

CHAPTER TWO

Theories and practice of second language and literacy learning

Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated - overpopulated - with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1981: 294)

Introduction

What does it mean to be literate in a second language? The answers to that question are to be found in the field of inquiry which deals directly with matters of second language acquisition (SLA). Contemporary SLA research is a multidisciplinary field (Selinker & Gass 1994) whose goal is to understand, explain and, in recent decades, to problematise the processes of the learning of languages other than one's native language. Given its multidisciplinary nature, SLA studies draw from other areas, including linguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, conversational analysis, and the sociology of education. SLA as a relatively new field of inquiry currently manifests itself in the capacity both to incorporate insights from many disciplinary fields and to contribute research methods, results and implications to them in return. However, as a field of research with the general focus on the nature of language and human mind and on their interaction, SLA includes a set of incommensurate theories and discourses which approach those issues from radically different epistemological standpoints (Pennycook 1994b; Thorne 2000). While some overview volumes (Ellis 1994; Mitchell & Myles 1998) make it clear that SLA researchers draw on a number of linguistic, psycholinguistic and social theories of language learning, it can also be assumed that the particular approaches, tasks of research, units of analysis and pedagogical practices informed by them are implicated in particular ideologies (Thorne 2000).

Questions of epistemology (and ideology) in the field are concerned primarily with the methodological debate about what kind of research and findings are *more* valid for constructing SLA as a discipline in its own right. In this regard, this chapter attempts to

give a brief overview of theories and methodologies in current SLA and literacy research and, in so doing, to problematise a 'scientific' drive toward the hegemony of a particular 'conduit metaphor' (van Leer 2000). Specifically, it is argued that a dominant positivistic approach to SLA reduces what it means to learn a second language to the processes of 'input crunching' and 'computationalism' (Donato 1994; Lantolf 1996). It prioritises the development of phonemic decoding habits, of learning vocabulary, and of hearing subtleties of accent (Luke 1995, Pennycook 2001) over uses of language and literacy in social practices of (re)reading and (re)writing the world (Freire & Macedo 1987). On the other hand, sociocultural approaches to L2 learning increasingly emphasise social and institutional practices as a starting point for understanding what is learned and, equally importantly, not learned, of a second language in societies characterised by social and cultural heterogeneity. L2 learning becomes linked to the interpersonal and intercultural praxis of people, so that a learner's cultural becoming and knowing are inseparable from her participation in sociocultural activities (Vygotsky 1978).

The rhetorical schema in this chapter is organised around two major metaphors - 'acquisition' and 'participation' - which are currently used in SLA research (Sfard 1998). I find them particularly helpful for the purpose of critical review of the field, as each metaphor presupposes a particular ontological and ideological emphasis with regard to L2 learning. The metaphor of acquisition underlies those SLA studies which focus on the individual plane - mental processes, knowledge processing skills, linguistic habits, etc. Typically in such studies the social plane is conceived as a realm of controlled linguistic and psychological 'variables', thus representing language as a fixed object to be acquired and the learner as a "one-dimensional acquisition device" (Pennycook 2001: 143). On the other hand, the metaphor of participation informs those L2 studies which are interested in various aspects of practice, discourse, relations of power and identity construction in institutionalised contexts of language and literacy learning. The focus on the social, however, does not mean a negation of the psychological plane. Rather, cognition is seen as a process which evolves in social practices, i.e., in participatory appropriation of the 'ways with words' and in an individual's growing engagement in a community of learners (Lave & Wenger 1991; Rogoff 1995).

While these two metaphors are not easily reconcilable, I am arguing for a wider adoption of the metaphor of participation in the field of ESL studies in order to understand L2 and literacy learning in a new (or different) way. In so doing, I deploy such conceptual tools as 'appropriation', 'negotiation' and 'construction' to emphasise that the metaphor of participation is not 'old wine in new skins' but "a perspective that fulfils a different educational goal and defines learning in a different way" (Donato 2000: 41). Adopting the

metaphor of participation as a key concept adds many new dimensions to research into L2 and literacy learning, including important social and political dimensions.

2.1 'Science envy' and the metaphor of 'acquisition'

A review of recent SLA literature, especially journals, shows a debate between cognitive and sociocultural approaches with regard to what constitutes productive research in the field. The cognitivist camp, in its ambition to define SLA as an independent discipline, argues for delineating parameters of unified theory. This theory-building debate transpires, according to Firth and Wagner (1997), in a context which reflects a theoretic-methodological imbalance between cognitive and mentalistic orientations on the one hand, and social and contextual orientations on the other. Even though this heated debate in itself constitutes a productive force, it is seen by some influential SLA researchers as a threat to the field's scientific purity and research validity. The mentalist approach, in its 'desire for paradigm' and 'science envy' (Block 1996), tries to present itself as the only possible 'Theory' of SLA based on 'accepted findings' (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991; Long 1993). Both theory-culling and intolerance to epistemological relativism have contributed greatly to the intellectual anaesthetisation in the field by placing language and learning practices in a "world of a-historical, decontextualised, and disembodied brains" (Thorne 2000: 220). When Long (1993) draws on Kuhn in his argument for constructing SLA as a 'normal science' in which models of scientific research should be coherent within a given paradigm, he paradoxically forgets Kuhn's (1962) argument that "those paradigms could shift, thereby rendering previous theories incoherent and previous facts obsolete" (Hruby 2001: 52). In this respect, as Ellis (1994) comments, the scientific validity of theories should be evaluated in terms of their origin and the purposes they mean to serve.

How can we trace the origins and purposes of the theories which are claimed to be representative of the 'scientific paradigm' of SLA research? Anna Sfard (1998: 4) has argued recently that our understanding of the purposes, guiding tacit assumptions and beliefs of research can be reached by "digging out the metaphors that underlie both our spontaneous everyday conceptions and scientific theorizing". According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the power of a metaphor - a literary device used to represent one thing in terms of another - lies precisely in the very fact that we think, communicate, and live by metaphors. By the same token, metaphors function as a productive research tool by providing a level of practical specification for analytical concepts. They bring abstract ideas down to earth by making them more vivid than the language of general objectives. In this way, metaphors can symbolise research directions providing researchers with the vocabulary to describe research outcomes.

For instance, when Neisser (1967) articulated the level of generality cognitive psychologists hoped to achieve by studying the flow of information in the mind, he introduced a 'computational' metaphor as an orientation in information-processing research. While Neisser's views since that time have changed dramatically in favour of the ecological approach to cognition (Neisser & Winograd 1988), the underlying principle of 'input crunching' (Donato 1994: 34) has received extensive elaboration in cognitive science. Through the years the computer has served as the dominant guiding metaphor for cognitive psychologists to characterise the properties of 'cognitive machinery' and to establish outcomes that refer to people metaphorically as effective (or deficient) information-processors: decoders and storers of input and producers of output (Hirst & Manier 1995). The important point, however, is that regardless of its newness the computational metaphor did not make the revolution in the conception of human learning sought by the psychologists in the 60s. Instead, it contributed to the already dominating view that learning is related to context only in indirect ways and takes place solely in the brain.

Indeed, the life of a metaphor in educational research is most peculiar. While theories come and go, a new conceptual mapping is meant to transplant the old metaphorical heritage by providing a means for an innovative explanation of learning processes. In this way new metaphors may help to transcend the fixities of old analytical frameworks and thus delineate radical theoretical shifts. But they can also be used for what can be called a facade renovation, where conceptual apparatus changes only on the surface and in fact reproduces the conduit metaphor of the broader theoretical approach or tradition. Hence, metaphors can function at both surface and deeper levels; they can be specific as well as transparent, concealing and explicating the history of ideas, assumptions and deeply rooted beliefs.

