

BAAL Language Learning and Teaching SIG

4th Annual Conference: Attaining second language proficiency

1-2 July 2008
University of Greenwich

CONTENT	Page
Conference Theme	2
List of Delegates	3
Conference Programme	5
Abstracts: Plenary Talks	7
Abstracts: Individual Papers	10

Conference Theme:
Attaining Second Language Proficiency

Papers at this conference address the theme *Attaining second language proficiency* from an L2 learning and/or an L2 teaching perspective; papers may also place specific emphasis on research methodology.

Much research concerned with L2 learning and L2 teaching seeks to establish how, why, or when learners progress in their development of L2 skills; yet, assumptions about what we mean by L2 proficiency often remain implicit. By the same token, the field of language learning and teaching utilises a wide variety of tools for measuring learners' progress and achievements as well as variables associated with these factors. The conference theme highlights these two strands, and papers addressing the theme in any way are included in the programme.

We hope that the conference will enable us to discuss questions such as the following: How can the notion of L2 proficiency be understood in terms of specific theoretical frameworks? What is the relevance of this notion in L2 teaching? What is the relevance of this notion in L2 assessment? How can the notion of L2 proficiency be understood in relation to classroom vs. naturalistic learning? Which methods may be suitable for measuring L2 proficiency? What factors contribute to the attainment of L2 proficiency?

Acknowledgement:

We would like to thank Martin Bygate, Roger Hawkins, Tony Lilley, and Emma Marsden for their help with reviewing abstracts submitted to the conference.

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Conference Programme

BAAL Language Learning and Teaching SIG Conference 1-2 July 2008
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Tuesday 1 July	
9.00-10.00	Registration (King William Building Foyer)
10.00-10.15	Opening (Lecture Theatre KW002): Joanne Finkelstein, Head, School of Humanities and Social Science
10.15-11.15	Plenary 1 (Lecture Theatre KW002): Bill VanPatten: The role of explicit information in instructed SLA research
	Tea/coffee
	Individual papers (Room KW003) Chair: Karen Roehr
	Individual papers (Room KW016) Chair: Roger Hawkins
11.45-12.15	Emma Marsden: What might priming techniques be able to tell us about factors that are involved in attaining L2 proficiency?
	Pedro Guijarro-Fuentes, Alejandro Cuza, Tiffany Judy & Jason Rothman: The acquisition of adjectives in instructed Spanish: The role of individual characteristics
12.20-13.10	Cecile Laval & Alessandro Benati: Measuring processing instruction secondary effects
	Clare Wright: The role of working memory in the process of second language acquisition
	Lunch (Kent Hall)
14.15-15.15	Plenary 2 (Lecture Theatre KW002): Roger Hawkins: The role of statistical learning and innate knowledge in early L2 grammars
	Tea/coffee
	Individual papers (Room KW003) Chair: Peter Skehan
	Individual papers (Room KW016) Chair: Virginia Samuda
15.45-16.15	Mick Randall: Second language reading proficiency and word recognition: The concept of saliency and its application across different scripts
	Ivor Timmis, Hitomi Masuhara & Naeema Hann: Factors affecting the attainment of proficiency by ESOL learners on vocational courses: Learner and tutor perspectives
16.20-16.50	Christopher Hall & Areli Reyes Durán: Language proficiency and cross-linguistic influence in vocabulary development
	Hania Salter-Dvorak: Entering the 'argumentative fray' of Anglophone academia: How learner identity and agency interact with affordances
16.55-17.25	Philip Durrant: Collocations in learner writing
	Ewa Lucas-Gardiner: A personal culture and context identity crisis
from 19.00	Conference dinner (Café Rouge)

Wednesday 2 July		
	Individual papers (Room KW003) Chair: Emma Marsden	Individual papers (Room KW016) Chair: Ros Mitchell
9.00-9.30	Paul Booth: Lexical trajectories and learning style	Wen-Ta Tseng: An application of item response theory to item analysis
9.35-10.05	Karen Roehr & Adela Gánem: Metalinguistic knowledge: A stepping stone towards L2 proficiency?	Nicola Nunn: Seeing language: L2 proficiency in sign language learners
10.10-11.10	Plenary 3 (Lecture Theatre KW002): Jan Hulstijn: What is language proficiency?	
	Tea/coffee	
	Individual papers (Room KW003) Chair: Jan Hulstijn	Individual papers (Room KW016) Chair: Alessandro Benati
11.45-12.15	Sara Kennedy, Pavel Trofimovich & Randall Halter: L2 proficiency: Measuring intelligibility at word and discourse levels	Parvaneh Tavakoli: Second language teacher and learner perceptions of task difficulty
12.20-12.50	Tanja Angelovska & Angela Hahn: English with a native-like accent: An empirical study	Martin Bygate: Summarising tasks, or task as the sum of its parts?
	Lunch (Kent Hall)	
	Individual papers (Room KW003) Chair: Adela Gánem	Individual papers (Room KW016) Chair: Martin Bygate
14.00-14.30	Rola Naeb: Log files: Innovative method of measuring attainment	Peter Skehan: Adapting a model of first language speaking for second language speakers
14.35-15.05	Erifili Roubou: Word processing in the 00s: A tool for improving writing quality and encouraging revision in the EFL classroom?	Helga Adams & Margaret Nicolson: The languages classroom: Comfort zone or obstacle course? Capturing diversity and creating personal spaces for successful speaking practice
15.10-15.40	Muhammad Abdel Latif: The relationship of linguistic knowledge with EFL students' writing affect and text characteristics	Catherine Riley: Taking a back seat: A student-centred syllabus
15.45-16.30	Close and Wine Reception (Room KW003): Baroness Tessa Blackstone, Vice-Chancellor, University of Greenwich	
16.30-17.15	SIG Business Meeting (Room KW003)	

