BEYOND BELIEFS: EXPLORING LANGUAGE LEARNER COGNITION IN ACTION

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Abstract

The appreciation of learners as active, decision-making agents in the process of L2-development has challenged and expanded the contexts in which research in this area is conducted. An example of this is the body of work exploring language learners' perceptions. Beliefs, or cognition studies in Applied Linguistics argue that researching participants' understanding of their L2-related activity in context can help make better sense of the disparity between what is observed and what is experienced. Language learner cognition, defined in this paper as the intersection of L2-related beliefs, assumptions, knowledge (BAK) and emotions, is an important construct in helping interpret individuals' thought processes, behaviour, and development as it relates to additional language learning. A socially constructed phenomenon, rooted in prior experience and guiding day-to-day interaction, learner cognition, however, remains largely unobservable. Thus, capturing this cognition in action poses significant challenges to the study of L2-learning. A layer of complexity is added when research steps beyond the language learning classroom (Nunan & Richards, 2015; Benson & Reinders, 2011). This paper, recognising the multifaceted and unpredictable nature of L2-development, investigates how an adult language learner in an ESL context navigates L2 use in naturalistic interactions. The findings suggest a model, rooted in complexity theory, which can help researchers better understand the ways in which L2-related cognition and behaviour mutually impact language learning development.

Keywords: learner beliefs, complex systems, out-of-class language learning, case study

Introduction: A learner-centred focus in applied linguistic and second language acquisition research

It has been some decades since the idea of learner-centredness entered the language of education and applied linguistics (Allwright, 1981; Nunan, 1988; Rubin, 1975; Wenden, 1986). As a result, attention to the learner can be found in many fields of applied linguistics, such as learner autonomy (Benson, 2013; Cotterall, 2000), learner strategies (Oxford, 1990) and learner beliefs (Mori, 1999), and in pedagogical approaches. For all that, it can still sometimes seem as though language learning is something that is done to or perhaps for the learner. A learner's agency in the process of learning an additional language is both a challenge to recognise and a challenge to

account for, further complicated by the fact that learner agency is a complex individual construct that manifests itself in different ways across different contexts (Duff, 2012; Kalaja, Barcelos, Aro, & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2015; Mercer, 2012) with distinct consequences. One way that this may be beginning to change however is with recent attention to out-of-class language learning or learning beyond the classroom (Benson & Reinders, 2011; Nunan & Richards, 2015). Research on how learners navigate their language use outside a formal classroom, and the consequent impact of this activity on their emotions and perceptions of L2-related issues are helping to further our understanding of the complex, dynamic and agentive interaction between individual and context. This paper adds to that literature by both focussing on the experiences of an adult beyond the language classroom and her experiences with the target language and by responding to the need for a more holistic understanding of learner cognition. It offers a new theoretical model of learner cognition rooted in a wide range of research, applicable across different teaching and learning contexts.

A brief history of learner beliefs studies

Learner beliefs studies is a long-standing field of research, broadly defined as investigations into the "opinions and ideas that learners (and teachers) have about the task of learning a second/foreign language" (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003/2006, p. 1). Studies on the role learners play in the process of their learning really began with an interest in exploring how beliefs could and did affect learners' behaviour in the language classroom, including how they interact with classmates, teachers, materials and the target language itself (Horwitz, 1999). A main tenet of work on learner beliefs holds that to adequately appreciate the intricacies of learning a second language, researchers must seek ways of exploring participants' subjective understanding of the various factors influencing their development. In other words, how learners feel, think and talk about themselves as learners, about the learning process, learning contexts, and the language being learned – the "personal meanings" (Kalaja et. al. 2015, p. 3) they ascribe to their experiences learning another language – directly impact their capacity to learn and use that language.

Originally, research in this area explored ways of managing the 'clash of expectations' learners (and teachers) experienced as they were increasingly exposed to unfamiliar communicative language teaching-learning methods (Horwitz, 1988). Later, the scope of belief studies expanded and began looking at learners' readiness for self-directed, autonomous language learning (Cotterall, 1999; Rubin, 2001; Wenden, 1998). The majority of this earlier work on learner beliefs used closed-item questionnaires which reflected a view of beliefs as static (mis)conceptions or opinions that learners have about language learning. Thus, while this early research helped pave the way for studies into the relationship between learner thinking and behaviour, the methodologies, as well as the key assumptions they carried about beliefs, were predominantly normative.

Advancements in the field began to see research on learner beliefs develop innovative ways of investigating this nebulous construct. Kalaja and Barcelos' (2003/2006) seminal work presented a collection of studies which showcased these significant shifts in approach. Framed within the underlying view that learners' beliefs emerge out of context, the studies in this collection adopted a diverse set of data collection and analysis techniques to explore beliefs about SLA. Ranging from the discursive (Kalaja, 2003/2006) to the sociocultural (Alanen, 2003/2006) the work in this collection reflected a complexity and dynamism of learner beliefs previously unrecognised. Additionally, this research helped reframe our understanding of learner thinking by centralising the role of prior experience and social context on belief development and refinement. Alanen (2003/2006) and Hosenfeld's (2003/2006) research, for example, looked closely at the emergence and complex trajectories of beliefs as they develop across a range of foreign and second language contexts, including young learners in school, adult learners' diaries, and research interviews.