In what follows, I endeavour to briefly explicate those metaphors - surface and deep-rooted - that have supported research into second language (L2) and literacy learning. Even though some metaphors were meant to be historical determinants in paradigmatic shifts, I argue, they were unable to change deep-rooted underlying assumptions inherent in the broader concept of language acquisition. Hence, I start this review of SLA with the metaphor of acquisition which implies the *innate* act of knowledge possession. I argue that this dominant metaphor has figured as a key concept in many approaches to L2 learning. While there have been some historical shifts in conceptualising language learning, this metaphor has remained intact in many theoretical incarnations. This has led to a distorted view of L2 learning as an individual process of 'taking in'. Therefore, I turn the focus of discussion to the metaphor of participation which implies knowing through being a

participant in social practice. This metaphor provides a radically different answer to the fundamental question of what counts as L2 and literacy learning.

Following Sford (1998), I recognise the danger of working and living with the one metaphor only. However, in the light of the current SLA debate between 'acquisitionists' and 'participationists', the discourse of intersubjective agreement can be built only on the grounds of theoretical relativism (Block 1996; Lantolf 1996; Thorne 2000). While Sford (1998) sees the problem only in terms of a discursive incommensurability between the two metaphors for learning, she also argues that they are compatible and presuppose each other. She sees a possibility for their peaceful coexistence by backgrounding this in the Rortyan pragmatism which promotes 'liberal utopia' (Mouffe 1996). Instead, I would argue for the theoretical deconstruction of the 'acquisition' model of L2 learning, which would lead to a more democratic ESL pedagogy. While positioning myself in this view, I see the issue of two metaphors for learning not so much in their reconciliation, but in foregrounding the social and cultural to provide a wider research perspective on L2 and literacy learning.

The acquisition metaphor has been presented here as a set of 'minor' metaphorical vocabularies, such as acquisition as the 'formation of habits', as 'language instinct', as 'computation' and as 'input monitoring'. These vocabularies have been used to express the general claim that mental structures provide language knowledge and skills of various kinds (van Leer 2000). I will examine those 'minor' metaphors by placing them in an arbitrary order on the time-scale of research developments in SLA. They all support the importance of innate properties (biological or mental), however different their explanations and procedures might otherwise be.

2.1.1 Acquisition as the 'formation of habits'

Mitchell and Myles (1998) make it clear that the development of theorising about second language learning, especially in the post-war period, was a response to the domination of the behaviourist approach to teaching languages. By studying the automatic conditioning of animal behaviour, predominantly in rats, behaviourists formulated principles of human learning. In particular, learning was placed between two sets of environmental influences: antecedents (what precedes learning) and consequences (what follows it) (Skinner 1953). Learning as the development of voluntary behaviour was defined as the process of strengthening or weakening consequences and antecedents. That is, it was seen as the formation of habits through reinforcement and punishment. Applied to language learning, linguistic behaviourists believed that successful learning is the result of the imitation and reinforcement of particular linguistic habits. Communicative practice was seen as a

sequence of stimuli and responses in which a certain situation required a certain response (e.g. greetings).

This principle of the practical formation of language habits was understood as a *science* of language and became central to language pedagogy in the 40s and 50s (Stern 1994). Bloomfield (1942: 12), for instance, delineated the aim of language teaching by saying that "the command of language is not a matter of knowledge... [but] of practice" (Bloomfield 1942: 12). For linguistic behaviourists, to learn a new language meant to acquire and automatise a set of new habits - *linguistic reflexes* to the environment. From this point of view, the specific goal of second language teaching was the need to change the already automatised responses formed in native language practices (Lado 1964). As a result, language drilling became the hallmark of second language pedagogy (e.g. in the 'army method' and later in the audiolingual approach). In many ways, this mechanistic methodology of L2 learning reflected Skinner's idea of a 'teaching machine' - a constructed learning environment which supposedly would allow students to learn more in less time and with less effort. The underlying idea of a second language teaching machine, however, was to dismantle old, and develop new, linguistic habits.

In order to shape a linguistic behaviour more effectively, scientific inquiry into language had been delimited by studies of the corpus of utterances and their formal characteristics. This research was meant to provide learners with the patterns of phonological, morphological and syntactic regularities of the language to be learned. Even though behaviourist linguistics put an emphasis on language practice (*performance*), the mastery of sentence patterns was organised around highly artificial texts disembodied from real-life practices in the world (Rodby 1992). In the same way, the original concern of behaviourists with the description of general language structures and speech events (signals) was a distinctive shift away from the previously popular Sapirian view of language learning as directly related to cultural practices.

2.1.2 Acquisition as a 'language instinct'

From about the mid-sixties, the general critique of behaviourism led to the questioning of the Skinnerian idea of a 'language laboratory' inherent in the audiolingual approach. In order to overcome the adjunct status of linguistic reflexology within the behaviourist framework, SLA set out to construct an autonomous discipline in its own right. In this drive SLA research found Chomsky's (1968) innatist conception of language and mind to be an appealing new metaphor for further theoretical development. The abstract generativism of language and mind (Halliday 1978) inherent in this metaphor posed a challenge both to behaviourist and anthropological linguistic research traditions.

By drawing on the highly abstract principle of biological monism, Noam Chomsky formulated the argument that a human capacity for language is due to biological make up - to an innate faculty or 'Language Acquisition Device' (LAD) as he has called it. This faculty contains a Universal Grammar (UG) which provides a structural blueprint for the development of grammars of particular languages. Hence, language is a "curious biological phenomenon" which is learned by an individual due to the "concepts that are already part of his or her conceptual apparatus" (Chomsky 1988: 41, 28). This refers both to the innate syntactic structures and to the meaning-forming capacity of an individual. Furthermore, Chomsky (1988: 153) also related the child's acquisition of the moral and ethical system to some innate human faculty. As such, language competence and knowledge are seen as inborn rather than learned from social life. The structure of the brain determines the content and possibilities of knowledge by sifting external data through perceptual filters, organising imperfect perceptions of reality, and making order from chaos.

Chomsky's rational allusions entailed drastic consequences for SLA. As Larry Selinker (1972) has emphasised, the goal of SLA is to understand the processes that underlie the learning of a non-native language. These processes involve the creation by the learner of a new language system, called an 'interlanguage'. Selinker insists on the centrality of the learner as well as on the linguistic reality of the 'interlanguage' that learners produce as they move to approximations of the second (or third, or fourth) language that they are attempting to acquire. This discovery in SLA studies has made it possible to formulate that the stages and the pace of learning/acquisition are apparently independent of teaching, thus implying that SLA research is *not* necessarily tied to pedagogical concerns (Newmeyer & Weinberger 1988). Rather, SLA should be concerned with the nature of the hypotheses, whether conscious or unconscious, that learners devise regarding the rules of the second language. The goal of second language research, formulated in this way, directed studies predominantly towards finding those rules (i.e., the learners' interlanguage systems); finding how they are similar to or different from those of the native language, and finding how the rules created by second language learners vary according to contexts of use. Due in great part to the influence of Selinker's work, research in SLA grew steadily through the 70s and 80s by drawing on the 'principles and parameters' metaphor of the language faculty proposed by Chomsky.