Plenary Talk

The role of statistical learning and innate knowledge in early L2 grammars

Roger Hawkins
University of Essex

A number of recent studies have provided evidence that post-childhood L2 learners retain the ability to rapidly compute the ‘transitional probabilities’ between syllables in strings of continuous, unfamiliar linguistic material. For example, in a study by Saffran et al (1996) adult learners heard an unbroken 21 minute string of an artificial language made up of 3-syllable ‘words’ joined together in a random order. Following exposure, participants were presented with pairs of ‘words’ and ‘non-words’ and asked to ‘choose which alternative ... sounded more familiar’ (Newport & Aslin 2000: 4). They were significantly better than chance at choosing the ‘words’. This ability appears to be a major component in the identification of morphemes in L2 development.

Some theories propose that such statistical learning is a pervasive feature of second language acquisition. In particular, knowledge of L2s ‘emerges’ just from computing transitional probabilities and ‘tallying’ frequencies of identified forms in the input, without need for pre-existing knowledge of linguistic properties. In contrast, so-called ‘generative approaches’ to SLA assume that an important part of acquisition is guided by pre-existing knowledge of the kinds of features and computations that make up human grammars, this coming from innate endowment (Universal Grammar).

In this talk I will assume that both statistical learning and innate linguistic knowledge play a role in early L2 acquisition. I will propose a model of how the two interact, and discuss how this model helps us understand a number of robust observations about the early acquisition of English verb morphology by L2 learners.

References:

- Newport, E. L., & Aslin, R. N. 2000: Innately constrained learning: blending old and new approaches to language acquisition. *Proceedings of the 24th Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development*,. Cascadilla Press, Somerville, MA. Vol 1, 1-21.
- Saffran, J. R., Newport, E. L. & Aslin, R. N. 1996: Word segmentation: the role of distributional cues. *Journal of Memory and Language* 35, 606-621.

Plenary Talk

What is language proficiency?

Jan H. Hulstijn
Universiteit van Amsterdam

If we want to explain why one L2 learner has attained a higher L2 proficiency than another, we need to have a well defined construct (i.e., a theory) of language proficiency. Similarly, if we want to explain differences and commonalities in the attainment of an L1 and define the notion of “adult native speaker”, we need a theory of L1 proficiency. Thirdly, if we want to assess to what extent individuals are proficient in their L2 or L1, we need to have a theory of language proficiency. In this presentation, I propose a theory of core language proficiency, still in its infancy. Furthermore, I present findings from several studies, conducted at the University of Amsterdam, involving the measurement of the same skills in L1 and L2. The studies, all funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, are concerned with the four integrative skills, i.e., reading and writing (N = 400, completed), speaking (N = 250, almost completed), and listening (N = 300, in its piloting phase) in L1 and L2, and with component skills, such as knowledge of grammar and lexis, and the speed with which grammatical and lexical information can be processed on line.

Plenary Talk

The role of explicit information in instructed SLA research

Bill VanPatten
Texas Tech University

It is increasingly being accepted that instruction on the formal properties of SLA makes a difference (e.g., Norris & Ortega, 2000), and yet at the same time, it is clear that the effects of formal instruction are constrained in a number of ways (e.g., Doughty, 2003). The purpose of the present paper is to examine an often overlooked intervening variable in instructed SLA research: explicit information (EI), that is, the information about the target structure(s) provided to learners prior to treatment.

In this talk I will review the nature of EI, and will review some literature where its presence or absence has been researched--distinguishing this research from what some call "explicit vs. implicit teaching and learning." I will then present the findings of a large scale study (N = 300 L2 Spanish learners) that compares three distinct approaches to focus on form: dictogloss (DG), meaning-based output instruction (MOI), and processing instruction (PI). As part of the design, our research team entered explicit information as an independent variable by creating treatment groups that either had it (+) or didn't (-). Thus our design consisted of DG +, DG -, MOI +, MOI -, PI + and PI- (plus controls that did not receive treatment of any kind).

Our findings reveal a pattern for the role of explicit information across the three instructional treatments. We discuss the findings in light of recent claims about cognition and practice (e.g., DeKeyser, 2007) as well as claims about the bias toward explicit learning in instructed SLA (e.g., Doughty, 2003). My conclusion is that not all focus on form treatments are equal, that some are more biased toward explicit learning than others, and that research on instructed SLA must grapple with the role of explicit information as part of a treatment if it is to make advances regarding the interface between instruction and the learner's creation of a mental representation of language.

