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Learning from Diane: Her Achievements and Profound Influence on Researchers and Language Teachers in China

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Abstract

Professor Diane Larsen-Freeman has been an enduring and highly influential contributor to the field of applied linguistics, English language teaching, in general, and especially grammar teaching. She has inspired many thousands of language teachers, student-teachers and academicians in applied linguistics. Her research in Second Language Acquisition and her later research interest in introducing complex systems to the field of applied linguistics has had a great impact on research in applied linguistics. The book she co-authored with Cameron put a completely different perspective on language and language studies. Her book on teaching approaches also attracted thousands of readers who specialize in language teaching. The video made on different teaching methods covered in the book is also a good demonstration helping learners identify the features of different methods. What's more, her coinage of the word “grammaring” and the concept of form-meaning-use she advocated in the book series *Grammar Dimensions* has shed light on people's understanding of grammar and grammar teaching, thus transforming the way of teaching grammar. Her numerous publications of influential books and papers have great impact on researchers and language teachers in China.

Keywords: *Diane Larsen-Freeman, Applied Linguistics, Complexity Theory, Grammaring, Grammar Teaching, Chinese Language Teachers, Chinese Researchers*

Introduction

Diane was the Director of the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan in 2006 when she offered me, a young researcher in China, an opportunity to be a visiting scholar with her as supervisor. Her questions in reply to my email helped me define my research interests and begin my journey of following her research and witnessing her influence on researchers in the field of applied linguistics and language education in China.

At that time, Diane was working on her forthcoming book *Complex System and Applied Linguistics* (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) and I had the honour to be the first reader and

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shared my personal understanding of the book with her. It helped me develop further understanding of complexity theory and began to know more about “grammaring”.

Diane was generous in having weekly talks with me, covering different aspects in SLA and language education and talking about research in applied linguistics from the perspective of complexity theory.

Diane spared her precious time to be interviewed by me concerning complexity theory and the new perspective of viewing and doing research in applied linguistics (Ji 2008). This interview introduced her insight for research in applied linguistics from the perspective of complexity theory to Chinese readers.

For the past 17 years, Diane presented her research in China in 2011 in Beijing, 2018 in Macao, 2019 in Beijing once again, or shared it online with Chinese researchers in 2022 at a webinar, all of which helped enhance researchers’ understanding of her research.

Learning from Diane: Her Professional and Personal Charms

Diane’s book (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) offers readers a clear outline of SLA research and it is a must-read book for students and researchers in applied linguistics. Her paper *Chaos/Complexity Science and Second language Acquisition* published in 1997 (Larsen-Freeman, 1997) was the first one to apply complexity theory to the field of applied linguistics. In this milestone paper, she introduced the concept of chaos/complexity science and its implications for SLA. She listed the features of complex systems, including being dynamic, complex, nonlinear, chaotic, unpredictable, sensitive to initial conditions, open, self-organizing, feedback sensitive, adaptive, having strange attractors and a fractal shape. She also compared complex nonlinear systems and language. She stated that the study of complex nonlinear systems and the study of language showed that they have much in common, including that they can be seen as active processes characterized by growth and change. Later in 2006, Ellis and Larsen-Freeman (2006) co-edited the *Applied Linguistics Special Issue*, which featured papers that applied complexity theory to various areas of applied linguistics.

As for myself, from reading her book (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991), I got a better understanding of SLA. Upon reading her 1997 article, I began to become interested in chaos/complexity science, and I should say it enlightened me a lot. I remembered that in my email back to Diane, I wrote that “When I first began to step into the field of SLA, it seemed that I had found solutions to many problems I encountered in language teaching. However, when I thought more deeply, and read more, I felt that it was not that simple. We cannot apply theory or research methods so easily and simply to our own teaching.” Maybe theories in SLA are not just black or white, just as what Diane stated in her paper that “it suggests we need to see SLA as both/and rather than either/or”. Diane also wrote that “language is dynamic, grammar is dynamic.” It was the first time that I have read that dynamic can be a word used to describe language and grammar.