In particular, SLA researchers, inspired by Chomsky's idea that language is 'unlearned behaviour' which develops from within in a predetermined way, have strengthened the rationalist position on language acquisition. In the first instance, this is evident in the body of research that privileges *competence* (linguistic knowledge) over performance by focusing solely on linguistic rules and individual mental operations. The hypothesis of an

innate knowledge of UG has been used by some SLA researchers to formulate a perspective from which language acquisition equates with the knowledge of complex syntax (White 1989). In this light, the contrastive investigation of grammatical judgements made by both native and non-native speakers has been made central for gaining insights into what learners know about language, rather than allowing such judgements to be seen as knowledge produced in language uses. This body of research - quite a distinct field, both in its theoretical underpinnings and in the types of studies it endeavours to undertake - has distanced itself from language pedagogy and, ultimately, from the classroom and broader social practices as sites of inquiry. This is mainly because working within the UG framework renders social interaction and instruction as not important. Teaching language and correcting errors, as it is believed, can influence performance only on the surface, whereas the underlying systematic knowledge of a second language remains unaffected (Schwartz 1993).

2.1.3 Acquisition as 'computation'

This scientism of the structuralist paradigm of language acquisition has been heavily questioned in a postcolonial era in which 'the worldliness of English' (Pennycook 1994a) as well as the rapidly changing cultural demography within English-speaking states has "forced [ESL teachers] to think seriously about what it means to teach someone to read and write in a second language" (Rodby 1992: 15). In this regard, the Chomskian linguistic tradition as appropriated in SLA research had been of little help for those ESL teachers who looked to it as "a guide for their classroom practices" (ibid.). There was (and still is), therefore, a need to look beyond traditional structural linguistics in order to understand the difficulties newcomers face in their learning to master dominant 'ways with words' (Heath 1983) fully enough to function in a new country and to evade the workings of powerful gatekeepers (Gee 1999). While migrant adults and their children come to the acquisition of a second language without the sorts of early preparation, pre-alignment, or sociocultural resources that native learners have, understanding the processes of *meaning-making* has become extremely attractive. That is, the focus of SLA research has shifted again toward performance - communicative and literacy acts - in which thinking processes can be observed.

In doing this, SLA studies have been increasingly influenced by new cognitive theories which, as with Chomskian linguistics, were intended "to bring 'mind' back into the human sciences after a long cold winter of [behaviourist] objectivism" (Bruner 1990: 1). However, the aim of the psychological revolution - to discover and describe meaning-making processes - appeared to be not so drastically different from that of Chomskian linguistics. As Bruner (1990: 1, 4) says, its original impulse "has been technicalized" from the start

and its "emphasis began shifting from 'meaning' to 'information', from the construction of meaning to the processing of information". Therefore, it has been relatively painless for applied linguists to reformulate language performance as 'types of thinking' or as 'information-processing skills' possessed by individuals. To explain what makes performances of meaning possible, through this cognitive lens, meant to build up knowledge systems which eventually underlie listening, speaking, reading, and writing. That is, the progressive accumulation of information in the heads of second language learners has been directly connected to how they attend to meanings inherent in language structures: the more information is stored, the more automatic the processing skills become (Schmidt 1990).

The information processing approach to SLA, as it has been formulated by McLaughlin (1987), implies a number of fundamental assumptions and metaphors. The basic underlying principle is the autonomy and activeness of individuals, who process information coded in symbols in the same way as computers do. That is, the minds of individuals contain internal representations that guide and regulate linguistic performance. Those representations are first acquired through the conscious attention of individuals to a particular type of information, which they select and store in short-term memory. In terms of language learning this can be seen as a stage-like development of skills with regard, first, to the key words and, later, to the grammatical morphemes connected to those words. In this way, new configurations of meaning and representations are stored. But because short-term memory is limited, it is essential for successful learning that some processing skills be automatised, stored in the long-term memory, and performed unconsciously to support more complex cognitive skills. Learning the language system in this way will depend on the degree of automatisation of reading and writing which, in McLaughlin's model, become subskills supporting the process of constant restructuring of L2 learners' knowledge systems. Hence, mastery of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills leads to linguistic competence which is needed to accurately process meanings. Literacy skills become in fact automatic subskills used to support the complex workings of the mind (internal meaning-thoughts) or to help decode the external meanings of others encoded in oral messages and written texts.

Psycholinguistic processing models represent a specific trend in SLA studies that tries to understand the process of meaning comprehension through the development of communicative, reading and writing skills. But because these skills are seen as autonomous properties, their development is tied exclusively to a set of individual variables. One of those variables is the prior knowledge (schemata) that a learner possesses while s/he engages with a text. That is, comprehension is affected by the extent to which a second language learner is familiar with the topics, objects and events described in a text

(Anderson 1994). From this 'computational' perspective, learners activate prior knowledge of the text topic by imagining what they know and do not know about the topic, by predicting what the text will be about, and by generating questions the text might answer. They begin with processing the print from left to right, top to bottom of the page, which involves decoding the words on the page, i.e., producing a mental or verbal equivalent to access meaning. As learners move across sentences and paragraphs to construct the larger meaning of a text, familiarity with the genre and its text structure comes into play, helping them anticipate and predict the direction and flow of ideas (Carrell 1992; Kintsch & Van Dijk 1978).

2.1.4 Acquisition as 'input monitoring'

The view of radical mental constructivism has been challenged by the interactionist perspective formulated by Krashen (1982) and further developed by Long (1983) and Pica (1994). Among Krashen's hypotheses, the comprehensible input hypothesis implies, albeit virtually, the presence of an Other who pays attention to the '+ 1' in an 'i + 1' model of information to be acquired. In addition to comprehensible input, individual affective variables (affective filters) such as anxiety, motivation and self-confidence have been employed to explain a powerful effect on subconscious L2 acquisition. In fact, Krashen (1982: 38, 37) states that "attitude may be the single most important factor in second language learning" because it enables the language learner "to intake and then to utilize comprehensible input for language acquisition". While Long (1983) agrees with Krashen that input is a main cause of second language learning, he is also concerned with the question of how input is made comprehensible in conversation. By analysing interactions between native and non-native speakers, he asserts that language input becomes comprehensible through modifications. In particular, this is seen in cases when interaction fails. Interactional modifications in such cases are caused by difficulties in message comprehensibility which the receiver of input seeks to repair by repeating and rephrasing. Hence, according to Long (1983), interactional modifications such as comprehension checks, clarification requests and paraphrases promote acquisition.

Even though a communicative approach to SLA focuses on using language for meaningful interaction, the underlying principle of innate monitoring is in complete agreement with the Chomskian notion of genetic faculties. Krashen (1982) maintains that the acquired system is responsible for intuitive judgements while the learned system acts only as a 'monitor', making minor repairs to what has been internally generated. He applies this principle to formulate the notion of literacy as tacit "knowledge of the code" (Krashen 1982: 27). This abstract knowledge of conventions is acquired in natural conditions of exposure and immersion. But because, for Krashen, literacy acquisition is a subconscious

process, understanding messages in L2 comes down to cognition of meaning, rather than to how that meaning is expressed and constructed socially. Therefore, despite this conception of the interdependence of language learning, cognition, and interaction with others, teachers of ESL are told that their role in the acquisition process is a largely passive one of providing comprehensible input. Consequently, far more attention has been paid to the innate process of English acquisition than to the impact of teaching practices such as effective classroom discourses, teacher-student interaction, as well as adult support for students' emergent literacy. Krashen never mentions the element of social interaction as a key for second language learning. The focus on social production of meanings for him is not important, because interaction is "a result of acquisition and not its cause" (Krashen 1985: 2). What *is* important, then, is once again that miraculous, genetic acquisition system of individuals, which allows them to work in solitude, even when they are interacting with others.

