

Book Review: Exploring L1–L2 relationships: The impact of individual differences, Richard L. Sparks (2022), 392 pp., \$ 159.9, Hardback, ISBN: 978-1-800-411791, Multilingual Matters.

Reviewed by:

Peyman Valizadeh
University of Zabol, Iran

Correspondence

Email: Peyman.Valizadeh.1993@gmail.com

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The book, written by Professor Richard Sparks, showcases his extensive research on language education, psychology, and bilingualism. The volume is a compilation of his influential articles that address key issues in current language education and applied linguistics. The book sheds light on the intricate relationship between bilingual learners' native language (L1) skills and their foreign or second language (L2) learning. Sparks employs numerous empirical studies, many of which are longitudinal in nature, to underpin his theories. His contributions to applied linguistics and language education are unique and extensive. His insights on language aptitude, couched within his Linguistic Coding Differences Hypothesis (LCDH), have been well thought out, well grounded, and well supported by his own studies and those conducted by other scholars applying the model. The LCDH proposes that people with language impairments struggle with language due to difficulties in processing and manipulating its structure in their minds. This deficit affects their ability to recognize sounds, syllables, words, and understand grammar.

This book is a collection of research papers from a group that has been investigating the connections between L1 skills and L2 learning for over 30 years. The volume is divided into seven parts, with six representing different strands of research. Part 1 focuses on the history and development of the LCDH theory and its connections

between L1 and L2 skills. Part 2 features three studies that lend empirical validation to the idea of cross-linguistic transfer from L1 to L2. Two of the studies are longitudinal and show that differences in L1 ability in primary school are strongly related to L2 aptitude and L2 achievement later in high school. The third study examines the effects of L1 print exposure on later L2 achievement.

Part 3 centers on the intricate relationship between an individual's L1 development and their L2 aptitude and achievement. The studies in this section show that differences in early L1 ability are important for later L2 aptitude and achievement, and that L1 skills and L2 aptitude tests may be measuring similar language components. The studies also suggest that language aptitude is made up of different components, each of which taps into specific skills required for L2 learning. The longitudinal nature of the studies strengthens the argument that L2 may be causally determined by L1.

Part 4 of the text discusses research on L2 anxiety and challenges the idea that anxiety is a causal factor in L2 outcomes. The authors posit that anxiety measures might reflect students' self-perceived L1 abilities and L2 accomplishments rather than anxiety itself. They conducted a series of studies using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et al., 1986) and Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) (Saito et al., 1999) to support their hypothesis. Their research found that L2 anxiety was strongly related to L1 ability and L2 aptitude, and that language skills play a confounding role in theories about anxiety in L2 learning. The authors suggest that questions remain about the role of L2 anxiety in L2 learning and the validity of anxiety instruments.

Part 5 discusses the relationship between L1 and L2 reading achievement, and explores whether there are similarities in L1 and L2 reading development for alphabetic orthographies. The Simple View of Reading (SVR) model, which details the skills necessary for learning to read alphabetic orthographies, is introduced as a means of investigating these connections. The SVR model postulates that reading comprehension is the product of word decoding and oral language comprehension. Studies detailed in this section support the applicability of the SVR model to L2 alphabetic orthographies. The chapter also introduces standardized cognitive and linguistic measures for assessing word decoding and language comprehension skills. Specific examples of standardized cognitive and linguistic measures for assessing word decoding and language comprehension skills are provided, along with implications for assessment and pedagogy.

Part 6 is an essay that reviews the literature on intra-individual differences in L1 ability and their connections to L2 learning. The author notes that L2/SLA researchers have traditionally believed that Individual Differences (IDs) in L1 ability are unimportant for L2 achievement, but this perspective overlooks the extensive evidence of early and pervasive IDs in L1 ability. The essay provides an overview of research on IDs in L1 ability and their relationship to L2 learning, and includes a tutorial on how to

understand inter-individual and intra-individual differences in L1 skills, L2 aptitude, and L2 achievement. The author speculates on how L1 working memory and L2 affective factors such as motivation and anxiety could affect advanced learners' L2 outcomes, and concludes that there is substantial variation in human characteristics and individual profiles that could be important for understanding successful L2 acquisition and development. Part 7 concludes with a summary of the main concepts presented in the book and reviews theoretical insights for L2 learning based on the facts of inter-individual and intra-individual differences in L1 ability.

The author's book on L1-L2 relationships is a comprehensive collection of his 40-year research, exploring the role of the L1 in L2 aptitude and learning outcomes. What makes it different from other books is that it offers a unique conceptual model of language aptitude, encompassing domain-specific and domain-general factors. Moreover, his extensive contributions to applied linguistics and language education are well supported by empirical studies, making the book a valuable resource for understanding the intricate relationship between L1 and L2 skills and aptitude. This book provides fresh insights and evidence-backed perspectives in language education literature.

This notwithstanding, a potential future edition of the book could benefit from some revisions. First, it could address concerns about the generalizability of the research, ensuring it encompasses a broader range of language learners and contexts. Providing additional case studies or diverse samples could enhance the book's relevance to various language learning situations. Second, the book could incorporate more practical guidance for educators, offering specific strategies and applications of the research findings in classroom settings. This would help teachers effectively integrate the insights into their teaching practices. Third, the language and terminology used in the book might be simplified or clarified to make it more accessible to non-expert readers. This would increase its potential impact and widen its readership. Fourth, the SVR model in Part 5 could be further evaluated for its applicability to various languages and writing systems. Considering the nuances of different orthographies would strengthen the model's validity and applicability. Finally, in Part 6, the tutorial could be enriched with concrete examples and actionable strategies, empowering educators and learners to address intra-individual differences in L1 and L2 skills effectively. By addressing these points, the book could become even more valuable and influential in the field of language education and applied linguistics.

ORCID

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3759-299X>

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