

Multilingual Profile  
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*Multilingual Map of Europe*  
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## Introduction

A number of models have been proposed as a means of visually mapping some of the diverse perceptions of multilingualism that have achieved prominence today. Not only do these mapping techniques provide researchers with a means of extracting qualitative data from multilingual persons in ways that differ from traditional qualitative data gathering methods (such as individual or group interviews and questionnaires), but they also allow the multilingual person to negotiate the variety of I-positions present within the multilingual self. As with any visualization or mapping method, it must be stated that a number of limitations exist and that no singular proposal can provide a full picture of psycholinguistic realism or the whole of the cognitive processes at work within an individual. While proposals such as those put forward by Herdina and Jessner (2002) and Aronin (2006) may be used today as a means of problematizing the L1/L2/Lx hierarchy, these models were produced when many scholars viewed these terms as a response to Rampton's (1990) call to displace the native speaker. In the contemporary, more continuum based understanding of language acquisition and use, employing models such as Dynamic Language Theory (DLT) and Dominant Language Constellation (DLC) can be seen as a way to illustrate (particularly when drawn by hand) how multilingual individuals might conform to or push against another schema representing language hierarchy.

## Dominant Language Theory (DLT)

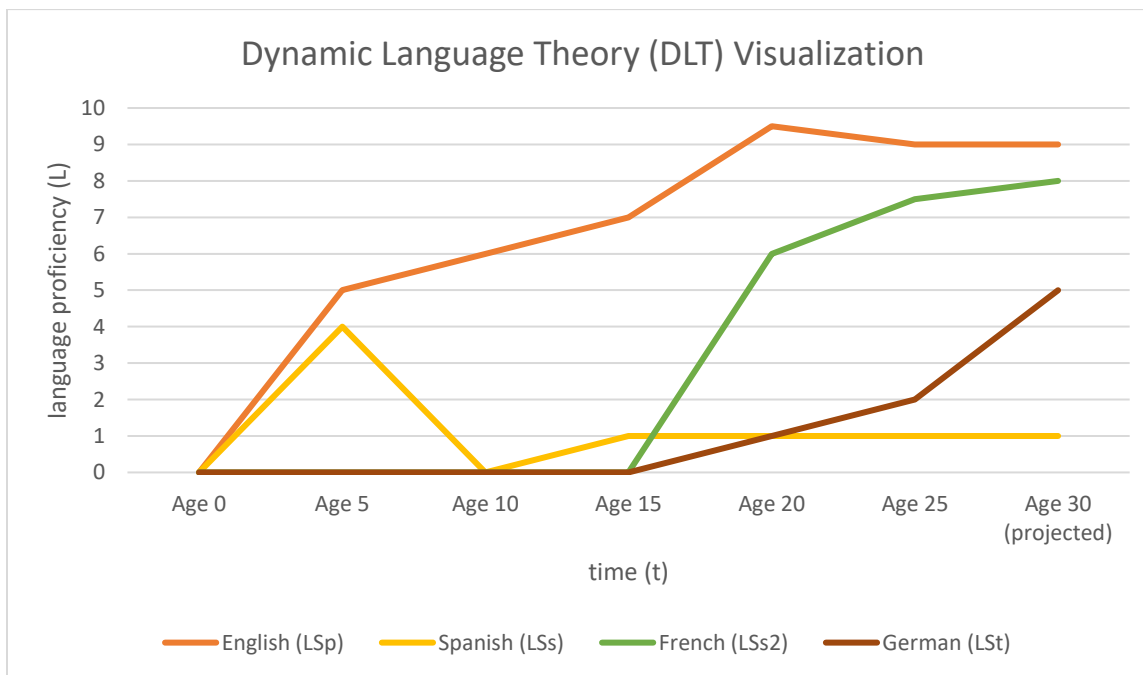


Figure 1: Herdina and Jessner (2002: 124)

DLT proposes a linear visualization model in which the passage of time is related to language proficiency. Above, I have chosen to represent time using age markers, as year markers would be

not only incoherent to the reader without substantial background information, but age markers additionally allow the reader to infer more meaning depending on their background in childhood language acquisition. The graph above provides one example of why a chronologically-based acquisition hierarchy system, most often used when referring to one's L1, L2, etc. may be problematic in accurately relaying one's linguistic competence. Timewise, while Spanish was the second language system that I acquired, an abrupt change in the living and working situation of my family removed me from the language community almost entirely, and Spanish remains a language that I have little (A1) competence in today.