In sum, this impressively rich metaphorical assortment in SLA research generates a sensation of dissimilarities between theories, schools and research directions, but underneath these distinctions become subtle and blurred. In fact, the dissimilarities disappear when it comes to eliciting the nature of L2 and literacy learning as gaining possession over language and meaning. They become a private property of the mind, whether in the form of the voluntary acquisition of habits, workings of an innate faculty, or processing devices within the acquisition system. Furthermore, gaining ownership over language is seen in terms of a linear stage-like development: from the universal and innate linguistic faculty - the 'organ of language' (Lantolf 1996: 728) - to the reception of a particular language system, and to the active processing of meaning. The metaphorical devices - in our case borrowings of terms from reflexology, genetics, or computer science - serve as productive tools in SLA research to specify the underlying abstract concept of acquisition. They symbolise the desired research directions and establish outcomes that refer to L2 learners as effective or deficient listeners, speakers, readers and writers who develop strategies, skills and aptitudes to influence the ways in which they go about learning a second language, or fail to do so (O'Malley & Chamot 1993).

The basic conclusion from studies into L2 acquisition can be expressed, therefore, in the following assertion: if language is the product of an individual mind, then literacy is a set of thinking processes (decoding, storing and retrieving skills) that helps learners to acquire a particular language system and meanings encoded in sound and in print. Both language and literacy become the property of individuals, which enables their speech acts, and permits them to code private thoughts in the form of print. This assertion, however, does not adequately represent the complexity of ESL and literacy practices. In particular, the acquisition metaphor deflects the attention of researchers from the sociocultural

constitution of language and literacy, and the attention of educators from the principles of teaching that have been used for centuries in sociocultural activities.

2.2 Theoretical relativity and the metaphor of 'participation'

In debates about future directions and current perspectives in L2 research, it is both unproductive and troublesome to push the conduit metaphor of acquisition - the basis for a small number of commensurate theories - in order to hegemonise the field. As James Lantolf (1996: 739) insists, "once theoretical hegemony is achieved, alternative metaphors are cut off or suffocated by the single official metaphor: subsequently, those who expose different world views ... cease to have a voice". By contrast, Lantolf argues for maintaining the vibrancy of L2 research by introducing new metaphors and theories. His argument is not against the practice of theory but for a diversity of theorising that will engage multiple perspectives on second language learning rather than limiting them to the positivist-experimental one only. Furthermore, Steven Thorne (2000) embeds the paradigm-building debate in the broad context of social and cultural research traditions which allow our field to be more specific in understanding how L2 learning relates to the social situatedness of learners (their identities/subjectivities). If we focus on the situated cognitive activity of L2 learners in sociocultural practices, their learning discloses itself as a complex phenomenon non-reducible to the workings of the mind. Consequently, the metaphor of participation becomes a key organising concept in an alternative to cognitivist L2 research perspectives.

To study people's learning in practice-participation means to disclose their functioning in 'micro ecologies', material environments endowed with cultural meanings (Lemke 1997). In this sense, participation involves both acting and being acted upon within the cultural-semiotic ecology of practices. Acting with others, as Sfard (1998) suggests, engages the learner's interest in *knowing* certain kinds of activities rather than in accumulating private possessions of knowledge. Knowing-in-practice is a dynamic activity of people and, in the case of language learning, presupposes an understanding of social 'ways with words' and texts. This is a necessary activity for 'legitimate peripheral participation' in practices (Lave & Wenger 1991). On the other hand, a learner is acted upon by others directly (in communication) and indirectly (by semiotic artefacts). He or she is now not an autonomous individual who cognises the world but rather is a 'person-in-activity' (Lemke 1997). The identity of a learner is changing as s/he moves from the outside toward peripheral practice membership. Hence, a learner's knowing-in-practice changes in relation to his/her *becoming* a member of a communal practice. This participatory view of learning entails, above all, the dynamic and multiple evolvment of knowledges and identities in practical activities, and marks a foundational shift from their static and singular formulations in cognitivist perspectives.

2.3.1 Participation as 'appropriation'

In the past two decades, the participatory model has received significant attention in L2 and literacy research as a promising metaphor for research into learning. In particular, sociocultural studies have converged around the metaphor of 'participation' to study L2 learning in the living reality of school and community practices. They focus on social uses of both native and second languages in the cultural activities of people and, in so doing, represent elaborations of Hallidayian sociolinguistics and ethnographic studies (Bremer et al. 1996; Ochs 1988; Peirce 1995; Rodby 1992; Toohey 2000), sociocultural psychology and Activity Theory (Hall 1995; Kramsch 1993; Lantolf 2000a; Lantolf & Appel 1994; Moll 1992; Tharp & Gallimore 1988), as well as postcolonial and critical studies (Delpit 1995; Pennycook 1994a, 1998, 2001; Morgan 1998; Osborn 2000; Rampton 1995). The common tendency within the sociocultural approach to SLA is a shift from a focus on the learner as a builder of mental structures to the social activities in which s/he participates. As a result, communicative, reading and writing practices in institutional settings have been incorporated into L2 studies in a new way: they became a unit of analysis which explicates how discourses and literate practices coalesce around the body of knowledge to be learned.

The metaphor of participation expands the conception of learning beyond the mastery of the grammar and structures of a new language system. This is conceived as a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite for engagement in cultural activities. With the focus on learning-in-practice (Chaiklin & Lave 1993), knowledge of a language system becomes an inalienable part of practical knowledge. Together they constitute what I am calling (in Chapters Five and Seven) *cultural literacy* - knowing how to make things meaningful to others both discursively and by doing. For a L2 speaker this means the development of a second social and cognitive mediational system (Lantolf 2000b). But because the sociocultural perspective does not consider learning as a process that ends up with the permanent possession of linguistic and cultural knowledge, the development of this mediational system is seen in 'the constant flux of doing' (Sfard 1998). In this case, becoming culturally literate in a new society is not solely about the acquisition of new grammatical, lexical, and phonological forms but, rather, about getting to know culturally constructed discourses and practice patterns which allow people to participate in a broader range of social, cultural and cognitive activities.

Sfard (1998) argues that the metaphor of participation also presupposes a metaphor of acquisition. That is, "the act of acquisition is often tantamount to the act of becoming a participant" and therefore "one can find it difficult to consider [them] separately, let alone

as mutually exclusive" (Sfard 1998: 6). While valuing Sfard's attempt to resolve the dichotomy between acquisition and participation, it can also be argued that the different perspectives on learning can not be so easily blended. One reason for this, missing from Sfard's discussion, is that a participation model of learning operates not with 'acquisition' but with '*appropriation*' as a metaphor, in dealing with individual acts of knowing. The difference between acquisition and appropriation is a very crucial one. For instance, appropriation, in the Bakhtinian sense, is used to define a boundary phenomenon of speech actions and consciousness alike. Learning language is to borrow the words of the Other and use them to re-present and re-mediate social dialogue with the Other. As Bakhtin (1981: 294) says in this regard:

Language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's.

This means that an historical individual - an individual situated at a point in history as all of us are - has used the words of others (societal and cultural resources for communication) from the outset of her/his learning to communicate with others. In this way, the "consciousness [of the individual] can not be derived directly from nature ... It takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse" (Voloshinov 1973: 13). In seeing language learning as the appropriation of the words of others in social practice, the mentation of individuals is localised "somewhere between the organism and the outside world, on the *borderline* separating these two spheres of reality" (Voloshinov 1973: 26, emphasis added). In contrast, the acquisition model of language learning, even if this is considered to be situated in a social context, implies a clear-cut *boundary* between the individual and the social on the one hand, and depicts their interaction as some sort of reciprocal relationship between organism and environment on the other.