When I was applying to be a visiting scholar in 2006, Diane showed her seriousness attitude when she emailed back to me with two questions “What do you hope to accomplish here? What are your research plans?” Her questions guided me to define my research interest. Later, when I became a visiting scholar at UM, I was able to attend her classes every week and she was so generous to offer me her precious time for meeting me once a week and exchanging ideas concerning research. At that time, the book *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics* that she

co-authored with Lynne Cameron was in final editing, and I was lucky enough to be the first reader of the version to be published. Then, in 2008, *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics* (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) was published by Oxford University Press, which, as Diane stated in the preface, “We have found a complexity approach to be very helpful in giving us a way of understanding certain phenomena in applied linguistics. We believe that the approach holds great promise, and we intend to continue to develop suitable methodologies in exploring what it affords.”

At that time, I was really interested in the way that she connected complexity theory and applied linguistics, so I asked her whether I could have an interview with her about her ideas. She accepted my invitation. The interview and a brief review of her new book were later published in Chinese in September 2008 (Ji, 2008) and her ideas of adopting a new approach for understanding phenomena in applied linguistics began to be known by researchers in China. A short extract of the interview will be featured in the next section of this article.

Later, after I finished my study as a visiting scholar in 2007 in the US, I thought it would be very difficult for me to meet Diane again in the future. I tried to follow her research and broaden my own horizon in research. However, fortunately, in the years to come, I had the honour of meeting Diane several times in China, each of which became a refreshing and unforgettable experience, enabling me to feel Diane’s professional and personal charm once and once again.

Diane was invited to China several times. In 2011, Diane was invited to be one of the keynote speakers in AILA (2011), giving the talk: “Saying what we mean: Making a case for language acquisition to become language development.” She advocated using the word “development” instead of “acquisition” to show that language is dynamic, always under construction, never complete. Later, Diane published other papers around the theme of complexity (2015, 2018, 2019), covering language development, and considering World English as a complex and adaptive system, and discussing learner agency likewise.

In 2018, she again returned to China. She was invited to be the keynote speaker for the 16th ASIA TEFL Conference, where she gave the lecture “A New Way of Thinking,” focusing on the implications of complexity theory for language education. She introduced complexity theory and showed how complexity theory gives us a new way to think about our field. Accordingly, she introduced such concepts as innovation, adaptation, improvisation, iteration, and inspiration. She said that this new way of thinking is essentially in keeping with the complex and dynamic Zeitgeist of the modern world. When I was with her in the conference, apart from her keynote lecture, what impressed me most was her dedication to research and education. She read the program very carefully and went to different sessions and asked questions and interacted with speakers and audiences, which showed what a real scholar is like.

In May, 2019, she came to Beijing Foreign Studies University, talking about SLA development, in which she summarized the development of SLA research and introduced complex dynamic system theory to a new audience at this prestigious university.

Then, in 2022, she presented a webinar in which she talked about grammaring and writing—how they are working together to make meaning in discourse. Each time she gave a talk, she enlightened us, offering us more insightful ideas concerning complexity theory in applied linguistics, grammaring, and grammar teaching.

Refreshing our Memory: An Interview with Diane Back in 2007

In the previous section, I mentioned that in 2007, before the book *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics* was published, I had the honour to interview Diane. In the interview, Diane talked about her initial thought of “connecting” complexity theory and applied linguistics, her own ideas on research and other topics. Now when we look back on the development of research done from the perspective of complexity theory in the field of applied linguistics in the past 16 years, it is easy to see that Diane is definitely a pioneering scholar. The original interview is in English, and in 2008, part of the interview script was translated into Chinese and published (Ji, 2008). With the permission of the journal the interview (in Chinese) was published, part of the original interview (in English) was put here, taking us back to more than 16 years ago:

Q: Your paper (Larsen-Freeman, 1997) was the first to associate Chaos/Complexity Science and Second language Acquisition, so readers of the forthcoming book of yours must be interested in the question “What made you associate these two?”