With ever-evolving methodologies and expanding conceptualisations studies on learner beliefs continue to grow and progress. Recent developments are delving deeper into the role of prior (language) learning experiences, and the influence of socio-cultural background on the construction of beliefs about language learning across different lengths of time (Aro, 2015a; Mercer & Williams, 2014). Aro's learner beliefs and agency study, partly in response to calls for more longitudinal work, spanned 14 years. Noted as a key area for further exploration (Barcelos, 2003/2006), belief studies have also worked on bridging the gap in our understanding of the relationship between belief development and diverse types of L2-related activity and interaction (Aragão, 2011; Macalister & Navarro, 2017; Peng, 2011). More recently, highly contextual, richly descriptive investigations are exploring how beliefs interact dynamically over time and place with behaviour and how in turn beliefs are shaped as a consequence of this agentive, contextual interaction (Kalaja, 2015; Ruohotie-Lyhty; 2015). This work is revealing an important network of relationships between beliefs and other fundamental factors (e.g. agency, identity, motivation, affect, and autonomy) which directly impacts the learning, teaching and use of an additional language. Similar to developments in language teacher cognition (Borg, 2006; Macalister, 2010; Woods, 1996), beliefs are now recognised as key constituents of a larger, complex socio-cognitive system. Thus, as the parameters of exploration grow, so does our understanding of how learners think and behave. Researchers like Mercer (2011) and Kalaja et al. (2015; 2003/2006) have been at the forefront of this expansion and in helping combat the historical tendency to modularise or separate into distinct compartments the different aspects of a learners' mental makeup. As a result, the picture we now have of learners' mental lives is more nuanced than ever.

The incorporation of affect in the conceptualisation of learner cognition is another example of how the field has continued to challenge the boundaries of our understanding of an individual's L2-related thinking. For too long, research on beliefs had been entangled in a circular (epistemological/philosophical) discussion around what constitutes beliefs and what does not (cf. beliefs vs. knowledge discussion) (Pajares, 1992). This, unfortunately, led to the modularising of inherently (inter)related constructs. An example of this is the way research has tried (and for a long time been successful in) separating the affective dimension from the mental, traditionally portraying emotions as irrational and uncontrollable (O'Loughlin, 2006; Wetherell, 2012). More recently however, work in the social sciences has shifted away from this dualism and begun arguing for a more interconnected view of emotion and thought (Forgas, 2001). This growing recognition of the relevance of affect (Schutz & DeCuir, 2002; Trainor, 2008; Zembylas, 2005) not only offers a more holistic understanding of human behaviour, but also opens up the possibility for further explorations into interactive development. Similarly, important work around the emotional dimension has also been taking place in language learning education (Aragão, 2011; Borg, 2012; Cowie, 2011; Kalaja et al., 2015; Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002; Murray, Gao, & Lamb, 2011). These advancements, including the centralisation of affect as a key constituent of individuals' mental repertoire, closely mirror the move in SLA research toward a more complex and holistic appreciation of learners' experiences learning an additional language.

Language learners and complex adaptive systems

Like studies on learner beliefs, work conducted on complex adaptive systems in SLA also expounds on the centrality of the learner as integral to the L2-process (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008a; Douglas Fir Group, 2016; Five Graces Group, 2009). Complex systems research of additional language learning as conceived within an 'agent-based framework' highlights what Dörnyei (2009) refers to as "the significance of individual-level variation in the characteristics and contextual circumstances of the learner/speaker" (p. 229). It stresses the unpredictability of development and thus the need to focus on the agent in (inter)action. Work on complex systems also foregrounds the fact that individuals do not develop in isolation, and that in fact language use and development, at any given time, involves multiple users in interaction, whose behaviour, based on prior experience, is "the consequence of competing factors ranging from perpetual mechanics to social motivations" (Five Graces Group, 2009, p. 2). In other words, from the point of view of second language learning and language-related activity, the interplay (i.e. the way different factors impact each other dynamically over time) between language learners and their environment should be a point of focus for focused exploration. This becomes particularly relevant when the L2 context become more and more chaotic and fluid. A natural outcome of a globalised world is that increasingly, diverse populations of individuals will become multilingual at later stages in life. This in turn implies a need to better understand how all sorts of individuals navigate the myriad of

demands imposed on their day-to-day interactions both in and beyond the L2-learning classroom.

The interest in Applied Linguistics in the type of learning which complex systems research advocates is largely a response to this need. The focus on diverse, individual experience is evident across a range of narrative (Kramp, 2004; Menard-Warwick, 2004; Thompson & Vásquez, 2015; Rivers, 2001) and classroom-based studies (Liu & Thompson, 2018; Macaro, 2001; Rao, 2002). Another important area where this research carries great potential is in L2-learning beyond the classroom. Studies exploring the out-of-class language learning experiences of individuals (Benson & Reinders, 2011; Nunan & Richards, 2015) have begun to identify, either explicitly or implicitly, the multifaceted nature of the language learning and using process. Unfortunately, even these studies at times remain overly teacher-initiated. In other words, while a more comprehensive picture of the role of context is being advanced, learners and their role in the learning process are still not being granted sufficient agency. If research on out-of-class language learning is to continue to advance then it must, in addition to extending explorations into naturalistic settings (i.e. beyond the formal classroom), also strive to more completely centralise learners and their language-related behaviour within these contexts.

This article, then, reports on a longitudinal ethnographic case study to explore one foreign language learner's experience with language (including their reporting of experience), and particularly 'accent', in a new country, in order to better understand the processes that promote and hinder language learning and language use beyond the classroom. In other words, to help form a theoretical (macro-level) framework of how a person's cognition and L2-related activity interplay with each other, our research looked at our participant's interaction with and reflection on an unfamiliar variety, English (micro-level), as a unique experience. While there were a range of salient themes emerging from the data (e.g. beliefs about English as tool for communication vs English as a tool for survival; feelings about herself as an L2 learner), we chose her experiences with accent for this discussion as they were a recurrent theme and thus neatly (if chaotically) illustrated the process in action.