This view of social context as "a collection of variables that influences the already existing individual" is common to traditional American pragmatist and contextualist studies (Tolman 1999: 83). In L2 research this tendency can be seen in studies that unduly emphasise the autonomy of individual cognitive processes in the communicative negotiation of meaning (e.g. Long 1996; Pica 1994). It is clear that neither input nor output modifications can be conceived as negotiation of meaning in social contexts, even though Pica (1994) insists on this. This is rather a model similar to that of Piagetian cognitive disequilibrium, in which interactional modifications are the results of internal mental contradictions within a particular individual, rather than the outcome of contradictions between the consciousnesses of native and non-native speakers in specific practice settings.

Appropriation, as another supporting metaphor for the framework of participatory learning, has been elaborated by Barbara Rogoff (1990, 1995). She employs a nested method of analysis to uncover how individual learning relates to the institutional and intersubjective planes of community practices. In so doing, Rogoff (1995) differentiates three planes of analysis which, taken together, do not allow for the reductionism inherent in the contextualist reintroduction of 'acquisition' to participatory learning. These planes, according to Rogoff (1995: 143-161), are:

- 1) *apprenticeship* - "a system of interpersonal involvement and arrangements in which people engage in culturally organized activity in which apprentices become more responsible participants";
- 2) *guided participation* - "the interpersonal plane ... made up of the events of everyday life as individuals engage with others and with materials and arrangements collaboratively managed by themselves and others";
- 3) *participatory appropriation* - "the process by which individuals transform their understanding of and responsibility for activities through their own participation".

This model of participatory learning takes into consideration community, interpersonal, and personal planes as they variously interpenetrate the complex organisational configuration of an activity. By focusing on different planes, we can see how communities, groups and individuals *transform* as "they together constitute and are constituted by sociocultural activity" (Rogoff 1995: 161).

The transformations within L2 learners occur as they struggle to come to terms with different ways of acting and particular rules for participation on the institutional plane; as they lose old and appropriate new subjectivities in discursive practices with others on the interpersonal plane (Toohey 2000); and as their selves get re-constructed in second-language-becoming on the personal plane (Pavlenko & Lantolf 2000). On all these planes complex transformations of L2 learners' identities occur in practices of 'language crossing' (Rampton 1995) and depend on "the understanding of the possibilities of using language against the grain, of taking up and using a language that has been a tool of oppression, colonialism, or rigid identity and turning it against itself" (Pennycook 2001: 69).

In similar terms, Aneta Pavlenko (1998), in analysing L2 literacy practices (writing narratives), defines appropriation as a dynamic and transformative process in two phases. The initial phase includes loss of one's linguistic identity, subjectivities and the inner voice, and hence a degree of L1 attrition. The second phase is defined as a recovery and (re)construction, which entails appropriation of others' voices, emergence of one's new voice (often first in writing), reconstruction of one's past and growth 'into' new

subjectivities. Hence, literacy learning in new cultural settings, as Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000: 174) claim, is "about a profound struggle to reconstruct a self". Experiences of cultural and linguistic border-crossings and displacement in time and cultural space, embody rewriting identities, both present and past, through the reintegration of one's history into the L2 world. Literacy practices are then not just exercises to get things grammatically right. Rather, through them L2 learners explore themselves and social relations to make sense of their second linguistic and cultural becoming.

Participatory appropriation of L2, however, is not just a more 'aggressive' metaphor for learning, but rather it entails a focus on the social construction of learners' identities. Sociocultural research into *how* L2 learning is related to the construction of identities calls attention to pedagogical frameworks in formal educational institutions, particularly those governed by assessment based implicitly upon notions of language ability and disability, constitutive of learners' identities. The focus on how schooling practices are organised and monitored is essential for understanding the modes of participation by L2 learners. This is especially important in the current situation, when L2 learners are overrepresented in the categories of learning disabled students (Artiles & Trent 2000). If being a linguistically able person is considered only in terms of individual cognitive structures, then notions of ability are straightforward: L2 learners merely have more or less of it. McDermott (1993), however, has given a careful account of the way in which children are positioned as "learning disabled," and as part of this account he shows that children have different abilities in different settings, in their interactions with different people, and at different times. In this respect, Lave's (1993a: 10) argument that "success and failure at learning [should be] viewed not as attributes of individuals, but as specialized social and institutional arrangements" refers directly to the analysis of L2 participatory learning in classrooms.

Toohey's (2000) ethnographic study of minority children in the mainstream classroom, for example, is nontrivial in this regard and calls into question the monolithic practice of assessment and organisation of activities that shift the blame for L2 students' language and learning difficulties on to students themselves. Instead, she sees L2 learning problems in the environments educators provide, in the practices they encourage, and in the broader (often racist) discourses which are brought to the classroom. Toohey criticises current ranking practices within schools, which reinforce the notion of identity as immutable and fixed. She argues for taking into account the politics of classroom practices in order to understand how multiple identities are discursively produced and changed.

In the same vein, Bonny Peirce (1995) connects the language learning of adult immigrants to their construction and perception of social identities. In this study, an adult female

immigrant struggles to resume her responsibility as a family caregiver through changing her identity from that of a submissive immigrant to a reasserted status as an adult. The woman first relies on her own children in performing various everyday tasks that involve L2 literacy, then she struggles to perform those tasks herself, claims her 'right to speak' at the workplace and, through these opportunities, learns English. This study argues cogently for L2 and literacy research that is foregrounded in the view of language as "constitutive of and constituted by a language learner's social identity" (Peirce 1995: 13).

The participatory metaphor of learning does not imply, in this regard, an unproblematic process of becoming a part of a new community. Participation of L2 learners in different social practices entails the struggle for meaning and identity, occurring in living events of language-crossing and appropriation. It is then through the *negotiation* of identities and textual meanings that language is learned, both within and across practice sites, and it is "through language that a person gains access to - or is denied access to - powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak" (Peirce 1995: 13).

2.2.2 Participation as 'negotiation'

While Bruner (1986) has suggested that classrooms are a forum for negotiating culture, sociocultural L2 researchers ask whose cultural knowledges are involved in this negotiation, on what terms cultural identities are negotiated and what impact this has on school success or failure. Two research perspectives which offer possible explanations for academic outcomes in schooled literacy learning by minority students can be defined in the sociocultural approach. One of them deals with cross-cultural differences in literacy practices and between ways of knowing. It focuses primarily on the question of socialisation in different cultural traditions and examines differences among schooled and broader literacy practices, as well as their consequences for the cultural-cognitive development of students (Cole 1996; Moll 1992; Saxe 1991; Scribner & Cole 1981; Gallimore & Tharp 1990). This perspective suggests that cultural mismatches between teachers' and students' funds of knowledge may result in communicative difficulties in the classroom which are often seen as learning problems. These contradictions work against the literacy learning of students whose community and home literacies are excluded from school practices. Another perspective looks beyond mismatches between the cultural knowledges of communities and the school. It suggests that the lack of educational success of non-English-speaking students reflects structural inequalities in the broader social, political and economic spheres (Au 1993; Ogbu 1987). This second approach takes into account the power relationships between groups, and argues that schools function to maintain the status quo. Both perspectives, however, are helpful in understanding why

negotiations of meaning occur and what is involved in the strategic resolution of the above-mentioned contradictions.

