Foreword

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If ever a scholar in applied linguistics deserved a *Festschrift* in celebration of a massively impactful academic career, it is my colleague and dear friend, Merrill Swain. Perhaps more than anyone else in our field, Merrill has shaped research in multiple domains of inquiry, including immersion education, second language acquisition (SLA), sociocultural theory (SCT) and language testing. What is more, her work has not only influenced multiple generations of applied linguistics scholars, but it has also found its way into classroom practice. A career of such magnitude demands to be memorialized in a volume of the type you are about to read. While I cannot here do justice to the full trajectory of such a stellar research record that Merrill has constructed over the past 40 years, I would like to highlight what I consider to be her most significant accomplishments. I can only hope that others, and Merrill herself, would concur.

Merrill earned her PhD degree in psychology from the University of California, Irvine, working with someone who would eventually become one of the leading figures in SCT, Michael Cole, but who at the time was working in experimental psychology. She joined the faculty of what was then the Modern Language Centre (MLC) founded by H.H. Stern at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in 1968 (following Merrill's retirement, the MLC changed its name to the Centre for Educational Research on Language and Literacies in 2010). Merrill identified very closely with the MLC and its graduate program in second language (L2) education.

From very early in her career, Merrill made her scholarly presence felt in the relatively young field of applied linguistics, in particular with regard to immersion education. While she authored and co-authored numerous publications on this topic, in my opinion one of the most revealing studies on the effects of immersion education on language development was Tarone and Swain (1995). The article brought into focus observational data on a Spanish immersion program in Minnesota as well as interviews with an English learner in a mainstream classroom in Australia and an L2 French immersion learner in Canada. The analysis revealed that immersion learners in these different settings

experienced a similar problem: as they moved to more advanced levels in school they increasingly avoided interaction with their peers in the L2. The authors speculated that the reason for this is that a diglossic situation emerges in which the L2 is restricted to academic topics, while the first language (L1) remains the learners' respective vernacular language for everyday communicative interaction. This is because classrooms do not provide them with opportunities to use the L2 as a vernacular language. A bit later, Merrill and her colleague Sharon Lapkin co-authored an important article (Swain & Lapkin, 2013) that brought to bear on immersion education the theoretical constructs of SCT, in particular the relevance of learners' L1 as a tool for learning the new language. The authors also argued for the need for educators to pay attention to the dialectical interpenetration of cognition and affective among immersion learners. The topic of emotion and cognition is something Merrill returned to later in her career as she began to examine the relevance of Vygotsky's notion of *perezhivanie* (see Vygotsky, 1994) for L2 development (see Poehner & Swain, 2016).

Merrill, of course, did not limit her research gaze to immersion education and instead broadened its scope, quite naturally, I believe, to encompass SLA. In 1980, she co-authored, with Michael Canale, what was to become the first of numerous seminal publications in SLA – Communicative Competence (CC) – a work that expanded the concept of CC originally proposed by Del Hymes in 1972 to include strategic competence, an especially important feature of CC for L2 users (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972).

In 1985, Merrill proposed the *output hypothesis*, yet another important concept for SLA that challenged the then dominant perspective asserted by Krashen and others that languages were learned exclusively through *comprehensible input* (Swain, 1985). The hypothesis was updated and refined in at least two of Merrill's subsequent publications (Swain, 2000, 2005). By that time, however, she had already made her transition to SCT and was now beginning to view output from the perspective of *linguaging*, but I get ahead of myself. I will return to this aspect of Merrill's research shortly. According to the output hypothesis, language production also plays an important function in acquisition to the extent that it provides learners with the opportunity to notice gaps in their grammar and what is indeed available in the input; it affords opportunities for learners to test their hypotheses regarding target language structures, and it allows them to reflect on the language and as a result potentially make adjustments to their interlanguage grammar.

