

Book Review: The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition and individual differences, edited by Shaofeng Li, Phil Hiver, Mostafa Papi, (2022), 517 pp., ISBN: 9781003270546 (ebook), Routledge.

Reviewed by:

Maryam Barghamadi
Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia

Correspondence

Email: barg0008@flinders.edu.au

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Educational psychology has increasingly focused on language learning to investigate individual differences (IDs) in second language acquisition (SLA) over the years, as shown in seminal works by Dörnyei (2005) and Skehan (1989). This increased attention to IDs has led to the exploration of new factors and perspectives within the field of SLA. Recent studies, such as those conducted by Pawlak (2021) and Pawlak and Kruk (2023) on the relationship between IDs and computer-assisted language learning, provide evidence of the growing field. As a result, the focus on IDs and educational psychology in SLA has intensified over the past two decades. It is widely accepted that IDs significantly affect human behaviour and cognition. Therefore, there has been a growing emphasis on understanding why some learners excel while others face challenges.

While most books on this subject tend to focus on fundamental variables like personality, aptitude, motivation, learning styles, and strategies, a recent publication by Shaofeng Li, Phil Hiver, and Mostafa Papi, titled 'The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Individual Differences,' stands out as a

comprehensive and up-to-date resource in the field. This book, with its 32 chapters divided into seven parts, not only integrates new theoretical perspectives on IDs but also significantly contributes to the field. It begins with a foreword by Rod Ellis, who provides a brief overview of the history and importance of IDs in SLA. The editors, in the introduction, not only offer guidance for empirical research but also invite contributions from leading researchers such as Peter Robinson and Diane Larsen-Freeman, thereby introducing fresh perspectives on SLA theories and their connections to IDs. The introduction also provides a comprehensive overview of complex systems theory/dynamics by Larsen-Freeman. However, some readers may feel that an individual chapter on complex system theory could provide more detailed explanations, especially for those new to the field.

In the subsequent section, the book presents an innovative organisational framework. The book's first three parts are structured according to Cronbach's (2002) taxonomy of IDs, encompassing cognitive, conative, and affective domains, respectively. Each section comprises corresponding chapters that delve into novel topics seldom explored in comparable literature. Chapter Six, for instance, explores metacognition within the cognitive domain, Chapter Eight focuses on mindset in the conative realm, and Chapter Twelve examines enjoyment in the context of affective disparities. The editors of this book extend their purview beyond Cronbach's taxonomy in part five to encompass sociocultural and demographic considerations, with a particular emphasis on identity and age dynamics. While previous sources have discussed age dynamics (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; Griffiths & Soruc, 2020), this book reevaluates it within the context of evolving understandings of language learners' identities, as illuminated by Norton and Pavlenko (2019). This underscores the complexity and multidimensionality inherent in individuals' self-concepts, thereby warranting recent attention in ID research.

Upon thoroughly analysing the existing literature, it has become evident that the principal focus lies on the intersection of educational psychology and SLA. This relationship primarily examines the connection between IDs and learning behaviours, as demonstrated by the works of Griffiths and Soruc (2020). Nevertheless, this new handbook surpasses prior works by offering a more detailed exploration of these themes, spanning from Part 2 to 5.

Of particular significance, part six of the handbook comprises eight chapters from chapters 17 to 24, emerging as a pivotal section within the volume. This extensive segment can potentially elevate the handbook into a more comprehensive resource by forging connections between ID factors and the acquisition of various components of second language (L2) learning. Importantly, it delves into aspects often overlooked by existing literature, such as pronunciation and pragmatics, and diverse skills, including listening and writing. By bridging these critical gaps, the handbook emerges as a comprehensive guide that enriches our understanding of IDs in SLA and provides

practical insights for educators and researchers alike, as exemplified by Pawlak's (2021) work.

Chapter 17 of this book discusses the speech learning models and highlights that these models do not sufficiently account for the complete range of ID variables in L2 pronunciation development. The chapter suggests some online programs that can be helpful to improve this skill, as native-like performance is not guaranteed by starting at an early age, and L2 phonology can be acquired at any age and is dependent on different types of IDs. Therefore, it is advised that a comprehensive examination of the various factors that influence L2 pronunciation be undertaken to develop a new edition of the present book. Although the current models have proven valid, incorporating additional ID factors will ensure a more precise and accurate analysis of L2 pronunciation. The consideration of these factors is essential for the effective enhancement of the book's instructional quality. Chapter 18 deals with the role of common ID variables such as working memory, motivation, anxiety, aptitude, learning styles and strategies, and age in L2 vocabulary learning. It finds that learners with more extraordinary working memory tend to learn more words. However, ID research requires more research on other aspects of vocabulary knowledge and various vocabulary learning conditions.

In the following chapter, Suzuki discusses how cognitive abilities and age affect knowledge of grammar in SLA. Suzuki sheds light on the dynamics of explicit and implicit learning and provides insights into how aptitude and instructional interventions can enhance L2 grammatical proficiency. The chapter specifically focuses on the relationship between aptitude and instructional feedback, both oral and written, in improving L2 grammatical knowledge. The findings presented by Suzuki highlight the importance of explicit aptitude, or language analytic ability, as a strong predictor of grammatical proficiency, especially among adult L2 learners. This suggests that explicit learning mechanisms play a more significant role in acquiring grammatical structures for adults.