It holds that these processes (as elements of lived experience) are non-linear, historical, emotional and intellectual. It also argues that to combat the challenge of capturing this chaotic (multifaceted, unpredictable) process in action investigations can make use of individuals' narratives of experience, specifically, individuals' evaluations and interpretations of particular interactions as they relate to learning and using English as an L2. As a data gathering approach, ethnographic interviews (as conversations) are shown to be effective in illuminating pictures of experience through a lens which melds cognition and behaviour.

Our evaluation of the research on learner cognition has highlighted an extensive body of important and influential work across Applied Linguistics. At the same time, important gaps have been identified, including the need for nuanced study of how a range of learner-internal factors (e.g. beliefs, emotions, assumptions, knowledge) can dynamically interplay with contextual factors as a learner engages in out-of-class L2-communication. This exploratory study sets out to address these gaps by looking for a way to describe how this process might look in a model (the lack of theoretical framework being another significant gap). It does so by bringing together a more holistic picture of cognition which includes learner beliefs and emotions influencing and being influenced through (reported) interplay. Finally, it also should be noted that while this research is primarily exploratory, it does hold as an underlying premise that a nuanced focus on learners in contextualised action requires an appreciation and understanding of development as complex (e.g. multifaceted over time) and dynamic (multidirectional over time).

Methodology

The participant is a 24-year old female Taiwanese national (Ruth, a pseudonym) who had been in Wellington for one month. She was not engaged in formal language study when the study began but later transitioned from English self-study to a master's course in applied linguistics (approx. nine months after arriving). Her entrance to the master's program came after her fourth attempt at securing the required IELTS requirements (i.e. overall band of 6.5) for postgraduate study.

Data gathering

Woods (1996, p.31) believes that it is possible to uncover underlying cognition in discourse and to construct 'hypotheses' of a participant's cognition by comparing behavioural and discursive instances occurring across different contexts and times. In short, our understanding of an individual's cognition can be enhanced through examination of both language (what they talk about) and behaviour (what they do), and this drove the approach to data-gathering. Essentially, we were interested in using a methodology which would support what the Douglas Fir Group (2016) describe as "integrative consideration" of learners' cognition, their moment-to-moment experiences using an L2 with different socio and ideological factors (p. 19).

Five voice-recorded interviews were conducted over two months, three weeks of daily indirect observation documentation was collected, and there was also one instance of direct observation of the participant's language-related behaviour. Both the initial and exit interviews were semi-structured. The remaining interviews were unstructured, ethnographic interviews (O'Reilly, 2005; 2009). According to O'Reilly (2009), unstructured interviews help researchers and participants to "delve more deeply, to express their feelings, to reflect on events and beliefs, and to even expose their ambivalences" (p. 125). Each interview was conducted in English (the participant's L2) and ran between 60 and 90 minutes. Given the nuanced nature of

the data, the interviews would ideally have been conducted in the participant's L1. It was a real challenge, however, to find recently arrived Spanish-speaking migrants (the first author's L1). We recognise this as a limitation of the study. That said, Ruth remained adamant that she was most comfortable communicating in English, seeing it not only as a learning opportunity but as a way of demonstrating her confidence and skill with the language.

Having a series of lengthy conversation-like interviews also meant that if some points were missed during one interview, they could be noted down and discussed at another time, which was frequently the case. The 'indirect observation' documentation refers to a type of self-report tool where the participant records information about language-related interactions. Specifically, the participant was asked to document 'details of interactions' where and when she used English. Details included date, time and place, along with information about who she interacted with, what took place and how it made her 'feel'. There was space for commentary as well where the participant would note down the 'effects' of particular experiences on her. Information from this documentation helped guide the in-depth interviews. The initial interview played an integral role in helping construct a type of cognitive profile of the participant as language learner emerging out of her prior learning history. It was also integral in moving beyond establishing rapport toward developing rapport.

Through the initial interview some of the more salient language-related experiences in the participant's life, and her interpretation of these experiences, emerged. Subsequent interviews were based around the participant's documentation of her language-related interactions (see Figure 1 as an example).

These ethnographic interviews were similar to informal, in-depth conversations (O'Reilly, 2005; 2009). The participant talked at length about the different language-related experiences she had recorded on the document, constructing narratives that reflected her understanding of these experiences, of her language-related behaviour, and of herself as a language learner.

❶ What did you do this week?
Give details of the interactions you had where you used English

When	Where	Who	What	How did you feel?
Wednesday, July 24th; Around 10:30 am	At home	By myself	I read a newspaper in English. I tried to read it from beginning to end but I couldn't.	☺
Saturday, July 26th; afternoon	New World	With my friend	I went to New World to do some shopping. I couldn't find some things so I asked the staff for help. Did not feel good talking.	☹

❷ Comments: Feel free to write about the experiences you listed and their effects on you

Reading the newspaper was a little boring and hard. I didn't feel good that I couldn't finish it all. I am not sure if I will try it again. And going to New World was a little confusing- it was hard trying to find the food I wanted and reading all the information in English. I wasn't too comfortable because it was really crowded and there were so many people. Still, I could ask for what I wanted and understand what the staff said-I felt good about that.

