

Keynote Speaker

**A New Understanding of Linguistic Competence**

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ABSTRACT

In this talk I will argue that our notion of linguistic competence needs to be revisited. Static depictions of the grammar of the target language are not suitable for informing research and language teaching. The fact is that language is dynamic, a characteristic that the term “competence” does not reflect.

By entertaining a view of language informed by Complexity Theory, we will come to see language as a complex adaptive system. Complexity theory sees language as a set of patterns emerging from use. Those that are frequently-occurring become emergent stabilities in a complex system. The patterns themselves are variegated in form, and their borders are graded, not discrete. Complexity theorists subscribe to an emergentist view of language development. As such, no innate language acquisition faculty is posited. Instead, it is thought that a learner’s language resources develop from the interactions that the learner experiences. Out of these interactions, a new order self-organizes. Development is thus never complete, and a learner’s language resources can be seen as a dynamic ensemble of interacting patterns.