Chapter 20 of the handbook serves two primary purposes. Firstly, it conducts a scoping review of quantitative studies between 1987 and 2019 to explore the relationship between pragmatic competence and learner characteristics. Most of these studies focused on proficiency as a learner characteristic, with less than 15% delving into other ID variables. The assessment of pragmatic competence was primarily accomplished through discourse completion tests, revealing that refusals and apologies were the most common speech acts observed. Nonetheless, it is essential to note that while these findings shed light on the relationship between pragmatic competence and learner characteristics, they do not imply that other factors do not influence pragmatic competence. Instead, the lack of attention paid to other learner characteristics in pragmatics learning is primarily due to the limited extent of their study.

Secondly, the chapter conducts a small-scale meta-analysis of qualitative studies, drawing from a final sample of 26 articles. This analysis suggests that production-based tasks demand higher proficiency than comprehension or recognition tasks. By synthesising qualitative findings, the chapter provides valuable insights into the varying demands of different task types on learners' pragmatic competence, offering a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in second language acquisition. The insights presented in this chapter have practical implications for second language teachers, curriculum designers, and researchers in language acquisition.

Chapter 21 provides an in-depth analysis of the listening process of second language learners. The focus is on identifying ID factors that contribute to successful listening. The chapter examines top-ranked journals despite limited research and classifies findings based on Cronbach's (2002) taxonomy and socio-cultural and demographic variables. The analysis highlights motivation and anxiety as the most influential IDs affecting successful listening comprehension. The chapter highlights the complex interplay between learner characteristics and listening proficiency. In Chapter 22, the focus shifts to investigating the impact of various ID factors on learners' L2 speaking abilities. The chapter explores the influence of working memory, anxiety, age of onset, and willingness to communicate on L2 speaking performance. The chapter delves into these factors to elucidate the intricate relationships between IDs and L2 speaking proficiency, underscoring the necessity of considering individual differences in L2 speaking assessments. Through this exploration, the chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of L2 speaking development and emphasises the importance of accounting for IDs in language assessment practices.

Chapter 23 of the book delves into the theories and models concerning ID variables. It highlights the mutual reinforcement of reading ability and phonological awareness. Moreover, it posits that L2 proficiency may mediate the relationship between working memory and L2 reading. The chapter proposes practical strategies based on ID factors to tackle the challenges of digital reading. To understand the link between the L2 writing process, written corrective feedback, and ID factors, *The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Writing* by Manchón and Polio (2022) could be a valuable complementary resource to Chapter 24. The book contains three chapters dealing with the role of ID factors in L2 written performance.

The chapters on IDs encompass an overview of data elicitation and research methods. Still, the Research Method segment is organised separately to provide a comprehensive understanding of research methods within ID studies. This segment briefly describes the methods, highlighting their nature, functions, and purposes. Meanwhile, the "technical features" section details how authors conducted their research, describing the data collection process and tools. The section expands on the data collection, preparation, and analysis process by examining five typical instruments in ID research, such as surveys, eye-tracking, and psychometric assessments. It sheds light on formulating research questions and measuring data

quality, guiding researchers in selecting the latest methods and following the appropriate steps to conduct research and recognise relevant issues. Overall, this section aims to equip researchers with adequate knowledge and technical know-how to conduct research in ID studies.

Chapter 31, in seven parts, presents the methods of a newly emerging ID and SLA research approach. The complex/dynamic systems theory methodology provides a new theoretical perspective. Researchers in this area use the method to study the reasons behind the differing performances of language learners. Contrary to conventional, modular independent variables, complex/dynamic systems theory redefines IDs in SLA as systemic phenomena. This allows for a more developmental perspective to be considered, explicitly reorienting attention towards change processes at varying timescales. The chapter provides an overview of the elicitation and analysis of data, along with the strengths and challenges of using techniques such as the idiodynamic method, experience sampling method, social network analysis, and design-based research methods. The final chapter provides an overview of the structural equation modelling procedure and technical aspects of ID research to examine latent variables and interrelationships among variables.

A well-structured and organised frame characterises the present volume within a theoretical perspective, empirical research, and future directions. As such, it is a valuable resource for researchers and educators concerned with second language (L2) acquisition and a helpful guide for students and novice researchers who wish to pursue empirical research. While the quality and quantity of empirical support varies across chapters, most ID variables are of marginal interest. Accordingly, the synthesis of findings and the derivation of general conclusions about the types of ID factors that lead to L2 learning success are unlikely. Therefore, the volume emphasises identifying potential and realistic options for future research.

Overall, *The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Individual Differences* is an essential resource for researchers and scholars interested in exploring the complexities of individual differences in language acquisition. It integrates new theoretical perspectives and focuses on empirical research, offering a valuable contribution to the field of SLA.

ORCID

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4982-3537>

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