

Book Review of *Exploring L1-L2 Relationships: The Impacts of Individual Differences* by Richard Sparks (2022)

Title: Exploring L1-L2 Relationships: The Impacts of Individual Differences
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A question in second language acquisition research is the extent to which the features of speakers' second language or foreign language (L2) can be predicted by those of their first language (L1). A review of the contemporary literature in the field shows that L1 can interfere with the use of L2 in terms of both accuracy and fluency, predicting the learners' success in learning a second language to a certain extent (Alamer & Lee, 2024; Dąbrowska, 2019). The transfer of some characteristics of speakers' L1 into L2 is a complicated process that reflects the characteristics of both individual learner variables and the variables of the community to which speakers have belonged.

Written by Richards L. Sparks, *Exploring L1-L2 Relationships: The Impacts of Individual Differences*, a book in Professor David Singleton and Associate Professor Simone E. Pfenninger's series entitled *Second Language Acquisition*, mainly focuses on the connection between individual variables that predict L2 achievement. The theoretical insights and empirical data collected from his lifelong influential research across disciplines of education, psychology, and linguistics, provide implications for L2 teaching and learning. The individual learner variables, such as teacher and student cognition, students' motivation, and anxiety, which have attracted research attention of applied linguists and language educators are highlighted in this book.

Apart from the Introduction and Overview and the Conclusion (Part 7), the book mainly comprises six parts representing different overarching research strands, including Theoretical Insights into L1–L2 Relationships: Individual differences (IDs) in L1 Attainment and the Linguistic Coding Differences Hypothesis (LCDH) (Part 1), Empirical Support for L1–L2 Relationships and Cross-linguistic Transfer (Part 2), Relationships Among IDs in L1 Attainment, L2 Aptitude and L2 Proficiency (Part 3), L2 Anxiety: Affective Variable or Cognitive Variable? (Part 4), Relationships between L1 and L2 Reading Ability (Part 5), and Individual Differences in

L1 Achievement, L2 Aptitude and L2 Achievement (Part 6). These parts showcase the author and his research group's research for over 30 years on the theme of L1-L2 relationship. Each part consists of typical studies chosen from more than 140 publications, roughly arranged in chronological order.

Parts 1 and 2 highlight four main individual differences: affective variables, learning strategies, L2 aptitude, and language-related deficits. Part 1, including Chapters 1, 2, and 3, explains the development and progression of the Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis (LCDH), one of the author's major academic contributions, laying the foundation for many studies on foreign language aptitude. Concentrating on the problems which learners may encounter, this part mainly provides the theoretical background for readers to make sense of the following part. Part 2, spanning from Chapter 4 to Chapter 6, highlights three prominent 10-year longitudinal studies to illustrate the theoretical insights mentioned in Part 1. These chapters emphasize how learners' L2 achievement can be predicted by their L1 features.

However, an extensive survey of the literature shows certain critiques of LCDH. First, as a cognitive model, it shows ignorance of the affective and social factors in SLA (see the book by Wen et al., 2023). Although learners have strong L2 backgrounds, affective factors may significantly influence SLA. As Sparks (2023, p. 275) put it, "L2 learners have consistently revealed strong relationships between IDs in L1 ability and L2 achievement." This suggests the necessity for investigations into factors other than language that have potential impacts on SLA, giving directions for research on individual differences (IDs), generally known as individual learners differences, including learners' emotion in language acquisition and learning.

Part 3 focuses on IDs in L1 and their intimate connection with L2 aptitude and L2 oral and written achievement. The authors embark on longitudinal studies to empirically illustrate the argument that there is a strong relationship between L1 and L2, reflected through IDs. The findings of the study reported in Chapter 7 show that students' L2 proficiency correlates with their L1 skills and L2 aptitude. Meanwhile, Chapter 8 reveals that L2 aptitude, proficiency, and affective variables (e.g., anxiety and motivation) are related to early development of L1 skills. Chapter 9, the last chapter in Part 3, features another longitudinal investigation, referred by the authors as a "seminal study".

Part 4 also consists of three chapters featuring studies seeking to challenge the argument that affective factors influence L2 achievement. Chapter 10 reports findings that shed light on L2 learning problems using an alternative explanation to language anxiety: the LCDH, according to which a deficiency in L1 skills can lead to L2 failure. Chapter 11 features a 10-year study with the conclusion that students' level of L2 learning anxiety in high school is closely linked to their L1 ability in the second grade. Meanwhile, what is reported in Chapter 12 indicates that even before L2 exposure, L1 skills can be predicted by L2 anxiety measured later in high school.

Part 5 examines the relationship between L1 and L2 from the perspective of L2 reading and literacy. In this part, Chapter 13 showcases what the authors labeled as the Simple View of

Reading model (SVR), an L1 reading and literacy model that can help to clarify the L1-L2 reading connection. The findings in this chapter reveal that students' individual differences in L2 reading fit with the profile posited by the SVR model. In chapter 14, the authors argue that L2 word decoding and L2 oral language comprehension are two separate variables and thus can make independent contributions to L2 reading comprehension. Chapter 15 illuminates how the SVR model can be employed to categorize L2 readers according to their strengths and weaknesses.

Parts 6 and 7 together serve to close the book. Unlike the preceding parts, Part 6 is a free-standing essay that aims to review the literature on L1 inter-individual and intra-individual differences and their relation to L2 skills. It also provides a tutorial on how to understand individual differences in this L1-L2 connection. To close the book, Part 7 summarizes the key arguments in the preceding chapters, inferring a model of interactions between L2 ability, L2 aptitude, and L2 achievement.

From our perspective, the book shows several different strengths. First, it is a collection of influential studies on IDs which are systematized in a way that readers with limited theoretical backgrounds may first familiarize themselves with the concepts introduced in the first chapters before they immerse themselves deeply in the empirical findings reported in the following chapters. Second, the book is not confined to a report of separate studies, but the empirical studies are interwoven to provide a large picture of investigations into IDs.

The authors may reconsider some points in the following editions of the book. A shortcoming is that the extensive array of knowledge presented in the book may require readers' ample background of the area, indicating a potential challenge for undergraduate and graduate students. The author may consider adding a summary of each chapter and/or part to make the book more accessible to readers.

Exploring L1-L2 Relationships: The Impacts of Individual Differences is an indispensable resource in libraries. Although the volume of information presented in the handbook could be lengthy and rather overwhelming for those with little background in second language acquisition, it provides a detailed theoretical background and supporting empirical results from the author's lifelong studies on the importance of individual variables in second language acquisition and learning. The book is an invaluable repository of knowledge for L2 students, teachers, and researchers in applied linguistics and language education.

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