language variation and made it one of the key fields of sociolinguistics. The research of modern language variation started with Labov's *The Social History of a Sound Change on the L2and of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts* in 1963, followed by *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* [45] and *Empirical Foundations for a Theory of Language Change*. [84] These classic works are presented as milestones of development of sociolinguistic variation research. The significance of Labov's research to SLA is that it suggests that interlanguage gradually transits from one's native language to target language and turns to a second language in the end. Under the framework of "labovian paradigm" and the "dynamic paradigm", sociolinguists use sociolinguistic method, for instance, sociolinguistic interview and variable rule analysis to explore generation mechanism of interlanguage variation, namely, how interlanguage variation is affected by language internal factors, situational factors and social factors. [48] The variation in L2 learners' language is thus called "interlanguage variation", existing at all levels of language, and forms a cross-research of sociolinguistics and SLA.

Sociolinguistics takes variation as an inherent characteristic of language and makes it the core research problem of sociolinguistics. Variation theory was applied to SLA research in the 1980s. It mainly focuses on the influence of social environmental factors on L2 learners' interlanguage development, including the identity and roles of two counterparts of communication, the topics and tasks of communication, and the grammatical forms used in communication situations. Variation theory holds that variability is a basic attribute of language. The occurrence of these variations is, firstly, due to the structure system of language, and then, it is inseparable from interaction between

language and social environment. The form of language variation is constrained by language and many other social factors. Thus, it is commonly admitted that variation research and the progress of society are interdependent. As in practice, variation theory has been applied in many fields such as education, law and employment. It is theoretically significant and valuable to analyze language variation of different speech communities at different levels, including phonological, lexical, morphological, syntactic and discourse. To research causes of language variation from perspectives as language's internal environment, social factors and cognitive factors through variationist sociolinguistic method is an innovative way to explore the essence of language.

Generally speaking, L2 research has been experiencing three stages: no transfer from one's native language (Platzack, 1996; Epstein et al., 1996; Meisel, 1997); full transfer from one's native language (Schwartz et al., 1994; Clahsen et al., 1996) and partial transfer from one's native language (Vainikka et al., 1996; Eubank, 1993/1994, Eubank et al., 1997) Consequently, language variation occurs not only when one is using his/hernative language, but also in the process of one's SLA. [19]

3. Variationist Sociolinguistic Method in SLA Research

Although the research of the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation has only been consolidated as a new wave of research within SLA research during just over the last decade, linguistic variation had nonetheless been and continues to be an important issue that SLA research has grappled with. The process of applying variationist sociolinguistic method in SLA is not smooth at the beginning stage. The early studies of language variation and SLA failed to cooperate with each other very well. Preston (1996) attributed this failure to three main factors: in the first place, the dominant position of formalism research in SLA; secondly, decreasing attention paid by sociolinguistics to "socially sensitive pragmatics"; thirdly, misunderstanding of basic concepts and research method of variation linguistics from SLA researchers. For example, Prof. Ellis, an expert in the field of SLA, has misunderstood the basic concepts of variation linguistics. According to Preston's point of view, Ellis' definition of "variable rule" (Ellis, 1985) is, as a matter of fact, the definition of "context sensitive categorical rule". One of Ellis' most famous experiments is to observe how an 11-year-old child uses two different negative rules "no + V" and "not + V" to express the same imperative meaning with the same environment (place, language and discourse). He insists that these two rules belong to the category of free variation because they have the same meaning seemingly. The changes when children use them are unsystematic and random, which denies the systematicity of interlanguage variation. On the contrary, other scholars point out that features of second language are presented as being systemic, variable and dynamic. Long (1990) set out the agreed core findings

constituting the least a second language theory needs to explain. These include: Interlanguages exhibit systematicity and variability... Interlanguage systematicity, including adherence to regular developmental sequences and systematic production of non-target like forms never modeled in the input indicates a strong cognitive contribution on the learner's part. Still, fossilization, overgeneralization and language transfer are also taken on as features of second language. [71, 38] Additionally, a wide range of studies over many years since Labov's pioneering work in the 1960s shows that variation is systematic and not random as had been previously supposed. [53] Factually, current SLA theory is no more a static representational system than is L2 interlanguage. Both are states of being in evolving dynamic systems.