Figure 1.   Example of indirect observation tool as a record of participants' interactions in English

It was in these personal experience narratives that the participant's embedded cognition surfaced and thoughts and emotions repeated over time in discourse revealed themselves as powerful influences impacting her language learning. The final interview took place immediately after 'direct observation' of her language-related activity, during which she was observed interacting in various ways with English in a naturalistic setting for several hours. The first author observed (from a distance) the participant as she visited a grocery store, met friends for lunch at a café, and studied English at a public library. Written field notes from these observations were used to help structure some of the topics for the final interview. While brief, and ultimately logistically too challenging to continue, this single observation did provide some interesting insight into the participant, showing her to be, from the outside, an assertive, independent L2-user, who was willing to communicate in English with different speakers, in different contexts.

Data analysis

While there were no pre-determined categories established prior to analysis, particular themes and categories emerged through discussion after coding the data (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, pp. 253-276), although it is fair to say that research on language teacher cognition did influence the naming of categories, as will be seen in the Discussion section. We looked for the themes which appeared as 'issues' in the conversations with the participant. Issues were signalled by "recurring use of certain terms to express concepts important to the participant, by explication and elaboration of those terms, by opposition to other terms and especially by evaluative comments about the concepts the terms refer to and the relationships among them" (Woods, 1996, p. 32). To put it another way, the issues emerging throughout the interviews were coded into categories; from these categories, themes, based on learners' embedded cognition, were created. In addition, we explored all explicit mention of cognition-related language, such as noting instances where phrases such as 'I think'; 'I believe'; 'I know'; 'I feel' were used. However, this was meant only to identify explicit mention of statements which may relate to the participants' cognition. We accepted that an initial mention of a belief- or affect-related idea should be understood as a 'hypothesis' and were cautious against immediately viewing these statements as clear evidence of established cognition. Beyond identifying how themes were communicated over time, we explored how they related to specific L2-related behaviour. The indirect observation tool was key here, as it helped bridge her various L2-related activities with associated cognition. During each interview, we would read over the tool and talk about what she had noted down. Also, after each interview the participant would provide me with a copy of the tool for my own analysis. This allowed me to 'observe' as it were, her naturalistic L2-interactions and note down salient or potentially significant themes to address in subsequent interviews. This, the tool worked as a kind of sounding board, which allowed us to explore her behaviour (e.g. what she did/her activity) as she recorded it along with her cognition (e.g. how she felt/what she thought).

Findings

This section provides a description of Ruth's English language related experiences, with a particular thematical focus on accent or pronunciation, gathered during the study but referencing a much larger time frame. A range of L2-related themes emerged from the lengthy conversations had over the five weeks, including her self-efficacy and self-concept and the role of English as an international language. For the purpose of this paper however, we selected accent as a theme to focus on, as it illustrates capably the complexity of the process of cognition development.

Ruth arrived in New Zealand as a self-confident English communicator, the confidence in her abilities derived from years of experience learning and using English in Taiwan, where she viewed herself, and was viewed by others, as having a type of elevated social status because of her knowledge of English: "…it's not like in Taiwan, like I can speak English so I'm kind of higher than someone else." She arrived with a self-belief that she could successfully navigate English interactions; that her "English is not bad," but in fact, rather good.

However, she reports "suffering from culture shock when I came here," which was at least in part language-related. For example, Ruth describes an incident with her partner at a café in Wellington (to give a sense of the interview data, and as this is an important incident, the full description is included as Excerpt 1 in Appendix A). It was her second day in New Zealand and she explains how in this particular interaction she failed to understand or respond to the café assistant's English: "…when the clerk asked me what I want I don't really understand what she was talking about. I know that it's English but I don't know what accent is that." Ruth's description of this interaction depicts her as unprepared for and confused by the different English 'accent', causing a powerful ripple of doubt: "…and so I feel everything I learned before that I think that my English is not bad but in that moment my English is sucks." The café interaction impacted Ruth's self-confidence, giving rise to feelings of self-doubt and apprehension:

> I was looking the window and lots of foreigner passed and who are they? Why I'm here? and in that week I am so depressed kind of upset like should I just go home because I just feel this is not my country nothing is familiar with me.

This incident seems to have triggered and been reinforced by an incident from her past which is evoked in one of our conversations. She discusses possible origins of her self-doubt/lack of confidence as a foreign language learner, linking her belief that her "English is not good" because she failed to understand an unfamiliar accent directly to particular interactions with her mother:

> I talked to Trent [her long-term American partner; pseudonym] how I feel like my English is not good because I don't understand… I thought it was because my background… my mom, 'cause my mom is really strict and though so she told me like if you don't understand then you are not good. She is really like…ahhh…too I don't know how to explain it but everything – if you don't understand if everything not go well, that's your fault.

Ruth is suggesting that her mother's criticism of her language skills, specifically her problems understanding a foreign language, has resulted in her own critical self-beliefs, which re-surfaced as a result of the bagel café incident. She says that when she doubts her own abilities as a foreign language learner, she instinctively reflects ideas appropriated from earlier experiences with her mother: "So I thought only my… I feel it but seems like it's not… because my mom make me feel that."

Interestingly, however, Ruth goes on to reject this positioning. In an effort to manage and dispel these negative emotions, she ends up defending her abilities as a language learner. Elaborating on how experience with her family has 'shaped' her thinking, she begins to fight back, awakening a realisation that learning and using a foreign language is not easy: "they just think that if you don't speak well, try harder but sometimes it's not that kind of… it's not easy." By highlighting how challenging it can be to learn a foreign language and how people with little language learning experience often underestimate these challenges, she rejects her mother's critical appraisal, and to a large extent creates a tension in her self-concept as a foreign language learner (Mercer, 2011) – where a negative assessment of her English ability works against her self-confidence.