Rather, French stands as the language that I refer to regularly as my so-called "L2", as it is not only the language other than English in which I am most comfortable, but as it also represents the second most prominent language in my personal sphere. For these reasons I have referred to it as LSs2 in the graph above, rather than LSt. My French education followed a fairly standard language teaching model, however, in an extremely monolingual context, both at home and in my formal education. My approximately B1 level in French upon entering university was considered sufficient to test out of all "foreign" language requirements in my program. However, I elected to continue with upper-level French courses, which equipped me with sufficient competence in French to communicate upon my move to France in 2014. As the French language was not among the prominent linguistic exports to my part of the United States (foreign language films were not available in the video rental stores in the small town of Texas in which I was raised), very little of my French linguistic competence has been developed through engaging with films, series or other media.

German, the language that I have classified as tertiary in Figure 1, indeed sits last as both the most recent language that I have acquired and the language in which I am least proficient. I have never taken a formal German course; the extent of my familiarity with German is rather a result of a compound of experiences. My vocal training before university and my undergraduate studies in lyric opera required me to perform regularly in German, Italian, French and English. At the time of my studies (graph point Age 20) I was quite proficient in French, the study of which had equipped me with a better understanding of how grammar and the lexicon of a language function, processes which are often quite hazy to those who learn English as a first language. Through regular singing, and because I have an odd knack for retaining musical librettos decades after performing them, I began to acquire a fundamental understanding of German tenses and grammar (for example, past-tense structures and verb placements, use of *haben/sein* as auxiliary verbs). A brief stay with the family of a dear friend in Germany, the prominence of German in Strasbourg and particularly in the University of Strasbourg language department, where I have been teaching since 2015, as well as my time teaching music to elementary and middle school students at the European School of Strasbourg were all significant factors in developing my German competence. Today, my regular interactions in German include grocery shopping, errands in Germany near my husband's business, and regular travel to visit two friends who reside in Mainz.

The manners in which I use my primary language system today have changed vastly since my time in France. Interacting with other users of English in France (most often in the context of my job), has often left me feeling disheartened by the lack of command I now exert over a language that I perhaps employed more fluidly at a younger age. In addition, the relationship I maintain with my partner, an English-French early simultaneous bilingual from England, has added to my English lexicon but has also contributed to the sense of subtractive

bilingualism that I have experienced, as we often use “Franglais” when relaying interactions that occurred in French or discussing concepts and systems that are intrinsic to French society.