A: First of all, thank you for the opportunity to talk about complexity theory. Second, to answer the question about how I came to associate the two, I must say that it was really just good fortune. I began to read a book on chaos theory. I didn't read it thinking about applied linguistics. I just read it because I am interested in science. Somebody gave the book to me and said I might enjoy reading it. The book was not about language or applied linguistics. It was about systems in nature. However, as I was reading it, I kept being reminded of language. The book talked about non-linear systems, dynamic systems, complex systems. I don't know anything that is more complex, dynamic, and non-linear than language. So it was a coincidence. It wasn't that I set out to do research in chaos or complexity theory. It was that when I was reading the book, I couldn't help making connections between naturally occurring systems and language.

Q: I know that maybe it is difficult or even impossible to summarize complexity theory in a few sentences, but would you please explain complexity theory briefly so readers may have a general idea of what they are going to look forward to in your book?

A: You are right. It will be difficult to be brief, but let me begin by providing a context. I said that I was making connections between reading the book and language. But it went beyond this because for a long time I had been dissatisfied with some aspects of the field of second language acquisition. It seemed to me we were limiting our focus. We were looking to reduce the complexity of language and its acquisition to something very simple, a reductionist strategy which the physical sciences often take. We were also looking at language acquisition at just one or two points in time. However, in chaos and complexity theory, I found a non-reductionist approach to science and one that honors a dynamic process such as language acquisition. Complexity theory deals with emergent phenomena, phenomena that are always in the process of changing.

Very little in our world is static. However, we humans try to reduce the dynamism in various ways. For one, we give someone or something a name. We call someone Diane or Xiaoting or something a river or a tree. This act turns a living or dynamic entity into a more or

less fixed concept. By the same token, when we call a language English or Chinese, we lose sight of the fact that language is not a static object, but instead, is always changing. Now, this is not a new insight. Hundreds of years ago, Heraclitus said that you can never step in the same river twice. However, in recent years in applied linguistics, I think we have forgotten this message, and we have instead, focused on language as a product, rather than a situated process.

Complexity theory studies the complexity that comes from phenomena on one level self-organizing to another level of complexity on a higher scale, just as individual birds fly together and the flock emerges from the interaction of many individual birds. Self-organization occurs in open systems, systems that open to energy from outside and are therefore in constant flux.

Q: From 1997 to the present, it has been more than ten years since you have written that first paper on chaos/complexity theory and second language acquisition. Would you please summarize the development of applying complexity theory to the field of applied linguistics?

A: The 1997 paper was actually presented as a paper at the Second Language Forum Conference in Montreal in 1994. When the paper was delivered, some scholars became interested in it, and some objected to it, but it did not receive a great deal of attention initially. However, the interest has grown considerably since then. As time has passed, more and more people are finding complexity theory attractive. There had been colloquia organized on it, special issues of journals devoted to it, and now books are being published on it. There is so much flux and fluidity of peoples in our globalized world, that I think complexity theory fits the zeitgeist of our time.

Q: I don't know whether it is polite to say that readers also want to know whether you have encountered some difficulties in the process of advocating a complexity perspective in applied linguistics. I think that you must have experienced those since not all agree to this point. Would you like to share with us some of your thoughts during these years?

A: Certainly, as I said earlier, some people objected to the ideas in complexity theory—specifically that language emerges from use. Linguists who come from a Chomskian generative tradition have difficulty with this position. They seek to describe an innate mental competence, something they call a universal grammar. However, in my opinion, it is not necessary to distinguish competence from performance in use in order to arrive at a satisfactory explanation for language. According to chaos/complexity theory, the act of playing a game has a way of changing the rules.

Of course not all will agree that complexity theory offers a useful perspective. That is to be expected. We wrote the book as an opening in a continuing conversation to better understand issues of interest to applied linguists.

Q: I think your book (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) will give applied linguists a new perspective in doing research and teachers a new perspective for viewing their teaching. What do you think may be the prospect of the application of complexity theory in applied linguistics?

A: I don't know. I do know that I have found in complexity theory a much more satisfying way of understanding language, language learning, language teaching. I hope to connect with other scholars who see it this way so that I might have some conversation partners.