Among various methods mentioned in the introduction, the most prominent feature of language variation method is to introduce quantitative research method into language research. It pays special attention to the relationship between language variables and social variables as well as the collection and analysis of natural corpus in practice, so as to put forward a new way to promote language research in both synchronic and diachronic way.

3.1. Variation Research of Interlanguage

Language variation is closely related to SLA and foreign language learning. In the process of learning a second language, L2 learners always subconsciously compare the language they are learning and the language they have learned and transfer from one to the other. The concept of "interlanguage" proposed by Selinker (1972) illustrates that the language and content produced in this process are related to language variation. *Interlanguage* refers to a transitional language system formed by L2 learners in the process of learning between their native language and the target language. It is a natural language, a continuum starting from a native language to a target language. It is neither native language nor the target language, but a dynamic language system with its own mechanism and gradually closer to the correct form of the target language as learning proceeds. Interlanguage is the "approximate system" of learners. It contains the characteristics of the learners' native language and target language, yet cannot be fully explained by them. By linguistic variation, we understand the learner's variable use of two or more second language forms to express the same functional value. If L2 learners do not use or underuse the appropriate form in context, that means such that there is a form-function mismatch in their interlanguage. [54] Thus, exploring the internal principles and underlying reasons of interlanguage is of great significance to SLA and foreign language teaching.

In SLA, interlanguage is regarded as a variant, and variability is a key feature of interlanguage development. [80] It might be affected by factors as language, social environment, the speaker's personality and other contexts. Consequently, the research of interlanguage variation has become the main content of the research of SLA variation.

The research of interlanguage variation began in the 1970s. Many previous studies showed that some phonological, morphological and syntactic features of interlanguage are constrained by linguistic and socio-cultural factors. [87, 78, 12] Today, much attention has been paid to the research of interlanguage variation and explored it from various perspectives by Chinese and foreign researchers. In the middle and late 1990s to the year of 2005, interlanguage research focused on the damage of intermediary sentence method. To be more specific, it was about the relationship between second language inflectional morphology acquisition and syntactic knowledge acquisition [64, 74] including “global impairment” [55, 56], “local impairment” [5, 6], “failed functional features hypothesis”. [81] The research of this period offered implications and applications in L2 testing and teaching. In the following decades, researchers devoted to exploring the ultimate state of second language. For instance, some scholars were concerned about “interface hypothesis” [76, 75] including internal interface and external interface. But this type of research was not domain-wide but variable-dependent. [76, 75]

The research of interlanguage variation by foreign scholars can be divided into two categories: the research of individual L2 learners and the research of group interlanguage corpus. The former is mainly a follow-up research to find some characteristics of the acquisition process in different phases and verify some results of the group research [34, 35, 70] The latter studies the group performance of language learners and reflects the general impact of social and cultural mechanisms on language learning and SLA. [8] The previous research results include: L2 learners’ accuracy may vary according to different classroom tasks [79], L2 learners’ tendency of mastering the typical order of English lexical and syntactic rules [42], the degree of native language influence on SLA [27], the role of comprehensible input in language acquisition [44, 21], L2 learners’ attention to the effectiveness of language forms [83], the effectiveness of explicit error correction when changing language behaviors [46], and the way of learners usually express in the target language environment. [16]

The above research results of interlanguage variation have direct implications to English teaching. In the case of English, as a lingua franca, a vast number of non-native speakers routinely interact with other non-native speakers. There are some notable exceptions such as Adamson’s (1989), Bayley’s (1996) respective work. For instance, Bayley (1996) focused on t/d deletion among Chinese adult learners. According to his survey, higher levels of deletion among those speakers were proved high degrees of social integration whereas speakers with lower degrees of integration.