### Dynamic Language Constellation

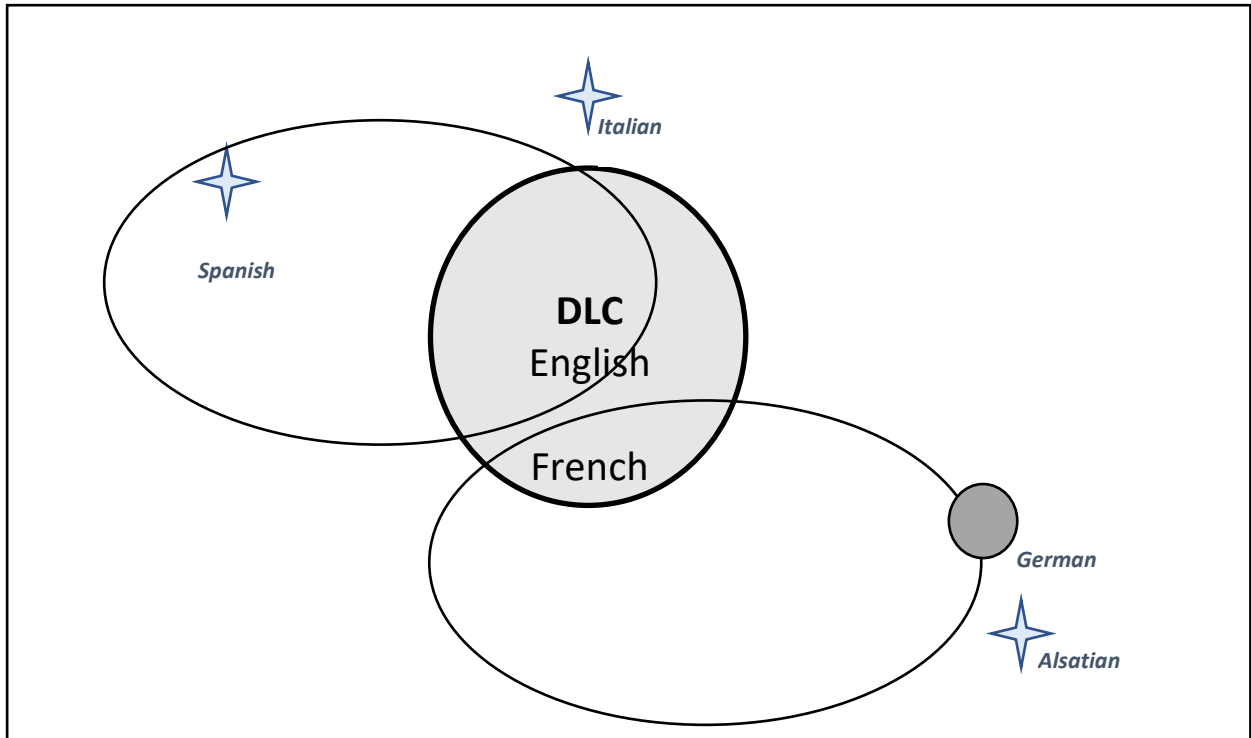


Figure 2: Aronin (2006)

The Dynamic Language Constellation above (Aronin 2006) provides an illustration of a more qualitative representation of how the multilingual or monolingual person may interact with the languages that are present in the spaces they inhabit. While this type of model may therefore be more difficult to quantify or interpret when reporting results of research, it also allows the reader to ascertain relevant details that may not appear in more “traditional” visualization schema such as the DLT model proposed by Herdina and Jessner (2002). Most notably, the DLC may provide information about the informant’s personal sphere and the languages that exist within it, whether through personal connections or languages made visible in space, such as the linguistic landscape of the individual’s city, town or village.

For the purposes of this exercise, the interpretation of the DLC model above has taken a language sphere approach to the organization of the constellations. While English is certainly a language that permeates all of my personal spheres, I most associate it with my upbringing in the United States and the languages that were present in that space. I have included Spanish, a language that is part of the linguistic landscape of Texas, but which was somewhat less present in the town in which I was raised. As stated above, Spanish was a language that I was able to use as a child but in which I cannot effectively communicate today. Italian, as a language that I am able to read and pronounce through my conservatory training, and understand (somewhat) as a result of my French comprehension, sits squarely between the two constellations.

In the constellation that turns around French, I have placed German, which remains part of my regular language sphere in Alsace. However, it is Alsatian, rather than German, which permeates the linguistic landscape of Alsace more widely, and more specifically in Strasbourg, where all street signs, as well as some business signs and advertisements make use of Alsatian (for more information on the sociolinguistic situation and linguistic landscape in Alsace see Huck et. al 2008, Bogatto and Hélot 2010 and Burdick 2012).

The two visualization methods explored above indicate just one nuance of the complexities that define research in multilingualism. Its intersection with many fields, including sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics as well as anthropology, sociology and communication sciences more broadly allow for a wealth of practices that can be borrowed and adapted between fields to aid in the reporting data and subsequent inferring of meaning. However, the field of multilingualism is not static: the people that are seen as multilingual and, therefore, the definition of ‘multilingual’ applied to this population is riddled with shifting identities and competences. Models used to represent these identities and practices, such as DLT and DLC, must therefore evolve with our understanding of the field. Through pushing back on stagnant models and enhancing the theoretical framework that underlines these visualizations, their progression will also allow researchers to visualize how larger conceptions of ‘multilingual’ have evolved over time.

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