Ogbu (1992) argues, for example, that meaning negotiations in L2 and literacy learning are closely related to the impact mainstream culture produces on particular cultural identities. That impact varies and thus its study should be approached, according to Ogbu, from the cultural-comparative perspective. He connects the literacy success and failure of minority students in schools to the historical contexts of becoming a minority group, and notes how this influences the general cultural dynamics within the cultural group. Ogbu claims in his research that some groups interpret cultural and linguistic differences as obstacles to be overcome, whereas other groups interpret these as differences to be maintained and as an expression of identity. As well, some cultural groups have a larger proportion of oppositional strategies on which minority students can draw in their resistance to the mainstream construction of identities in educational settings. These findings resonate with Ferdman's (1990: 197) argument that "cultural identity mediates the process of becoming literate as well as the types of literate behavior in which a person subsequently engages". Hence, negotiation of meaning as a process acquires multiple forms due to the underlying reasons for disagreement or agreement. Since L2 literacy teaching involves the transmission of the dominant values, marginalised cultural identities respond differently to discourses and texts in the learning situation. Either they must adopt the mainstream perspective and risk undermining their cultural identity, or they must resist the externally imposed activities at the risk of becoming alienated from the school (Au 1993; Cummins 1986).

Discourses and practices of schooling have a significant impact on students who daily have to negotiate textual meanings. For some, these cultural practices are more familiar and offer few challenges, while for others they represent significant obstacles to their success at school. Cummins (1986: 32) suggests that the learning trajectories of minority students are related to the practices of how "schools reflect or counteract the power relations that exist within the broader society". His work provides a useful framework for evaluating the efforts of schools in this regard. While ESL readers and writers are involved in the activity of meaning-making, their thinking processes are affected by the broader discourses that explicitly and implicitly guide meaning-negotiation in classroom literacy learning. They learn particular ways of thinking and talking about texts. Based partly on classroom community norms and partly on broader cultural discourses, L2 students negotiate issues such as how much information to include in a retelling about texts or in writing, who should talk about the reading, what vocabulary is appropriate, what interpretations are worth sharing, how personal or culture-specific one's responses should be, whether or not to ask questions about issues in a text, whether or not to change one's mind about ideas (an

ideological positioning), and whether discussion about a text should support and extend others' comments or seek 'flaws' in their approaches to textual interpretation. Meaning-negotiation, in this sense, is deeply embedded in power relations, involving cultural ways of doing, valuing, voicing opinions, etc.

While in the participatory mode of learning, teachers and others socialise ESL students into particular ways of speaking, reading and writing, these practices may also occur in culturally coercive literacy events. That is, literacy learning may occur in situations of the 'reordering of social identities' and 'cultural capital' (Olneck 2000). This calls for a rethinking of what is generally called a L2 learning 'deficiency' (Cook 1999) as an effect of power-meaning negotiations and, often, as resistance to the deployment of dominant cultural capital. In this regard, research into bilingual and multicultural learning redefines the institutionalised negotiation of meanings - the organisation of classroom interactions - in a way that rewards the cultural practices of minorities (cultural empowerment) on the one hand, and enhances the L2 learners' critical awareness of power relations (critical empowerment) on the other.

In relation to the former, Cummins (1986, 1989) identifies four structural elements of schooling which, he argues, influence the extent to which students from minority backgrounds are empowered in L2 and literacy learning. These elements include the incorporation of minority students' culture and language; the inclusion of minority communities in the education of their children; the pedagogical assumptions and practices operating in the classroom; and the assessment of L2 learners (Cummins 1986: 24). In connection to the latter (a critical view of empowerment), Delpit (1995) suggests that an approach to literacy education, one that combines access to the dominant discourses with a critical awareness of issues of power, is particularly important for NESB students' learning. Even as these students are being taught the cultural codes of power "within the context of meaningful communicative endeavors", Delpit (1995: 100) argues, "they must also be helped to learn about the arbitrariness of those codes and about the power relationships they represent".

In this regard, an organisation of literacy practices that incorporates multicultural semiotic resources (native languages and knowledges) and critical discourse analysis can be used to extend the metaphor of participation beyond L2 students' socialisation into the new language and textual practice. The participatory learning framework should promote a critical social inquiry as a way of engaging students in critical literacy projects (see a discussion of 'critical' in Pennycook 1999, 2001). Through participation in such literacy projects, students become involved in close reading of texts and analysis of textual events, deciding on whose cultural capital is favoured or devalued in textual representations, and

resolving intercultural and ethical problems. Rather than just reading and acquiring the official knowledge favoured in historical, sociological, scientific and literary texts, participants in a truly multicultural practice of learning examine texts critically by drawing on both official and unofficial knowledges and perspectives. In this way, L2 students come to think, read, and act like novelists, historians, or scientists by reading and writing critically. They learn how to handle second-language discourses and registers in problem-based dialogical inquiries and through the ongoing conflict between multiple identities, meanings and funds of knowledge. These practices influence the students' L2 development, but they also affect their broader identities as learners (Wenger 1998), which, in turn, affects their knowledge production within and outside school.

Participatory negotiation as a complex practice of meaning-making can be better understood as a multilayered co-construction of knowledge, situated contextually, but related to other sociocultural domains of life and the histories of the participants.

2.2.3 Participation as 'construction'

Among a variety of constructivist approaches (Hruby 2001) within the participatory model of learning, sociocultural constructivism in L2 and literacy learning research emphasises that the situated production of knowledge depends on other people (intersubjectivity), other texts (intertextuality) and other discourses (interdiscursivity). All these influence the selection of choices from available meanings and practices which are brought to bear on the situated production of meaning in classroom negotiations (Dyson 1999). The plane of intersubjectivity in language and literacy learning is often described through the metaphor of 'scaffolding', which is used to define the temporary and adjustable support of a learner's activity by others (teachers and peers). 'Scaffolding' was first used in its educational sense by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) to characterise adults' verbal interaction when reading to young children. Before a shared reading of a book, children in this study were assisted and familiarised with pictures and the general content of the text, and they were asked general questions related to the images and the topic of future reading. After that, children and parents were engaged in the collaborative reading and discussion of the pictures by using words and phrases from the text. The important point was that the adult had done more than simply tell the child the meaning of a word. Rather, the verbal meanings were constructed by the children *with* the active assistance of and feedback from the adults.

This scaffolded learning, according to Wood et al (1976: 90), is an instructional process that "enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal which would be beyond his [or her] unassisted efforts". Scaffolding, however, is not just help or guidance. It incorporates the construction of intertextual and interdiscursive links to the

situated reading activity. These links help, on the one hand, to build a broader context for situated meaning-making and, on the other hand, to mediate the differential appropriation of meanings through the textual and conceptual recontextualisation of reading or writing events. As Dyson (1999) argues, individual constructions of meanings and texts are characterised by the potential *syncretism* inherent in the complex tension between the diverse symbolic, social, and ideological worlds which children live in and draw on in their literate activity. This cultural-semiotic diversity presents a pedagogical challenge: how to scaffold the development of the second mediational system (L2) within the tentative cultural landscape of schooled literacy, criss-crossed as it is by the social worlds, desires, pleasures and literacy resources of L2 learners.

Constructivist research into language and literacy learning requires, then, not only studies of how learners manipulate multiple resources for meaning-making but also of how those resources (and in the first instance languages) manipulate their minds in society (Vygotsky 1978). That is, in order to understand how meanings are constructed we have to see how mind "extends beyond the skin" (Wertsch 1991: 14) and how it is distributed across texts, discourses and the minds of other practice participants. Hence, either for the general purpose of making sense or in critical inquiry - 'making trouble' (Lemke 1995) - meaning construction can be better understood as a socially distributed, intertextual and situationally re-constructive process. This stance is taken by many L2 researchers who underscore the importance of language learning through socially and semiotically mediated activities (Donato 2000).