There is, then, a change in her language-related behaviour, and in her feelings toward living in Wellington. The effect of the bagel café incident – avoiding language-related situations, feeling anxious, stopping talking – are forgotten. Ruth paints a more positive picture of her recent experiences in Wellington, including her day-to-day language-related interactions. For example, when asked how she has been 'settling in' she says, she "likes" living in the city now, adding that

> … people are so friendly. Even I don't know if they are true or fake, even they don't know you… they still smile to you and in the store the clerk they ask how are you; it's just totally different from Taiwan, yeah.

Ruth's response conveys a picture of her growing accustomed to life in the foreign city. She has experienced more success communicating in English and dealing with a variety of accents across different naturalistic settings. The once-unfamiliar accent no longer appears to be a significant source of anxiety or frustration. Day-to-day interaction in Wellington has led her to revisit past beliefs regarding English as a tool whose primary purpose is authentic communication (English for practical, social purposes) – beliefs she alluded to in previous interviews when recalling her problems with Taiwanese English education, which focused more on accuracy and reproducing memorised scripts than meaningful communication (which she recognises as messy). Connected to Ruth's more positive account of life in Wellington is the idea that she now also feels more relaxed using English and is less concerned about making mistakes:

> …now it's like everyone speak English so it's just the way to communicate and but now I think the big difference I don't feel… I don't feel as embarrassed to make some mistake in English because I heard some people make mistake and or maybe just you know… you know just the way they to talk or just the way

you communicate they don't really focus on you how the grammar work the vocabulary use wrong so it's kind of more relaxing when I speak English.

It is quite possible that this more relaxed, less accuracy-focused English has helped make communication not only more enjoyable, but also easier. Finally, this increased facility and success in language-related interactions has had a knock-on, positive effect – if nothing else, a conscious willingness to engage more with the foreign language.

This is quite a change from her initial description of life in Wellington during the introductory interview, where she depicts her experience as something more similar to a struggle. Interestingly, Ruth again references her mother as an important influence (See Appendix A, Excerpt 2). She maintains that her mother's advice, encouraging her to persevere when things get difficult by not overthinking, and "just doing it" has helped shape this element of her "personality". Rather than becoming overly concerned with problems, she prefers to put in the necessary effort, work hard, and "change it" so she will not "regret in the future". Ruth's mother was earlier portrayed as someone who had led Ruth to doubt her own ability and progress as a language learner, but is now shown to be someone positively impacting her approaches to her English-related challenges. Ruth's stated indifference to certain problems and challenges, along with her refusal to succumb, are rooted in her mother's ideas on perseverance. As Ruth explains:

> I just sometimes, I don't care… I just think maybe my mom says 'Just do it do it! Don't think too much you just do it!' and so I kind of don't care about like how things, ahhh make me feel bad.

Her mother's words are reinforced by memories of past experiences as she recounts her eventual success, on the fourth attempt, with the IELTS examination – which she celebrated as a significant achievement.

There is further evidence of change in relation to foreign language accent (specifically, the New Zealand variety of English) when Ruth describes recent experiences in the MA course she enrolled in after six months in Wellington. The first thing she mentions after being asked how "everything is going" in her classes, is her problem understanding one of her lecturers:

> I still don't used to her accent… it's just so…or maybe my vocabulary is not like those the word I know is not enough… she says lots of things and I don't understand and everyone was laughing and I feel I should laugh….

This time however, accent is not the only thing she recognises as problematic, suggesting that her failure to understand might also be due to a lack of vocabulary. Ruth's inclusion of "vocabulary" as an additional obstacle hints at a possible revision in her thinking regarding her problems understanding what people are saying to her

in English. Another interesting point that she makes which suggests a change in her thinking is that she is having problems with specific people's accent – it is no longer presented as a universal problem: "…yeah, there is Kiwi girl in our class too and I feel she doesn't have accent." Although 'accent' clearly remains a concern for Ruth, we can see that she is beginning to describe a different understanding of it as an L2-related issue. Also, for the first time, she presents the idea of "getting used" to the different ways people speak:

> …so I need to take longer time to used to someone else's accent and I think maybe sooner or later I will used to her accent and I will just accept everything she says and it will make sense to me.

Elaborating further on this idea, she mentions the significance of "English background", meaning both the length of time using English and the types of experiences using English:

> but I think they also basic their English background if they have like… there's a girl she studies here in college for like… and now she's been here eight years and I think she's quite good to deal with that… just take shorter time than me to deal with that and for me it just takes longer.

Ruth is indicating that over time, maybe "longer" time but certainly "sooner or later", she will be able to "accept" what people are saying to her as well. She uses her relationship with Trent, as an example of getting used to English: "and in the lecture like the teachers accent I think just because I talk to like different people… like I talk to Trent for too long and I am used to his accent." She explains how in conversations with her Chinese friends, who are in similar situations, she has identified similar issues with understanding accents. They get used to one type of spoken English but continue to struggle with other less familiar accents:

> …and also I talked to lots of Chinese girls and they say like they have same situations because they have native speaker husband or boyfriend so they used to their accent and when they try to first talk to someone else they still need some time to used their accent.

Discussion

The previous section demonstrated that Ruth's relationship with English in this context was neither easy nor constant. It shows positive and negative responses to chronological incidents, the impact it had in the immediate present and how these impacts were at times reinforced by people and events temporally distant (i.e. historical experience). Thus, for example, the bagel café incident had the immediate

effect of making her believe "my English is sucks," which was reinforced by comments her mother had made.