The research of interlanguage variation in China started with the introduction of foreign interlanguage variation studies. Wu Bo (1997) elaborated the relationship between dynamic paradigm theory and interlanguage variation research, and confirmed that dynamic paradigm had great potential in describing and explaining interlanguage variation. Song Mengli, and Wang Qiang (1998), Dai Manchun (1999)

and Wang Lunan (2000) introduced the theory of interlanguage variation from different angles. Some scholars pioneered the research on variation in a specific field, e.g. Cai Jinting (2004) explored variation research in the field of tense/aspect acquisition, while other scholars did empirical research on interlanguage variation in syntax (Liu Shaolong, 1998; Yu Shanzhi, 2005; Li Yu, 2014), vocabulary (Xu Daming, 2008; Guo Hongjie et al., 2012), form (Cai Jinting et al., 2005; Yang Yanfeng, 2010; Guo Hongjie et al., 2010; Hu min, 2011; Yang Jie et al., 2012), phonetics (Mei Li, 2005; Yan Yan, 2010; Guo Hongjie et al., 2010; Chen Chen, 2011) and other aspects. In terms of theoretical innovation, Cai Jintang and Zhu Lixia (2004) proposed the interlanguage variation model as a theoretical framework for the research of interlanguage variation, and further studied the influence of language factors on Chinese college students’ use of the general past tense in English interlanguage within this framework.

The above studies on interlanguage variation, covering from theory to practice, from qualitative to quantitative, from overall to specific, employ various research methods to research interlanguage variation and provide theoretical support and practical enlightenment for classroom teaching and learning of SLA.

3.2. Application of Variationist Sociolinguistic Method in Interlanguage Research

Quantitative analysis is mostly applied in variation theory to explore the relationship between sociocultural factors and language use to reveal the variability of interlanguage. Language variation theory not only studies the variation phenomenon at a certain stage in the development process of interlanguage, but also pays attention to the variation mechanism of interlanguage variation over time. Meanwhile, it recognizes social attributes of language learners and pays attention to individual differences of language learners. Due to its broad research horizon, variationist sociolinguistic method is applied widely in interlanguage research. Since the 1990s, many scholars have carried out a variety of studies on interlanguage by variationist sociolinguistic method. Regan (1996), with the method of longitudinal tracking, studied the development process of L2 learners’ social language ability; Preston’s sociolinguistic model (2002) integrated factors as language, social culture and time into psychological mechanism of language acquisition, so as to explain the variation of interlanguage; Rehner et al. (2003) through quantitative analysis studied the relationship between L2 learners’ social characteristics (e.g. age, gender, social class, etc.) and their L2 use.

There was a general tendency in early interlanguage studies which attempted to find the one recurring factor from contextual factors to solve the problem of learners’ interlanguage variation. These single factors, such as “speech adaptation” of Beebe [7], “topic concern” of Tarone [79] and “planned and unplanned discourse output” of Ellis [22], all presented a certain extent of influence. However, interlanguage variation is not the result of a single factor. It is

affected by a diversity of contextual factors, including the internal factors of language as well as external factors like the learner's age, gender and speech style, etc.. These factors do not work alone, but are closely related to each other. Therefore, multifactor research is expected to be the main tendency of interlanguage variation research. So, which of the above factors is the real reason for the variation? Are there any other factors that have not been studied? Will these factors have different effects on different groups of learners?

To analyze the function of several factors at the same time, the "variable rule analysis" in the research of sociolinguistic variation theory might be the most appropriate quantitative analysis method. This method is developed on the basis of "variable rules". It is a multiple regression analysis method commonly used in the research of sociolinguistic language variation for the purpose of analyzing naturalistic speech data. It is suitable for the choice of different language forms influenced alternately by diverse environmental factors, including language structure factors and internal social environmental factors. [20] Though maximum probability estimation method, the variable rule analysis method can select the truly relevant factors from dozens of groups of environmental factors and confirm their values. These values can be used to explain the influence of various factors related to situation and context on the speaker's choice of language form. More than that, it enables researchers to estimate the relative intensity of various independent linguistic and social factors in any speech activity. At present, two widely used computer programs put in use are VARBRUL and GOLDVARB. These two computer programs are providing a new way of SLA research. Such studies have turned to computational analysis of this variation through the application of the VARBRUL and GOLDVARB computer programs. Take VARBRUL as an example, it captures the relative effect of a range of contextual factors on the speaker's choice of a particular variant, such that a constraint order can be established concerning those constraints which most favor use of a particular variant as opposed to those that do so to a relatively lesser extent. [54]