Q: I remembered that you said in the book that “Writing this book is a kind of risk, but the benefit outweighs the risk”.

A: That's right. Anytime you write a book there is risk involved. You put your ideas out for others to judge. But my feeling is that scholarship is about being open to new ideas and about sharing them with others. I do not wish to impose complexity theory on anybody. But I have found the study of it very productive, and so I want to offer it to others. In so doing, I will also learn from others, no doubt.

Q: Maybe readers can really benefit from reading this book, whether they are researchers, applied linguists or teachers. They can get something new for their own benefit.

A: I know I was very excited when I discovered complexity. However, I leave it up to others as to whether they accept the ideas or not.

Q: I think readers in China will benefit a lot from it. Thank you!

What Happened after the Interview in the Past 16 Years: Her Influence on Chinese Researchers

When we reviewed the interview done 16 years ago, it was found that Diane was excited about complexity theory and she left it up to others to see whether they accepted the ideas or not. She did hope to have some conversation partners concerning the perspective of complexity theory and applied linguistics, but she could not anticipate what may be the prospect of the application of complexity theory. But now, as we look back over the past 16 years, we can say that the years have witnessed the quick development of research in SLA from the perspective of complexity theory. It seemed that Diane could have been more optimistic considering this issue.

From 2008 to now in China, there has been a lot of research done in SLA employing a complexity approach, in which they all cited Larsen-Freeman's 1997 paper and 2008 book with Cameron. These revealed to us the significant influence of Diane and her work. It has been transformative. The studies done in China include Li (2011), giving an introduction to the development of dynamic complexity theory in SLA, which, together with Ji (2008) introduced this new perspective of doing research to Chinese researchers. Zheng (2011) illustrates vocabulary acquisition, which is a novel way for researching vocabulary, while Wang (2011) presents a web-based English reading model, showing the influence of CDST on online teaching, and Xu (2011) illustrates foreign language teaching reform, which offered implications for Chinese foreign language education. All of these articles stated the perspective of Complex Dynamic Systems Theory. In the following years, the studies on Chinese learners and foreign language learning environment from the aspect of Complex Dynamic Systems

Theory flourished (Zheng,2016; Zheng& Liu, 2020). Larsen-Freeman’s articles and books exerted profound influence in this field.

There’s an increasing number of Chinese scholars making use of complexity theory when it comes to research in SLA. During the period from 2010 to 2019, there have been different articles published both in China and other countries (Zheng, 2020), 80 in total from scholars in China. Zheng (2015) “adopted a cross-sectional design and investigated the vocabulary breadth-depth development over a seven-year span”. Dong (2016) “investigated the developmental trajectories of an EFL learner's listening strategy use and listening performance and explored the dynamic correlation between the two variables from a dynamic systems perspective”. They paid more attention to the development over a period of time, which indicated the dynamic features of the systems. According to Zheng (2020), between 2011 and 2019, the peak for the theoretical application of complexity theory was in 2013, in which there were about ten papers published. Then, starting in 2015, researchers began to do more empirical research applying complexity theory in their research. Studies done in China mainly covered SLA, motivation, classroom research, bilingual development, studies on individual differences, translation studies and other topics. These research have been transformative and they applied the CDST in researching more about individual learners, which showed they paid more attention to the “noise” (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) in the traditional reductionist approach. When reading all these papers, we can feel the great influence of Diane and her milestone paper and book chapters.

From 2020 to now, there are still more research done in China from the perspective of Complex Dynamic Systems Theory, including Zhu et al (2021); Zhu & Liu (2021); Zhu (2021); Zhu et al (2023); Zheng (2020). Their research include research on the development of written language based on Complex Dynamic System Theory, in which they mentioned that the application of Complex Dynamic Systems Theory to the study of second language development is an emerging research paradigm. The unique research method makes the empirical study of language dynamic development scientific and effective. Zhang & Zhang (2022) did a research on the exploration on the characteristics of college students' English writing competence development from the perspective of complex theory. Zhang & Liang (2022) did a research concerning multi-dimensional interactive patterns between second-language writing text fluency and discourse cohesion. Huang & Zheng (2022) did the research from the perspective of complex dynamic system theory. They examined the impact of bilingual learning on the development of first foreign language by comparing and analyzing the development level and the dynamic process of written syntactic complexity of first foreign language (English) in one academic year for bilingual learners and single foreign language learners.