In 1993, I had the distinct pleasure of encountering Merrill in person for the second time in my career. The first time was when I heard her give a lecture in 1978 when I was on the faculty of the University of Texas at San Antonio. At the time, I was involved in research on the history of Spanish and the Spanish dialectics of the San Antonio area. Since I was

also teaching Spanish, I thought I would attend the lecture that Merrill gave on bilingualism and immersion education. It was, for me, one of the most interesting talks I had heard to that point in my still young career. However, it had a profound effect on my thinking as it provided the initial impetus that eventually pushed me away from historical linguistics and dialectology to the study of SLA. Our second meeting some 15 years later was on a more personal level. It occurred at the Georgetown University Roundtable, honoring the former Georgetown professor and my colleague at the University of Delaware, Bob Di Pietro, who had sadly passed away the previous year. Merrill asked Bill Frawley and me to meet her for a drink after the day's session. At the meeting, she expressed her interest in SCT, the area that Bill and I had been working in for the previous five years or so. Since Bill was less interested in SLA than I was, Merrill and I continued our interactions on the potential relevance of SCT for the study of L2 development. Following numerous e-mail exchanges regarding SCT and L2 and at least one visit to the MLC at OISE, it became clear that she had indeed shifted her theoretical orientation to SCT. Among her early influential studies on SCT-L2 was her co-authored article (Nassaji & Swain, 2001). In this study, the researchers assessed in quite a creative way one of the central claims of Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994), which proposed that feedback as mediation was most effective when it was sensitive to learners' zone of proximal development (ZPD). In their study, Nassaji and Swain showed that feedback that was random was less effective than mediation negotiated between tutor and learner and that was therefore presumably within the learner's ZPD.

In 1997, while I was on the faculty at Cornell University, our graduate program in linguistics sponsored the Summer Linguistics Institute, which included a substantial curriculum in SLA, including a course on SCT-L2 that Merrill and I co-taught. Subsequently, when I moved to Penn State, we continued to co-teach an SCT-L2 course in three more summer institutes that took place in 2002, 2005 and 2009. In each case, my inclination was to teach the course in a lecture format; Merrill, however, in her commitment to the importance that Vygotsky assigned to dialogue, insisted that we had to incorporate significant opportunities for the students to interact among themselves on many of the topics addressed in the course. This approach clearly made for a far more interesting and engaging experience for everyone involved.

During the 2002 institute, Merrill pointed me to an article on dynamic assessment that she had recently come across. I was at that time unaware of the concept and of its importance for rethinking the dialectic between language teaching and language assessment. I shared the article with Matt Poehner, then a student in our doctoral program, who developed the topic into his dissertation and who has subsequently developed the concept into a significant and influential research program. We owe much to Merrill for opening up a new line of important SCT-L2 research.

Continuing with the testing topic, but outside the scope of dynamic assessment, Merrill alerted testers to the relevance of ‘collaborative dialogue’ for a more robust assessment of learner development (Swain, 2001). Traditionally in oral assessment practices, learners are assessed on the basis of their performance during interviews with trained test administrators, such as in the case of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Oral Proficiency Interview. However, based on Vygotsky’s notion of mediation, Merrill proposed that the dialogue that emerges among learners working in small groups can reveal a great deal about their language development when its focus shifts from solving a task to solving language problems that arise during the task-completion activity. This was known at the time as ‘collaborative dialogue’, which eventually Merrill reconceptualized as *languageing*, the topic I turn to next.