3.3. Contributions of Variationist Sociolinguistic Method to SLA Research

The combination of variation theory and SLA provides a new perspective to the development of SLA research. Specifically, the variationist sociolinguistic method provides a precise way to research the impact of native language transfer. As long as the speaker's native language is included in the statistical model of language variation, it can test the influence of the speaker's native language by a series of variables. Moreover, sociolinguists' detailed analysis of variant forms in speech communities around the world provides a more realistic perspective than traditional methods for of SLA research, which can explain how the target language works more effectively. Is SLA a process of repeated reorganization? Is it progressive along a multidimensional continuum? Variationist sociolinguistic method can be used to explore the above questions through

testing. It advocates comparing learners' native language variation patterns with target language variation patterns to evaluate acquisition. This comparison is helpful to research how speakers use their language resources in social situations in order to understand SLA and sociolinguistics better. The investigation of a range of sociolinguistic variables across various learning contexts provides significant insights into the SLA of sociolinguistic variation.

Variation theory considers a wider range of linguistic and social factors from the perspective of sociolinguistics, and delivers a more comprehensive and detailed research method for SLA, which is of great significance to explore personalized teaching. It shows the variability of language by comparing its dynamic process, and further reveals the systematic attribute of language. It is a useful attempt to apply the quantitative paradigm of sociolinguistics to SLA variation research.

What's more, there have been methodological advances that make research on variation more detailed and comprehensive and, therefore, more likely to impact disciplines outside language variation [9, 28], leading teaching and learning of foreign languages taking into the political and societal context consideration, but not taking language itself alone. Variationist sociolinguistic method contributes to explore how different types of educational input may impact differentially on SLA. Such an experimental method is exemplified in Lyster's (1994) research. It was illustrated that the impact of teaching sociolinguistic norms through explicit methods in the classroom, leads to very positive sociolinguistic outcomes for the learner.

4. Implications

The transformation from native language to target language is dynamic and complex, which is affected by factors like internal factors of language, situational factors and social factors. The research results of interlanguage variation deliver enormous impact on English classroom teaching, including revealing the problems, internal mechanism and learning paths in the process of foreign language learning. Students might go through a complex and relatively long acquisition process in order to master English well. The pedagogical materials are required to adequately incorporate such sociolinguistic variation so as to give rise to genuine classroom interaction. To be more specific, the language rules that students seem to have learned in class may not be correctly used or really learned in the natural environment. And genuine opportunities for use of informal variants may be restricted for both teachers and learners alike. Because in more natural and casual occasions, the communicative function of language goes first, and simultaneously, language rules become second. Consequently, the interference from one's native language increases, resulting in a large number of interlanguage variations, which need long-term learning and application to adapt and change; Teachers are advised to observe and

analyze various variations (interlanguage) in students' learning and their use of English according to different environments, and offer different requirements for students according to different occasions to guide their learning. In particular, it is necessary to create various environments for students to learn and use English, and allow students to take time in progressing from their native language to target language.

In addition, there is a wide impact on foreign language learning by sociocultural factors, which would affect phonology, morphology and syntax in interlanguage. In foreign language teaching, teachers are expected to pay attention to the variation of language at different levels, including pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax and discourse to help students transfer positively from their native language in the process of foreign language learning. Students' accuracy may vary according to different classroom tasks. Therefore, teachers are supposed to guide students to standardize their use of foreign languages in different topics and different types of tasks.

5. Conclusion

This research expounds the research on SLA from the perspective of variation theory of sociolinguistics, reviews the variation research of interlanguage in China and abroad, and further deliberates application of variationist sociolinguistic method in interlanguage research. Although the quantitative research method in variation theory provides a new perspective for the research of SLA, it is necessary to see that it is not the only effective method to research interlanguage variation. In order to analyze learners' interlanguage accurately and describe learners' performance systematically, it sometimes needs to be supplemented by other methods, such as oral report and participant ethnography. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods will help obtain more reliable research results. Furthermore, the phenomenon of variation might not only stay at the levels of pronunciation, vocabulary and syntax, but also the character system can be studied as a phenomenon of variation. Will learners imitate the writing habits of native speakers? Or will learners create new text forms by influence of their native language in the process of target language acquisition? These are questions also worth exploring. Finally, although the findings of interlanguage variation have implications to classroom teaching, teachers need to be cautious when these findings are applied in classroom SLA. All in all, as a burgeoning area of SLA research, future studies within the SLA wave of sociolinguistic research promise to be as rich as past studies and bring fruitful insights to SLA.