For example, Merrill Swain (2000) analyses in her study the collaborative writing of L2 learners who were trying to recreate a text in writing. In so doing, students constructed knowledge initially jointly: they negotiated linguistic forms by drawing on each others' contributions. But because collaborative writing is a creative process, they attempted to produce new phrases beyond their current knowledge of second language. The students also referred to their dictionary to solve a linguistic problem and accomplish the act of knowledge construction. From this perspective, what each student achieved cognitively (their internal activity) originated first in their external activity mediated by the text(s) they read and other resources (e.g. the dictionary) they drew on. In Vygotsky's (1978: 57) words, their individual L2 learning involved the "reconstruction of psychological activity on the basis of sign operations", which is always a cultural practice between people. That is, the students' production of meaning was socially distributed, negotiated and collaboratively 'scaffolded' *before* it was internalised. This kind of L2 research is very important for unravelling the multilayered complexity of learning in the collaborative and, hence, knowledge-building dialogue from which internal mental activity originates (Swain 2000). Also, significantly, this insight helps to refocus research attention on the social

plane, while dealing with the situations in which conflicts over meaning in L2 learning practices occur.

The sociocultural approach takes a contrasting position to that of cognitive constructivism, which emphasises that the construction of meaning first emanates from participants' heads. It rejects cognitive conflict (disequilibrium) as the starting point for the analysis of meaning-making interactions. Rather, conflict over meaning, from the sociocultural perspective, emerges from diverse social positions (and positionings) of participants. In this respect, Fairclough's (1992) assumptions might be helpful for constructivist L2 researchers to pursue in order not to lose the socially nested view of meaning construction practices. First, Fairclough argues that people are always confronted with the real social institutions in which existing relations and ways of life are reified (e.g. an educational setting). Second, every social practice is connected with other practices which influence the former (e.g. broader social practices influence situated meaning-making in classrooms). And, third, the power relations within the broader social structures determine the particular behaviours in a particular social institution (e.g. in a classroom). Therefore, the construction of meaning and knowledge does not arise in people's heads but, as Fairclough (1992: 66) argues, it is *discursively* constituted and emanates "from a social practice which is firmly rooted in and oriented to real, material social structures".

As Jerri Willett's (1995) study reminds L2 researchers, these important characteristics of sociocultural constructivism are often not addressed. Willett (1995: 475) insists that L2 learning occurs in "the micro-politics of social interaction" in which "people not only construct shared understandings in the process of interaction, they also evaluate and contest those understandings as they struggle to further their individual [social in origin] agendas". Her longitudinal study of female ESL students has shown that their language development and meaning constructions were dependent on constructions of their identities in sociocultural contexts and related to the ideologies of educational practice which differently motivated these students' learning in the classroom setting. In particular, the students' similar gender and social class identities formed the basis for their close friendship, mutual support and collaborative work to succeed in developing their identities as 'good students'. Similar studies of L2 socialisation have emphasised the importance of the nested sociocultural perspective to understand the connections between broader identity-constitutive discourses, students' experiences and situated constructions of meaningful learning in communication.

In sum, the metaphor of learning as participation opens multiple vistas for research into L2 language and literacy learning. It suggests additional vocabulary (appropriation, negotiation, construction and scaffolding) to bring out the message of sociality,

collaborativeness and contradictoriness that are characteristic of learning in social practice. Researchers working from this perspective do not dismiss human mentation but see this as the psychological activity which originates from and is deeply embedded in social context. This metaphor also allows us to see the complex picture of learning through the expanded notions of language and literacy. That is, the participatory learning model takes language "not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, ensuring a maximum of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life" (Bakhtin 1986: 667). At the same time, learning L2 and literacy in multiple social practices implies knowing "the life of language" (ibid.: 668) as it is manifested in social practices and discourses. To study L2 learning, then, involves not only observations of how participants pick up prefabricated language chunks from native speakers, but also how others' words become differently deployed in practices, and how L2 learners resolve the inevitable contradictions between multiple discourses and between their social, cultural and political implications. Furthermore, learners' growing L2 and literacy experience results not only in the move from peripheral to more central participation in practices. As well, their participatory learning implies also the growth of a critical awareness of their social and cultural identities (subjectivities) in these practices and of those conditions in which they find themselves being constructed in particular ways. In this way, our understanding of the complex processes implicit in the metaphor of participation is fundamental to an understanding of the psychological plane, the interpersonal plane and the institutional plane of L2 and literacy learning.

L2 participatory research does not distance itself from teaching practice. On the contrary, it sees this as one of the main domains in which the learning of language occurs. Indeed, it is upon the organisation of teaching practice that language and literacy learning (and the social futures of L2 learners) in many ways depend.

2.3 Implications of these two metaphors for L2 teaching

I have deployed two metaphors of learning within this review of SLA studies for two reasons: one is related to the current theoretical debate and the other is related to teaching practice. A critical look at the SLA debate on 'theory building' through the lens of acquisition and participation metaphors reveals two major incommensurate tendencies in the field - the cognitivist and the sociocultural. Notwithstanding the broad theoretical scope of SLA studies, their theoretical diversity coalesces, in fact, around their philosophical, epistemological and ideological positions on the nature of language and literacy learning. In this respect, the debate launched by cognitivists with regard to the construction of a unified theory of SLA (based solely on the metaphor of acquisition) may be the road to an

epistemological dead-end. It would be naive to assume that SLA as an academic discipline does not represent a technology to normalise and hierarchise, to homogenise and differentiate a theoretical variety within the field (Foucault 1977a). Behind an agenda of constructing a 'normal' science of SLA lies the political promotion of the cognitivist paradigm of acquisition and the selective exclusion of other 'unscientific' approaches. However, there is yet another problem here. In prioritising innate processes of acquisition, cognitivist approaches lead to a particular view of language and literacy pedagogy, assessment and classroom practices, one that distances itself from the social and cultural problematics of learning. Success or failure in L2 and literacy becomes, on this view, solely a matter of individual mentation, motivation and skill development. The individual is made responsible for learning outcomes, personal control of language learning and information processing skills, as if language were a solitary achievement or an individual property.

Therefore, it is important that this alienating view of learning and learners is challenged not only on the grounds of sociocultural theorising (with an emphasis on the metaphor of participation) but also on the grounds of teachers' disillusionment with what is going on in many multicultural classrooms. Teachers who have learned that students can be more successful when working collaboratively with an adult or more advanced peers (Bruner 1990; Spivey 1997; Vygotsky 1978, 1987), that they appropriate language and knowledge in social interaction and activity participation (Bakhtin 1981, Leont'ev 1981a), that language mediates learning and that students make the greatest learning leaps when they are working in their 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky 1978), begin to see how the social view of second language and literacy learning is important for reforming classroom practices (see Genesee 1994; Antón 1999). It is curious, then, why some voices in the SLA debate are trying to marginalise the body of research that acknowledges language as a non-neutral phenomenon and the classroom as a non-monolithic site. If English language classrooms are now as diverse as the social world they are a part of, teachers need to be informed by research into diversity and heteroglossia of social languages and relate this to the particular kinds of literacy experiences they create in classroom communities (Gutiérrez & Stone 2000).

The sociocultural theory of classroom learning is no less important (and arguably even more significant) for SLA than the UG-based or computational theories of language acquisition. It is important for one simple reason: that a classroom is often the primary (though not the only) site for many young and adult ESL students to experience what counts as literacy in a new cultural context. As Rodby (1992: 81) puts it, "the ways in which ESL literacy is learned, the literacy practices of the classroom, are what constitutes the meaning of ESL literacy for many students. There is not a better or purer literacy in the

world outside the class". She continues: "ESL literacy is what students' experience tells them it is. For students who experience literacy only or primarily through the social interaction of schooling, what literacy *is* often depends on how it is taught and learned." Those experiences of L2 learning often occur in classrooms as sites of conflict between the pedagogy of cultural assimilation and the culturally diverse practices and knowledges that learners bring with them. But because of the dominance of the acquisition metaphor in ESL educational research, the cultural politics of assimilation remain largely unquestioned, as do the politics of knowledge, language, text and difference (Pennycook 2001).