The researches are still going on.

Grammaring and Grammar Teaching: Her Influence on Chinese Language Teachers

In the interview done in 2007, when asked about the implications of the book *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics* for language teachers, Diane said “The book was not necessarily written for teachers, but I do think complexity theory has implications for teaching. In another book, I created the term “grammaring” because I wanted to point out the importance of students’ being able to use grammatical structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately.

It is not enough to know about the grammar. Knowing all the rules will be insufficient when it comes to overcoming “the inert knowledge problem,” the problem of students’ not being able to use what they have learned for their own purposes.

Diane talked about her grammaring book when answering another interview question.

Q: I think Cameron mentioned that teaching is not like doing a shopping list, which means I have this grammar structure, then I teach this grammar structure, then it can be erased from the list, then I teach another one.

A: Right, right, and that point is in my grammaring book as well. I have suggested that it might be better to think of a syllabus more as a checklist than a prescribed sequence for teaching. When something is learned, the whole system can be restructured. Learning is not just an additive process. Of course teachers are responsible for teaching certain material, and that is why I call it a checklist. When students show that they have learned a certain structure, the teacher can cross it off the list. This honors students’ readiness to learn while not prescribing the sequence.

She put forward the term grammaring to refer to a learner’s ability to use a grammar constructions accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately. She summarized her position that grammar has these three dimensions; it is not only about accuracy, and she stated that for different grammar items, different dimensions may become the most difficult and most challenging for the learners. In her “grammaring” book, she listed the differences between the traditional way of grammar teaching and the way of teaching from the perspective of grammaring. Traditionally, grammar was considered as knowledge while from the perspective of grammaring, it should be a skill, which can be used along with the other four skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing. It emphasized the dynamic use of grammar instead of merely memorizing the rules. What is more important is that learners should know when to use structures and how to use them appropriately. She cited the term the “inert knowledge problem” (Whitehead, 1929, as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2005) to refer to the fact that learners often cannot make use of what they have learned in the classroom. The reasons for this kind of phenomenon may be traced back to the ways of teaching which attach too much importance to learning grammar rules as knowledge instead of using grammar.

I still remembered clearly that once in her class she contrasted two different ways of teaching simple past tense to illustrate this point. The first way was to resort to the traditional way of mechanical drilling like “Did you go to the zoo yesterday?” “Did you visit your grandpa?” “Did you have a good day?”; however, the other way she used was to encourage learners to use the grammar more communicatively. She asked the students to look at her and then close their eyes. Then she took off her watch, her eye glasses, turned her ring around etc. Later, when students opened their eyes, Diane asked them to find six changes she had made. Students then used interrogative sentences in simple past tense to identify the changes. At that moment, students had to use simple past tense instead of memorizing the rules of simple past tense. This activity she designed for students to practice simple past tense may be used as a perfect example to show the connotation of the phrase “psychologically authentic”—the activity should be designed to allow learners to experience some of the normal psychological

pressures felt by people engaged in real communication. Her ideas on grammaring and grammar teaching were introduced to Chinese language teachers in 2010 (Ji & Ke, 2010).

The integration of form, meaning, and use offered insight for grammar teaching, in which learners should not only know the rules, but should know how to use them. This idea was adopted in Curriculum Standards for Senior High School English (2017) and guided grammar teaching in senior high schools in China. Then in 2022, an important document, Curriculum Standards for English in Compulsory Education in China, advocated the integration of these three dimensions in grammar teaching.