Returning to the output hypothesis, Merrill’s expanded interest in SCT led her to reconceptualize her earlier theorizing on the role of output in light of the principles of Vygotsky’s theory. In particular, the notion that speaking plays a central role in mediating our thinking process. According to Merrill (Swain, 2006a: 96), output was too static a notion, which by the year 2000 she had begun to recast as a verb rather than a noun. However, she was still uncomfortable with ‘verbalizing’ because it seemed to limit the mediating function of language to speech, and she felt, along with Vygotsky, that writing also plays a central role in the thinking process (indeed, Vygotsky referred to writing as ‘written speech’). She believed that *languageing* was a more appropriate means of capturing how language activity (spoken or written) can lead us to ‘a new understanding, a new insight’ (Swain, 2006a: 96) relating to a particular matter, and in this case, the matter is the process of learning a new language. Although languageing has a long history in domains such as psychotherapy, Marxist theory and even in applied linguistics (see Lado, 1979), Merrill’s adaptation of it as a way of recasting the output hypothesis has left its mark on the field. Languageing, construed as a problem-solving activity for language learning, can occur in dialogic interaction with others or with the self and it can occur through the medium of the L1 or the L2. An important consequence of languageing, as Merrill cautioned (Swain, 2006b), relates to research using verbal protocols as data. Typically, in such research, participants are asked to externalize in speech or at times in writing, what they are thinking when they engage in some type of language activity such as reading or writing, taking a test, carrying out an information gap task, etc. In Swain (2006b), she documents instances in which languageing during tasks can indeed influence and change the very activity that the research is trying to access via verbalization.

In the spirit of Vygotsky’s quest to make psychology relevant for improving people’s lives not only through education but through other forms of practical activity, Merrill and her colleagues, in particular

Sharon Lapkin, extended the concept of languaging to praxis-based research with elderly individuals. A series of case studies (Barkaoui *et al.*, 2011; Lapkin *et al.*, 2010; Swain & Lapkin, 2011; Swain *et al.*, 2013) demonstrated the power of languaging to regenerate the apparently diminishing cognitive, affective and linguistic capacities of several residents of a care facility for the elderly in the Toronto area. Not only are these studies important for their immediate practical value, but they are also theoretically significant because they show that development is a process that can indeed continue throughout one's life, provided appropriate forms of mediation are made available.

I think it is important at this point to highlight Merrill's co-authored *Sociocultural Theory in Second Language Education*, now in its second edition (Swain *et al.*, 2015). In some respects, this work has been seen by many as the 'antidote' to Lantolf and Thorne's (2006) book that introduces the central concepts of SCT and surveys the L2 research informed by the theory. The unique feature of the former monograph is its sensitivity to a readership who indeed might well be interested in SCT-L2 but who may not have the background to grapple with the latter work. Again, I believe Merrill's text demonstrates her keen awareness of how to make a complex theory understandable, a talent that not all of us possess. The uniqueness of the approach is made clear in the work's subtitle – *An Introduction through Narratives* – which has the dual goal of explaining the concepts and of informing the novice that it is ok to struggle with the theory itself.

Merrill received well-deserved recognitions for her scholarly and service contributions to applied linguistics. Among these are her election as president of the American Association for Applied Linguistics in 1998. The same organization recognized her with its Distinguished Scholarship and Service Award in 2004. The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers named her as their Robert Roy Distinguished Educator in 2003. In 2006, she was named *Language Learning* Distinguished Scholar at the Beijing University of Foreign Studies. Finally, the University of Vaasa, Finland, awarded Merrill an honorary doctorate in 2011 for her research on immersion education.

I cannot conclude this woefully inadequate commentary on Merrill's academic achievements without mentioning that she was a major figure among major figures in what was once perhaps the pre-eminent graduate program in applied linguistics and language education. Long before I was fully committed to applied linguistics, I heard colleagues discussing the high-quality research and the stellar graduate students emanating from the MLC at OISE. Merrill's retirement, along with virtually all of her contemporaries at the MLC in recent years, represents an immeasurable loss to our field. It will be all but impossible to fill this gap. Although in retirement Merrill has reoriented her life toward interests outside of academia, including working for the betterment of her

Toronto neighborhood, she has without question left an indelible mark on applied linguistics. To this day, however, I, and many others in our field, continue to call on Merrill for assistance, insight and criticism of our own work. Kudos and a resounding BRAVISIMA!

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