In this section, we move from describing her experience to identifying and discussing the cognition-related factors that appear to be present in Ruth's experience with the target language. We use this discussion to propose a model of language learner cognition that can help us understand the complex and dynamic nature of a learner's relationship with the target language. We then explain selected findings in terms of the model, before summarising its key features. The bolded terms in the discussion below reflect salient categories which emerged through the analysis (presented in the Findings above). These categories also reflect key themes found in both Beliefs and Dynamic Systems research as it pertains to SLA.

At the beginning of the study, Ruth was already established as a successful language learner. She had a positive belief in herself as an English user based on her prior experience in Taiwan, and as the partner of a native English speaker, and as a result arrived in New Zealand with the assumption that she would be successful in this new context. She was, then, unprepared for the experience of failure in the Wellington bagel café; this language-related experience became part of her prior experience that she was able to refer to in subsequent interviews, but also had an immediate impact on how she felt about herself (affect), as a language user and about being in New Zealand. This negative feeling was reinforced by recollection of prior experience in Taiwan, experienced as a daughter rather than a language learner. That same source of prior experience did, however, contribute to a change in feeling; as she became more familiar with the new context in which she was living and more positively inclined towards it, she recalled encouraging words from her mother, contributing to a shift in affect. She also gained confidence through various language-related experiences which demonstrated to her that other language users also make mistakes; this knowledge contributed to her shifting feeling. Being able to recall her own successful experience as a language learner also allowed her to counter criticisms she had received from others. As a result, she was better prepared for the experience of difficulty in comprehending accent when she began her post-graduate study. She realises, based on prior experience, that she will grow accustomed to her lecturer's accent through exposure over time. She also recognises that it may not be accent alone that is impeding comprehension; she displays knowledge of the role that vocabulary plays in understanding, and this knowledge will have emerged from prior experience, possibly through academic or professional learning. What also appears to be a factor in her developing confidence as a language user is hearing about the experiences of others in similar situations in the new context.

This summative evaluation of Ruth's development allows us to propose a model of language learner cognition, conceived as a dynamic interplay between what learners think, know, believe, and feel, and their language-related behaviour (see Figure 2). As a definition, this resonates with Borg's (2006) understanding of language teacher cognition. However, there is some noteworthy variation. First and foremost, it is

concerned with language learners, not teachers. And secondly, it centralises the emotive dimension, promoting the idea that affect needs to continue to be seen as an inseparable component in our conception of cognition.
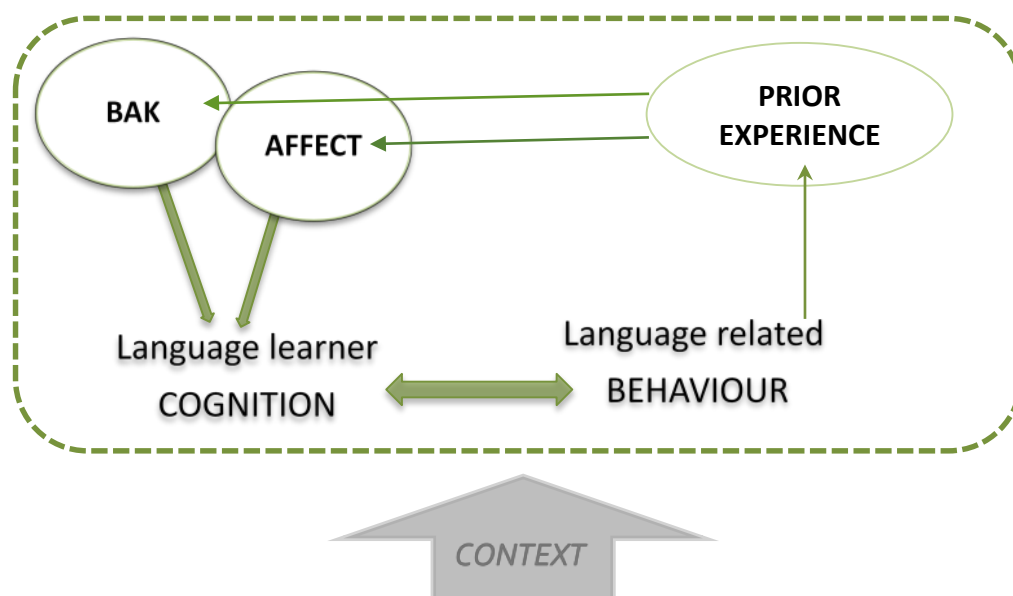
Figure 2.   A model of language learner cognition in action

To explain the model, it may be best to begin with the least transparent component, that labelled BAK. This draws on the seminal work of Woods (1996), and represents beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge about language learning. Rather than trying to tease out the exact nature of each component, or to rank the relevance of each, Woods recognises their "interwoven nature" (p. 197) and their relevance to "how they are used in the decision-making processes of the [in his case] teachers" (p. 199) as parts of a whole. Different forms of experience influence BAK; these may include personal experience with language learning in the home, experience with language learning in formal settings, such as school (the "apprenticeship of observation", Lortie, 1975), and learning about language learning. The experience component is extremely dynamic as every instance of language-related behaviour immediately becomes part of experience (Nespor, 1987). In fact, an individual's language related behaviour becomes a type of experience. As well as influencing BAK, experience also influences affect (Kalaja et al., 2015), the conceptualisation of herself as a language learner (Mercer, 2011), and beliefs about the language being learned, about speakers of that language, and about the experience of language learning.