In China, a lot of researchers have done research on grammar teaching, especially grammar teaching in basic education (Ji & Ke, 2010; Hou & Yang, 2019; Su, 2021); the search with “three dimensions of grammar” as the key words, there are more than 166 research results which showed the influence of Diane’s grammar ideas, in which we can see the influence of Diane. In their papers, they mentioned three dimensions of grammar, the importance of the use of grammar, the importance of discourse in grammar learning and teaching, the importance of practice and production in grammar teaching and learning which are in accordance with what was stated in Diane’s book. In her “grammaring” book, she challenged the conceptions of grammar, explained the dynamics of language, stating three dimensions, explaining the difference between rules and reasons, emphasized the grammar of choice and the grammar of discourse. She also integrated insights from SLA research by discussing consciousness-raising, output practice and production, feedback, and teaching grammaring.

All these aspects, three dimensions of form, meaning and use, and designing output practice activities held important implications for grammar teaching in China. In the past, when talking about grammar teaching, most teachers in China attached a lot importance to the explanation of the grammar rules, requiring students to recite the grammar rules and do a lot of mechanical exercises and answer multiple-choice questions. What was emphasized was mainly the form, or form and meaning, while the use dimension was usually neglected. What’s more, what was ignored is what kind of activities should be designed for students to use grammar in real contexts. Diane’s grammaring book listed some essential criteria for designing output practice activities. The first one is that they should be meaningful and engaging, “Students will best acquire the structures or patterns for some meaningful purposes other than decontextualized or mechanistic practice. Meaningful practice activities also serve to engage learners” (Larsen-Freeman, 2005, p.117). Sometimes teachers may misunderstand that engage equals entertain. Diane, however, stated in her book that “I do not think that my function as a teacher is to entertain my students, but it is crucial to engage them. If they are not engaged, then they are probably not attending, and their attention is important” (Larsen-Freeman, 2005, p.117).

The second point that she made is to focus on the learning challenge—the dimension of form, meaning or use, that is when we are planning activities, it is important to recognize that different types of activities address different dimensions of grammar. As for activities designed for form, frequency is essential; whereas for activities addressing meaning, the association between form and meaning is more important; and for the use dimension, “neither frequent use nor association is the operating mode; instead, students must learn to make the appropriate choice according to given contextual constraints. They may be put into a situation where, given two or more different forms, they have to choose the most appropriate form for that context” (Larsen-Freeman, 2005, pp.118-119).

She is also the series director of the books *Grammar Dimensions: Form-Meaning-Use*, in which each unit includes an opening task, focus, and using English activities. The opening task uses the grammar of discourse, setting a scene and providing a context for the grammar to be used. Then subsequent foci treat form, meaning or use. Finally, in the activity part, different kinds of communicative activities are provided in order that learners may enhance their mastery of grammar. The series made teachers and students see grammar in a different way, which meant that they shifted perspectives on grammar and grammar teaching in China.

Anecdotes about Diane: “I can walk too” and “I do smile”

Diane not only has written articles and books about grammar. In daily life, she has a sharp ear for the use of grammar items. When I was a visiting scholar at ELI UM, we always walked together to the building where she taught. I remembered that one day when we chatted on the way, I used some tag questions, which interested her. Diane asked me to say those sentences again and tried to analyze why I said what I did. We had a lot of such wonderful “grammar” times together.

In 2011, she was invited to be the keynote speaker at AILA (2011). Unfortunately, she injured her leg before she came to Beijing and when she arrived in Beijing, she had not totally recovered and she was using a walking stick. The organizing committee arranged for a car to pick her up every day. One day when we walked together from the conference venue to the gate of the university, she offered me a ride, and at that moment, the first sentence I blurted out was “I can walk.” Diane smiled at me and teased very “angrily” with her walking stick knocking on the ground: “I can walk too”. Actually, she was correcting me on the use of “can” as a modal verb. “Can”, as a modal verb, is used to indicate the natural ability one has. She was “angry” because I was “challenging her ability to walk”. In this situation, “I can walk” is right in form and meaning dimension, but not in use dimension. I used the word “can” accurately, but I didn’t use it properly and appropriately.