Declarations

Ethical Approval

Not applicable.

Authors' Contributions

Not applicable.

Funding

This research was funded by Shandong Provincial Philosophy and Social Science Planning Project, 20CWZJ05; The Fourth Tutor Academic Leadership Project of Shanghai International Studies University, 41004289; Undergraduate Teaching Reform Research Project of Harbin Institute of Technology (Weihai), 2023KTZZ02.

Availability of Data and Materials

Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest

Not applicable.

References

- [1] Adamson H. D. 1989. Variation theory and second language acquisition [M]. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press.
- [2] Auerbach, E. 1993. Reexamining English only in the EL2 classroom [J]. *TESOL Quarterly* (27).
- [3] Bayley, R. 1996. Competing constraints on variation in the speech of adult Chinese learners of English [A]. *L2A and Linguistic Variation* [C]. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- [4] Bayley, R. & Tarone. 2012. Variationist perspectives [A]. Gass & Mackey. *Handbook of L2A* [C]. New York: Routledge.
- [5] Beck, M. 1997. Regular verbs, past tense and frequency: tracking down a potential source of NS/NNS competence differences. *Second Language Research* 13: 93-115.
- [6] Beck, M. 1998. L2 acquisition and obligatory head movement: English-speaking learners of German and the local impairment hypothesis. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 20: 311-348.
- [7] Beebe, L. M. 1977. The influence of the listener on code-switching [J]. *Language Learning* (27).
- [8] Beebe, L. 1980. Socio linguistics variation and style shifting in L2A [J]. *Language Learning* (30).
- [9] Blackwell, S., & Quesada, M. (2012). Third-person subjects in native speakers' and L2 learners' narratives: Testing (and revising) the Givenness Hierarchy for Spanish [A]. In K. L. Geeslin & M. D'iaz-Campos (Eds.), *Selected proceedings of the 14th Hispanic Linguistics Symposium* (pp. 142-164). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
- [10] Block. D. 2003. *The Social Turn in L2A* [M]. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- [11] Bo, W. 1997. On the Variation of Interlanguage [J]. *Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages*, (2): 5-11.
- [12] Broner, M. 2001. Impact of interlocutor and task on first and second language use in a Spanish immersion program (CARLA Working Paper No. 18) [R]. Minneapolis: CARLA.