It would perhaps be redundant to explain every part of Ruth's language learning journey in detail (not to mention obvious space limitations) but to vivify the model we shall more closely examine two selected incidents.

The first is the bagel café incident. At the initiation of this fleeting encounter Ruth believed and felt that she could manage such exchanges. Her successful and positively perceived English-related experiences had helped establish her positive self-beliefs as an English user. In other words, her positive evaluations and associated emotions rooted in prior L2-related experiences helped build a concept of herself as a capable user of English. Studies on beliefs about one's self and one's language abilities in a foreign language context (c.f. Mercer, 2011, p.14) have shown these constructs to be a significant factor in understanding language learner behaviour. In fact, self-related beliefs have proven to be an integral force, both driving learner behaviour (Mills, 2014) and shaping learning contexts (Taylor, 2014). However, her initial inability to understand the English being used, after all her years of experience with English, cast doubt on her ability as a language user in an ESL context. Here, we have an example of Ruth's expectations clashing violently with the reality of life in a target language context. In terms of the model, Ruth's interaction at the café serves as an example of language-related behaviour interacting dynamically with language-learner cognition. Behaviour, which almost simultaneously becomes lived, remembered, and told experience, challenges current states of BAK and Affect. These in turn influence her cognition which, in turn, determines how subsequent interactions are experienced, perceived and managed.

However, as this incident illustrates, the process of cognition construction and development can be much more complex and layered. It has been argued that difference in time, or the relative temporal proximity between experiences, carries little relevance to present-day behaviour. Events that took place years ago can sometimes be "more relevant to meaningful behaviour now than other events which are closer in linear time" (Lemke, 2000, p. 80). What matters is not so much how recent an experience was but rather the relationship between events. In other words, present-day interactions can act as a type of trigger, resurfacing certain thoughts and feelings related to a past experience (Mercer, 2012). The stronger the relation, the more powerful the emergence. This process, where past events interplay with more recent interactions, results in – or reinforces – change in current cognition. This is illustrated by Ruth's recall of her mother's words, reinforcing the lack of confidence this incident triggers.

The second incident to be examined is a more positive one, but one that also draws on her mother's words. This is the incident where she is enjoying Wellington and expressing a determination not to be defeated. Here we see evidence of the dynamic, self-organising nature of an individual's cognition in action. Ruth speaks of "a belief in my head" that it is important to always put in effort, to 'try to do something for that and change it," and echoes her mother's advice to not worry too much, take chances and do what she needs to do to avoid feeling "regret". This would appear to conflict with the earlier recollection, but these apparently opposing ideas operate in a type of co-adaptive process, which directs both Ruth's interpretations of, as well as actual, language-related behaviour. "Co-adaptation" (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron,

2008b, p. 202), as a type of causality promoted in Complexity Theory, argues that changes in subsystems (including the introduction, creation, or revision of psychological constructs such as beliefs, attitudes, emotions) are responsible for changes in larger systems, creating a type of shared-impact effect. This notion of the reciprocal influence of sub-systems over time offers a way to interpret the interplay between psycho-emotional constructs and an individual's behaviour. Similar work has been conducted in belief studies in relation to a learner's agency and identity (Aro, 2015b; Barcelos, 2015).

Key features of the model that reflect Ruth's language learning journey are summarised in Table 1. The model presents a synthesis of core concepts derived from theories and research grounded in language teacher cognition and learner beliefs in particular. It describes a dynamic system, emphasising the inseparability of an individual's mind, their behaviour and a "socially stratified world" (Sealey & Carter, 2004, p. 184). Contextual factors are positioned as "dimensions of the system" (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008a, p. 204) where changes in context impact directly and indirectly on different levels of the system. The model is rooted in the idea that complex systems themselves exist at varying interconnected levels, such as the inter-/intra-personal, the home, the classroom, the community, and the nation (Byrne, 2002). To account for development, it focuses specifically on the interplay, or interaction, over time between language learner cognition and language learning activity. Prior experience, BAK, and affect are shown to directly influence the construction of a learner's cognition. Prior experience also influences the development of BAK and affect. Additionally, different types of day-to-day language-related behaviour become (prior) experience. By presenting and describing essential components and processes borrowed from diverse traditions in language education, the model serves as an analytical tool with which to collect, analyse, and discuss data related to the language learning process.

Table 1.   Description of model of language learner cognition in action

MODEL	Learner cognition in language learning
ORIGIN	Language learner cognition; learner beliefs; Socio-cultural theory
SYSTEM	Dynamic; Complex
COMPONENTS	Language learner cognition; Prior experience (personal experience; experience with schooling and instruction; experience with formal knowledge); Affect; BAK; Context(s)
PURPOSE	Explain elements and processes of learner cognition in language learning; Guide investigations into language learner cognition in action

INNOVATIONS	Changes language teacher cognition to language learner cognition; Positions BAK as a subset of learner cognition; Categorises types of experience (i.e. Prior Experience); Highlights the interconnectedness of Prior Experience-Affect-BAK and how the interplay between these factors over space and time essentially constructs cognition

The model is also addressing the importance of incorporating a non-linear but temporal perspective on the study of learner development. By accounting for a learner's experiences over time, it centralises the idea of change over time and recognises how our current and future cognitive-behavioural make-up is rooted in (interpretations of) past interaction. This finding reflects current conceptualisations of learner beliefs research which demonstrate the value of looking at cognition at play over time (Kalaja et al., 2015; Mercer, 2011). Like any social activity, learning takes place in and over time and space; it is a dynamic process, where everything involved, including the participants, comes from somewhere. In other words, our prior experiences shape, not only how we behave now, but also, how we may behave in the future. The past, therefore, is not some static or finite feature, but instead a continuously influencing (often unpredictable) force, directing today's and tomorrow's language-related behaviour. If we only consider the here and now – the immediacy of present actions – we risk ignoring important non-linear, trajectories of development which are crucial in the search for a robust understanding of learning. This model of learner cognition, through its dynamism and its underlying emphasis on the interconnectedness between mental and social lives, recognises language learning development as contextualised movement through both time and space.