As for smiling, Diane has recorded a video series demonstrating different language teaching methods, including audiolingual, communicative language teaching, suggestopedia, the silent way, the community counselling and total physical response. In that video, she seemed to be a little bit serious, and she didn’t smile a lot. When I got that video and wanted to use it in my class, Diane said to me: “Xiaoting, please tell your students that I do smile.”

From these anecdotes, we may feel that Diane is humorous and cute (once, a student in her class described her as cute). Later, Diane said to me: how could my students use cute to describe an old woman like me? We can see that Diane is a keen observer of the use of grammar and vocabulary.

Conclusion: Top Five Words and Diane’s Everlasting Influence

If we were asked to think of five words that can be associated with Diane, the following five words or phrases may be the ones I would choose. The first one may be applied linguistics. The contribution of Professor Diane Larsen-Freeman to the field of applied linguistics has been enormous and invaluable. The book she has written on SLA is a must-read for students specializing in applied linguistics, and she has numerous publications of influential papers in this field. Countless book chapters, conference keynote speeches and a variety of presentations

established herself as a pivotal and eminent figure in SLA, or what she calls SLD, second language development.

The second one may be complexity theory. As a pioneering scholar, she introduced complexity theory into the field of applied linguistics and transformed the ways of doing research in this field. She tried to explain a lot of things from the perspective of complexity theory. Her milestone paper is the first one to connect complexity theory and applied linguistics. She co-wrote the book *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics*. She analyzed learner agency from the perspective of complexity theory and she explained the role of a teacher from this perspective as well: “From a complexity theory point of view, I see my role as a teacher as not making students conform to uniformity. Speaking a language is not merely a process of reproduction. Furthermore, teaching does not cause learning. There is not a linear relationship between the two, at least. It is clear that students do not necessarily learn structures of the language I teach in the order that I teach them. There is still an important role for teachers, of course. It is the role of managing our students’ learning. I think complexity theory helps us understand the learning process; therefore, it helps to make teachers better managers of their students’ learning.”

The third one may be grammaring. Throughout her career, Diane has devoted considerable time to grammar and grammar teaching, with her *Grammar Dimension* series and her numerous articles on grammar teaching. She coined the word grammaring, considering grammar as a kind of dynamic skill instead of static knowledge, which transformed grammar teaching to a great extent. She proposed three grammar dimensions of form, meaning and use, emphasizing that for different grammar items, the learning challenges for the learners may be different. Her ideas on grammar teaching have had an influential impact on grammar teaching in China, which is reflected in the Curriculum Standards for both senior high school and compulsory education.

The fourth one is dynamic. I think her favorite word may be “dynamic” because she uses it very often, not only stating that using grammar is a dynamic skill, but also emphasizing that “Language is a dynamic system.” In an interview with her, she emphasized that language changes through use. The many speakers of a language interact, and as they do, a language system emerges and continues to evolve. She said the changes take place moment by moment—not just over the centuries. It is in the daily use of language that small changes take place that become bigger changes over time. English and Chinese are changing right now. They are changing through the interactions of their speakers, and it is through these interactions that patterns form and stabilize—although they are never static. She pointed out that our former way of looking at language was to describe language as a static system. We talked about the grammar and the lexicon as if they were static finite subsystems of language. We did not pay so much attention to the process that gives rise to the product. However, complexity theory is a “bottom-up” approach. The patterns emerge out of the interaction of people using language. The result of interactions entrains subsequent interactions in a process of mutual causality. As you and I are using English, we are changing English. Language arises, evolves, changes, gets used, gets learned and gets acquired all in a dynamic fashion.

The last one may be language teaching. She has written that famous book on language teaching methods, and she has recorded a series of teaching methods training videos, explaining what these teaching methods are like and what the principles underlying these teaching

methods are. She summarized different techniques and principles in language teaching, which encouraged teachers to experiment in language teaching.

As a pioneering scholar, Diane played a significant role in the development of SLA. As an empathetic supporter for novice teachers and researchers, she is always there offering help whenever needed. As a conscientious researcher, she's always humble, listening to others' ideas and exchanging insights. She's always there, making contributions to the field, to the growth of young people, challenging us to think differently.

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