- [13] Chen, C. 2011. A Study on Phonetic Variations in Thai Students' Acquisition of Chinese Level and Falling Tones [J]. *Journal of Research on Education for Ethnic Minorities*, (1): 79-85.
- [14] Clahsen, H., S. Eissenbeiss & M. Penke 1996. Lexical learning in early syntactic development. In H. Clahsen (ed.), *Generative Perspectives on Language Acquisition*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 129-159.
- [15] Cohen, A. D. 1984. On taking language tests: What the students report [J]. *Language Testing* (1).
- [16] Cohen, A. & Olshtain, E. 1981. Developing a measure of sociocultural competence: The case of apology [J]. *Language Learning* (31).
- [17] Connor, U. 1984. A research of cohesion and coherence in EL2 students' writing [J]. *Papers in Linguistics: International Journal of Human Communication* (17).
- [18] Cumming, A. 1994. Alternatives in TESOL research: Descriptive, interpretive, and ideological orientations [J]. *TESOL Quarterly* (28).
- [19] Daming, X. & Jingwei, Z. & Hong, W. 2008. A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Lexical Variation in English Interlanguage [J]. *Foreign Languages Research*, (6): 1-9.
- [20] Daming, X. 1999. The Use of VRA in Bilingual Research: A Singapore Case [J]. *Contemporary Linguistics*, (3): 25-35.
- [21] Ehrlich, S. & Avery, P. & Yorio, C. 1989. Discourse structure and the negotiation of comprehensible input [J]. *Studies in L2A* (11).
- [22] Ellis, R. 1985. *Understanding L2A* [M]. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [23] Ellis, R. (1999). Item versus system learning: Explaining free variation [J]. *Applied Linguistics*, 20, 460-480.
- [24] Epstein, S. D., S. Flynn & G. Martohardjono. 1996. Second language acquisition: theoretical and experimental issues in contemporary research. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 19: 677-758.
- [25] Eubank, L. 1993/1994. On the transfer of parametric values in L2 development. *Language Acquisition* 3: 183-208.
- [26] Eubank, L., J. Bischof, A. Huffstutler, P. Leek & C. West. 1997. "Tom eats slowly cooked eggs": thematic-verb raising in L2 knowledge. *Language Acquisition* 6: 171-199.
- [27] Gass, S., & Selinker, L. 1992. *Language Transfer in Language Learning* [M]. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- [28] Geeslin, K. L., & Gudmestad, A. (2010). An exploration of the range and frequency of occurrence of forms in potentially variable structures in second-language Spanish [J]. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 32, 433-463.
- [29] Hawkins, R. & C. Y. Chan. 1997. The partial availability of Universal Grammar in second language acquisition: The 'failed functional features hypothesis'. *Second Language Research* 13: 187-226.
- [30] Hongjie, G. & Qinqin, Z. 2012. Variation in the Acquisition of the Indefinite Article by Chinese EFL Learners, [J]. *Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages*, (1): 54-58.
- [31] Hongjie, G. & Qinqin, Z. 2010. The Influence of Verb Saliency on Past Tense Marking in English Interlanguage [J]. *Foreign Language Learning Theory and Practice*, (1): 6-13.
- [32] Hongjie, G. & Min, W. 2010. The Variation of (-t d) Deletion in EFL Interlanguage [J]. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, (5): 73-78.
- [33] Hornberger, 1987. *Hymes's Linguistics and Ethnography in Education* [M]. University of Pennsylvania.
- [34] Huebner, T. 1983. *A Longitudinal Analysis of the Acquisition of English* [M]. Ann Arbor: Karoma Publishers.
- [35] Huebner, T. 1985. System and variability in interlanguage syntax [J]. *Language Learning* (35).
- [36] Hui, H. & Jinshi, S. 2016. The Contribution of Sociolinguistic Theory to Research in Second Language Acquisition [J]. *Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education*, (3): 23-27.
- [37] Jie, Y. & Jing, L. & Lin, Z. 2012. A Study on the Variation of the Perfect Aspect of Verbs Based on Modified Adverbial Types [J]. *GUANGXI SHEHUI KEXUE*, (8): 157-160.
- [38] Jinting, C. 2004. The studies of tense / aspect acquisition [J]. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, (5): 10-15.
- [39] Jinting, C. 2004. The Influence of the Chinese Aspect Mark "le" on the General Past Tense Mark in English Interlanguage [J]. *Foreign Languages Research*, (1): 23-27.
- [40] Jinting, C. & Lixia, Z. 2004. The Theoretical Frameworks for Interlanguage Variation Study: Inheritance and Development [J]. *FOREIGN LANGUAGE RESEARCH*, (3): 88-95.
- [41] Jinting, C. & Hui, C. 2005. The Effect of Verb Saliency on the Simple Past Marking English Interlanguage [J]. *Journal of Sichuan International Studies University*, (6): 92-97.
- [42] Johnston, M. 1985. *Syntactic and Morphological Progressions in Learner English* [M]. Canberra: Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs.
- [43] Kimberly, L. Gee, Avizia, Y. L. 2014. *Sociolinguistic and L2A: Learning to Use Language in Context* [M]. New York, NY: Routledge.
- [44] Krashen, S. 1985. *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications* [M]. London: Longman.
- [45] Labov, W. 1966. *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* [M]. Washington, DC.: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- [46] Lightbown, P. 1985. Great expectations: Second-language acquisition research and classroom teaching [J]. *AppliedLinguistics* (6).
- [47] Li, M. 2005. Variability in Pronouncing Chinese blade-palatalinitials by Japanese SLA Learners [J]. *Chinese Teaching in the World*, (1): 97-105.
- [48] Li, T. 2016. Review of Domestic Research on Interlanguage Variation [J]. *Journal of University of Science and Technology Beijing (Social Sciences Edition)*, (6): 25-30.
- [49] Long, M. H. (1990). The least a second language acquisition theory needs to explain. *TESOL Quarterly*, 24, 649-666.
- [50] Lunan, W. 2000. Research on Variations in Second Language Acquisition [J]. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, (5): 32-37.