Limitations and future directions
Limitations

It has been nearly 30 years since Pajares (1992) first called for research on thinking in education to include learners – this model and the approach it supports represent a small step in that direction. While the framework is a useful tool for describing and understanding language learner behaviour, it is necessary to keep in mind that it carries certain constraints. The most significant of these is that models, by their very nature, are reductionist – taking extremely complex processes and phenomena and attempting to articulate graphically what is happening and why. With this in mind, the model presented in this paper can be revisited and revised as needed. It carries an inherent flexibility, allowing new categories to be introduced and others reorganised. Relationships between certain core components of the model can be shifted or foregrounded, to more accurately represent particular research. As an example, it is possible to conceive of the concept of 'language related behaviour' (LRB) as part of, rather than separate from, 'Experience' and depict an individual's LRB as a type of prior experience. For this potential to be fully realised, the model needs further trials with different data sets to see how well it meets the challenge of helping to guide

analysis and describe language learning development. With these limitations in mind, it is also worth commenting on the model's potential for further research.

Future Directions

The framework as a research tool can be used in either classroom investigations or in studies exploring 'language learning and teaching beyond the classroom' (Benson & Reinders, 2011). The latter, largely neglected despite its recognised importance in foreign and second language acquisition (Ellis, 2008), would particularly benefit from this tool. Language learning research looking to move beyond the traditional classroom as a site of investigation can use the model as a means of exploring different interactional contexts on learner development. In addition, beyond challenging established conceptions of the language learning setting, naturalistic language learning studies also ask us to reconsider our assumptions about the nature of learners/learning. This reconsideration echoes Firth and Wagner's (1997) call for studies in language learning to find ways of broadening "the traditional SLA data base" (p. 286). The framework supports these challenges through its emphasis on the dynamic interplay between an individual's language learning cognition (BAK; affect), their actions and experiences, and their surrounding context. The individual as a learner, context as a fluid site of activity, and the processes between thoughts and actions as catalysts for development are the main tenets of the framework and are well suited for explorations into both traditional and non-traditional language learning endeavours.

Conclusion

The description of Ruth's language-related experiences, specifically her thoughts and behaviour related to foreign language 'accent', have provided a glimpse into the emergent, non-linear, self-organising properties of an individual's language learning development, including how thoughts/feelings born of prior language-related experiences interplay with more immediate language-related interactions across a range of contexts. From this 'glimpse' it has been possible to extract the more salient features of the process – operating at a macro-level – and to position them into a model of the process at work.

Reflecting Allwright's (2006) assertion that research in language education has been moving from prescription, to description, to understanding (p. 13), the framework presented here expands the parameters of exploration and understanding of the language learner. It furthers our appreciation of how contextualised language-related behaviour becomes actualised in social processes, and how these processes in turn impact and direct the mental lives of learners. With the relatively recent rise in interest in studies on language learning beyond the classroom (Benson & Reinders,

2011; Nunan & Richards, 2015; Morrison & Navarro, 2014) a framework which centralises the interaction between thinking and behaving in learners, while expanding the parameters of learning contexts, can serve as a welcome resource through which to appreciate and understand a different, and at times difficult to access, dimension of language learning. For successful learning outcomes, language teachers need to understand language learners.

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Appendix A: Interview Excerpts
Excerpts

1.   Participant (Ruth): Yeah and yeah, and th… because of those courses related to tourism so I know what culture shock and culture shock is what I just ahhh suffering when I came here.

Researcher (D): Oh really? Yeah, tell me about …I was going to ask you about now your current situation. So you have been living in wellington now for…how long?

Ruth: Two months.

D: Two months. Tell me about how you are experiencing this change?

Ruth: When I just came like, the first day I was excited that everything is so fresh and just like…but the second (day) I kind of feel like it's not clear everything I feel it's like a dream not real to me because there lots of foreigners and they different face to me and they speak English but they have a different accent; accent I don't know not Chinese accent not Asian accent so I don't really understand…one day we went to a bagel store, we are ordering bagels but when the clerk asked me what I want I don't really understand what she was talking about I know that it's English but I don't know what accent is that and so I feel everything I learned before that I think that my English is not bad but in that moment my English is sucks! There is nothing… doesn't work and I'm just…when I was eating the bagel I was looking the window and lots of foreigner passed and who are they? Why I'm here? and in that week I am so depressed kind of upset like should I just go home because I just feel this is not my country nothing is familiar with me.

2.   Ruth: I think, I just kind of my personality is to sometimes I… I just sometimes I don't care I just think maybe my mom says, 'Just do it do it! Don't think too much you just do it!' and so I kind of don't care about like how things, ahhh make me feel bad something that because I just, if I just stay there to feel like oh I'm not really good what I should do what should I do I should stop or something I would rather just like, ok this is not good so I try to do something for that and change it so I won't feel bad because if I try it and it's still not good then maybe I should try harder and if I try and I did it so I… I…will be really happy because I… this is a belief in my head I feel like if you try or if you don't try you might regret in the future...