This contradiction is particularly evident in those classroom practices that decontextualise literacy through the transmission of abstract linguistic knowledge (Wells 1999). This kind of teaching practice leads to the development of a narrow (and often skewed) perspective on things in the world, draws on a limited repertoire of resources, and relies on a single approach to address a variety of issues and language needs. This approach is evident in the view that limits L2 development to mere exercises that, by and large, are far removed from the learning of a functional language (Rodby 1992).

Alternatively, the sociocultural paradigm grounds productive L2 learning in dialogical knowledge-building relevant to students' social life. This is described by Wells (2000: 72) as a process of collaborative sharing, questioning, and revising of opinions and views:

Collaboration always occurs because ... people are linked to the wider community, past and present, through the artifacts that they use. The problem that preoccupies them, too, is likely to be one that arises out of a broader sphere of activity in which many other people are involved and to whom the solution will ultimately be addressed. Knowledge building, whether conducted alone or in company, is thus always situated in a discourse in which each contribution both responds to what has preceded it and anticipates a further response.

What Wells argues for is a mode of teaching that draws on multiple resources and broader discourses in the dialogical, classroom-situated practice of learning. From this perspective, participation in a dialogue leads to the development of language which is "the essential condition of knowing, the process by which experience *becomes* knowledge" (Halliday cited in Wells 2000: 73). Hence, the participation metaphor for language learning at least provides the opportunity to examine what counts socially as L2 literacy, and what experiences might underlie students' situated learning.

If language learning is a process by which experience becomes knowledge, then the experience of intercultural tensions is also an important source for knowing language socially. These tensions often originate from students' drawing on dominant (official) and

subjugated (unofficial) discourses in meaning-making (Gutiérrez & Stone 2000). For example, while teachers may be encouraged to adopt the current language and literacy curriculum as mandated by state policies, democratic teaching in multicultural classrooms is hardly possible without a consideration of what it means for students' learning to implement those curricular policies. In this regard, Hammond (1999) argues that, while the general intentions in many literacy policies are positive, their effect and implementation strategies raise questions about access and equity in ESL education. In particular, this concerns strategies aiming to eliminate programs that would be able to address "diverse and very real literacy needs of ESL and other minority students" (ibid.: 132).

L2 researchers who are working with the practice approach to learning argue cogently for a *situated* view of implementing the top-down curriculum mandated by literacy policies. By drawing on the sociocultural framework of participatory learning, Hall (1995: 221), for example, emphasises a pedagogic focus on "the interactive processes by which individuals within groups, and groups within communities, (re)create and respond to both their sociohistorical and locally situated interactive conditions, and the consequences - linguistic, social, and cognitive - of their doing so". In other words, the sociocultural view of L2 learning calls practitioners' attention to how classroom practices can be changed as a result of the interactive and critical activity of learners and teachers. An impressive body of sociocultural L2 research elaborates such concepts as 'the ZPD', 'internalisation', 'prolepsis' and 'scaffolding' specifically for ESL practitioners to consider in this regard (Donato 1994; Frawley & Lantolf 1985; Kramsch 2000; Mercer 1995; Nyikos & Hashimoto 1997; Ohta 2000; Oxford 1997; etc.). One important implication of this research for teachers' activity is that L2 learning is a profoundly social and semiotically mediated practice, in which social regulation is primary to the self-regulation of individual cognition. Therefore, learning outcomes will depend on the organisation of classroom practices as the social context for L2 and literacy development. The social context for learning is not homogeneous and its collaborative organisation should also take into account the specificity of a particular school. Pedagogic effectiveness will depend in many ways on the teacher's awareness of the community surrounding a particular school, the cultural backgrounds of students, and the dominant culture of that community (Moje et al. 2000). All these become very important for educators to acknowledge in order to understand and cater for situated learning in a classroom, as well as for the socio-pedagogic (re)organisation of learning activity.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes Part One of the thesis, in which I have delineated the problematics of language and literacy learning in conditions of multicultural complexity. I use two

metaphors of L2 learning - acquisition and participation - as an organising framework for a review of SLA studies. This framework is a strategic choice to present two incommensurate approaches that have always been in tension, especially in the current situation fuelled by debates about SLA theory-building.

I have argued here that the metaphor of *acquisition* is the conduit metaphor underlying behaviourist and cognitivist approaches to L2 learning. Even though mentalist-oriented theories operate with a variety of vocabularies to specify their particular slant (e.g. behaviourist, generative, computational, or interactionist), they nonetheless see language and knowledge as commodities to be accumulated and/or construed by the mind. It is generally taken for granted that L2 learning takes place in the brain, whether this learning is seen as the development of linguistic habits and reflexes, or as information-processing and 'input crunching'. The brain's innate structures incorporate language codes, rules and meanings in the process of sensual perception and computation, providing knowledge and skills of various kinds (van Leer 2000). Furthermore, conventional linguistics and cognitive theories of learning become institutionalised within the educational system and create particular pedagogic conditions in which the sociocultural complexity of learning is reduced to knowledge transmission and facilitation, and to the measurement of individual cognitive skills. Such pedagogical practices inevitably produce a particular type of learner who is skilled in the processing of decontextualised knowledge but, who, at the same time, is socially and politically deskilled.

Alternatively, the metaphor of *participation* figures prominently in L2 studies that take sociocultural perspectives on learning. This metaphor allows for a shift of focus from the individual mind to the processes of becoming a member of a certain community (Sfard 1998). It gives an opportunity for researchers to be more specific about the complex social nature of learning-in-practice. Even though the metaphor of participation can be used to explain the internalisation of socially produced discourses and knowledges, this does not mean that they become internalised unproblematically all the time. Rather, in sociocultural studies of L2 and literacy, learning is understood as a social practice directly connected to the construction of meanings and identities. Consequently, the issues of asymmetry, domination and tensions in practice participation open up additional perspectives on L2 learners and learning. For this reason, I am using additional vocabulary, such as appropriation, negotiation and social constructionism, to draw particular attention to the contradictions and tensions inherent in the participatory mode of learning. Many sociocultural studies of L2 and literacy have emphasised the sociopolitical tensions in practices resulting in the everyday struggle of L2 learners for meanings and identities. Therefore, I deem it necessary to nuance the metaphor of participation with vocabulary

which allow for a more 'aggressive' vision of participatory learning as appropriation, negotiation and collaborative constructivism.

The adoption of the metaphor of participation within the sphere of pedagogic practices can radically change the ways teaching and learning are currently organised. By paying critical attention to the workings of the social (i.e., the context for learning), a pedagogy informed by sociocultural perspectives prioritises collaborative-dialogical learning and incorporates the multiple resources and knowledges of all members of the classroom community. The metaphor of participation is about the inclusion of diversity to enhance participatory learning and hence to make it more relevant to the (inter)cultural experiences of L2 learners.

Lastly, mainstream SLA research must acknowledge that sociocultural approaches to L2 learning are here to stay. They are not something that disrupt or make the appropriate findings of the dominant paradigm obsolete, but they are, rather, a force that leads to a paradigmatic shift - a new understanding of L2 and literacy learning and teaching. SLA as a field of inquiry can only gain from a theorising which embraces pluralism (Thorne 2000), and the sooner this is recognised the better it will be both for those who teach and for those whose learning is likely to benefit from pluralistic research of this kind.