- [51] Lyster, R. (1994). The effect of functional-analytic teaching on aspects of French immersion students' sociolinguistic competence [J]. *Applied Linguistics*, 15: 263–287.
- [52] Manchun, D. 1999. A Debate on Interlanguage Variability and Its Implication [J]. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, (1): 15-18.
- [53] Martin H. & Isabelle L. & Vera R. 2006. The SLA of a phonological variable: the case of /l/ deletion in French [J]. *French Language Studies* (16) 1–24.
- [54] Martin H. & Mougeon, R. & Dewaele, J. M. 2013. Sociolinguistics and Second Language Acquisition [A]. *The Oxford Handbook of Sociolinguistics* Edited by Robert Bayley, Richard Cameron, and Ceil Lucas.
- [55] Meisel, J. 1997. The acquisition of the syntax of negation in French and German: contrasting first and second language acquisition. *Second Language Research* 13: 227-263.
- [56] Meisel, J. 1998. Revisiting Universal Grammar. Paper presented at Second Language Research Forum 1998 (SLRF 98), Hawaii, Oct. 1998.
- [57] Mengli, S. & Qiang, W. 1998. The Variability of Interlanguage and Second Language Acquisition [J]. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, (1): 43-44.
- [58] Min, H. 2011. A study of the variation of the plural marking in Chinese EFL students' writing [J]. *Modern Foreign Languages (Quarterly)*, (2): 187-194.
- [59] Pennycook, A. 1994. *The Cultural Politics of Teaching English As an International Language* [M]. London: Longman.
- [60] Platzack, C. 1996. The initial hypothesis of syntax: a minimalist perspective on language acquisition and attrition. In H. Clahsen (ed.), *Generative perspectives on language acquisition: empirical findings, theoretical considerations, cross-linguistic comparisons*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins, 369-414.
- [61] Preston, D. R. 1996. Variationist perspectives on L2A [A]. In R. Bayley and D. R. Preston (eds.), *L2A and Linguistic Variation* [C]. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- [62] Preston, D. (1989). *Sociolinguistics and Second Language Acquisition* [M]. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [63] Preston, D. 2002. A Variationist perspective on L2A: Psycholinguistic concerns [A]. In Kaplan (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Applied Linguistics* [C]. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [64] Prévost, P & L. White. 2000. Missing surface inflection or impairment in second language acquisition? evidence from tense and agreement. *Second Language Research* 16: 103-133.
- [65] Regan, V. 1996. Variation in French interlanguage: Alongitudinal research of sociolinguistic competence [A]. In 55. Bayley, 57. R. & Preston (eds.). *L2A and Linguistic Variation* [C]. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- [66] Regan, V. (2004). From speech community back to classroom: What variation analysis can tell us about the role of context in the acquisition of French as a foreign language [A]. In: J.-M. Dewaele (ed.), *Focus on French as a Foreign Language. Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, pp. 191–209.
- [67] Rehner, K. & Mougeon, R. & Nadasdi. 2003. The learning of sociolinguistic variation by advanced FL2 learners: The case of nous vs. on in immersion French [J]. *Studies in L2A* (25).
- [68] Sankoff, D. 1988. Sociolinguistics and syntactic variation [A]. In F. J. Newmeyer (ed.) *Linguistics: The Cambridge Survey, vol. 4, Language: The Socio-cultural Context* [C]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [69] Schwartz, B. & R. Sprouse. 1994. Word order and nominative case in nonnative language acquisition: a longitudinal study of (L1 Turkish) German interlanguage. In T. Hoekstra & B. D. Schwartz (eds.), *Language acquisition studies in generative grammar*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 317-368.
- [70] Schachter, J. 1986. In search of systematicity in interlanguage production [J]. *Studies in L2A* (8).
- [71] Selinker, L. 1972. Interlanguage [J]. *International Review of Applied Linguistics* (10).
- [72] Shaolong, L. 1998. A Case Study of Learner Errors in the Acquisition of English Parts of Speech [J]. *Modern Foreign Languages*, (2): 66-81.
- [73] Shanzhi, Y. 2005. The Syntactic Operations of English Interrogative Sentences and Variations in L2 Acquisition [J]. *Foreign Language Education*, (1): 12-1.
- [74] Slabakova, R. 2009. What is easy and what is hard to acquire in a second language? [C]// Melissa Bowles et al. *Proceedings of the 10th Generative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition Conference*. Somerville, MA: Cascadia Proceedings Project: 280-294.
- [75] Sorace, A. 2011. Pinning down the concept of 'interface' in bilingualism [J]. *Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism* 1: 1-33.
- [76] Sorace, A. & F. Filiaci. 2006. Anaphora resolution in near native speakers of Italian [J]. *Second Language Research* 22: 339-368.
- [77] Spada, N. 1990. A look at the research process in classroom observation: A case research [A]. In C. Brumfit & R. Mitchell (Eds.), *ELT Documents: Research in the Language Classroom* [C]. Exmouth, England: Modern English Publications.
- [78] Tarone, E. & G. Liu. 1995. Situational context, variation, and L2A theory [A]. In Cook, G. & B. Seidlhofer (eds.). *Principles and Practice in L2A* [C]. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [79] Tarone, E. 1985. Variability in interlanguage use: A research of style-shifting in morphology and syntax [J]. *Language Learning* (35).
- [80] Towell, R. & Hawkins, R. 1994. *Methodes to L2A* [M]. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- [81] Tsimpli, I. M. 1992. *Functional Categories and Maturation: The Prefunctional Stage of Language Acquisition*. Doctoral Dissertation, University College London.
- [82] Vainikka, A. & M. Young-Scholten. 1996. Gradual development in L2 phrase structure. *Second Language Research* 12: 7–39.
- [83] Van Patten, B. 1990. Attending to form and content in the input: An experiment in consciousness [J]. *Studies in L2A* (12).
- [84] Weinreich, U. & Labov, W. & Herzog. 1968. Empirical foundations for a theory of language change [A]. W. Lehman and Y. Malkiel (eds.), *Directions for a Historical Linguistics* [C]. Austin: University of Texas Press.

- [85] Yan, Y. 2010. The Study of Situational Context Effect on Acquisition of Third Tone of Mandarin by American Students [J]. *Chinese Language Learning*, (1): 96-104.
- [86] Yanfeng, Y. 2010. The Influence of Sentiment on the General Past Tense Markers in English Interlanguage: A Study Based on Oral Corpus [J]. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, (2): 54-59.
- [87] Young, R. 1991. *Variation in Interlanguage Morphology* [M]. New York: Peter Lang.
- [88] Yu, L. On the Variability of the Second Language Acquisition of Chinese Ditransitive Constructions [J]. *Chinese Teaching in the World*, (1): 88-101.
- [89] Yuan, B. 2010. Domain-wide or variable-dependent vulnerability of the semantics-syntax interface in L2 acquisition? Evidence from wh-words used as existential polarity words in L2 Chinese grammars [J]. *Second Language Research*, (26): 219-260.
- [90] Yuan, B. & E. Dugarova. 2012. Wh-topicalization at the syntax-discourse interface in English speakers' L2 Chinese grammars [J]. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, (34): 533-560.
- [91] Zhengguang, L. & Yujuan, F. & Jian, C. 2013. The Socio - cognitive Perspective of Second Language Acquisition and Its Theoretical Sources [J]. *Journal of Foreign Languages*, (6): 42-52.

Biography

Meng Yu, a Ph.D. majored in language strategy and language policy of Shanghai International Studies University, a lecturer of Harbin Institute of Technology at Weihai campus. Research interests: second language acquisition, language policy and planning.