The relationship of linguistic knowledge with EFL students' writing affect and text characteristics ¹

Muhammad M. Abdel Latif
University of Essex

This paper reports a study that investigated how two types of English linguistic knowledge (grammar knowledge and vocabulary knowledge) interact with Egyptian university students' writing affect (writing apprehension and writing self-efficacy) and text characteristics (text quality and text length). The study used the Oxford Grammar Test to measure the participants' grammar knowledge, and the Productive Vocabulary Levels Test and Receptive Vocabulary Levels Test to measure their vocabulary knowledge. The participants' scores on these tests were compared to their scores on two scales of their English writing apprehension and self-efficacy, and to their text quality scores and text length measures. This quantitative data was also supplemented by interviewing participants with different levels of linguistic knowledge about their writing perceptions. The results indicated that the participants' linguistic knowledge and English language competence self-esteem accounted for the different levels of their writing apprehension and writing self-efficacy. The study also revealed that the participants' scores on the three linguistic tests correlated positively with their essay vocabulary, total, language use and organization scores more than their essay content and mechanics ones, respectively, and that their linguistic knowledge is a positive predictor of the text quantity and the number of sentences in their essays. Overall, the correlations of the participants' grammar and productive vocabulary scores with their vocabulary, total, language use and organization ones and with text length were higher than those of their receptive vocabulary scores. The paper ends with presenting some pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research.

¹ This paper is based on a part of my PhD research which is supported by the 2008 Sheikh Nahayan Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship granted by The International Research Foundation for English Language Education (TIRF). My thanks go to TIRF Board of Trustees for granting me this award.

**The languages classroom: Comfort zone or obstacle course?
Capturing diversity and creating personal spaces for successful speaking
practice**

Helga Adams & Margaret Nicolson
The Open University

This presentation builds on previous research into language learner negotiation of speaking tasks. It examines survey data from beginners' language students, seeking to establish if their views validate the authors' problematisation of methodological choices in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the part they play in facilitating student integration, access to Bhaba's third space (Bhaba 1990) and achievement of cognitive goals. Areas examined are: personal information in tasks, pair and group work, target language use, physical response, opting out and adapting tasks. The respondent cohort profile indicated a higher degree of language learning than anticipated so many students understood the rules of the language learning game and were able to integrate successfully. Nonetheless, student integration is dependent on a complex interplay between the tasks, group dynamics, individual psychological and social comfort and the teacher's capacity to create a conducive environment. While it may seem like a utopian expectation to achieve the perfect ecology for language learning, the presenter suggests that FL providers should aspire to achieve this as far as possible.

English with a 'native-like' accent: An empirical study

Tanja Angelovska & Angela Hahn
Universität München

“Attaining a native-like accent” is an issue widely used in language teaching, and sounding like a native has been seen as the ultimate goal for many learners. Second language acquisition research has focussed on the age factor as the most important hindrance of achieving this goal ever since Lenneberg’s Critical Period Hypothesis in 1967.

In our presentation we ask the question how some native speakers perceive and assess foreign accented and near-native speech. Our research paradigm involves native speaker assessments of learner language data (read out and free speech) as well as questionnaires, qualitative interviews with learners and native speaker raters. One widely spread assumption as a “justification” for the native speaker’s view “sounds funny” has been that late starters are (cognitively) unable to achieve native proficiency in L2 pronunciation. We will challenge this explanation, based on data collected in a study on late foreign language learners of English whose L1 is German and Macedonian and who have attained a high level of proficiency.

Previous research in perception studies has mainly dealt with native and non-native varieties of English and has not dealt with the speech produced by near-natives. In our study we include a wider range of native speaker reactions to non-native speech, both foreign accented and near-native speech, explaining basic stereotypes. In contrast to previous studies we include interviews with native speaker judges as a supplement to the rating procedure.

Reference:

Lenneberg, E. 1967: *Biological foundations of language*. New York

Lexical trajectories and learning style

Paul Booth
Kingston University

Lexical development is a complex and dynamic process. One way of understanding this process is that differences in learners' approaches to language learning may shape their lexical development. This paper explores the relationship between individual differences in learning style and patterns of lexical trajectories of a small group of second language learners. Memory- and analysis-orientated learners (Skehan 1998) are categorised by language aptitude tests of visual memory of paired associates and grammatical sensitivity respectively. Productive written vocabulary is analysed by using two different types of software: one which measures diversity and one which measures word rarity. D_Tools (Meara and Miralpeix 2007) is software based on a type-token curve fitting statistic, parameter D, while P_Lex (Meara 2007) produces a summary measure, lambda, based on the distinction between high- and low-frequency vocabulary. The results suggest that the memory-analysis framework can provide some insights into the shape of lexical trajectories, that learners' trajectories are in fact non-linear and that learners may not even progress at all during an intensive English course.

Summarising tasks, or task as the sum of its parts?

Martin Bygate
Lancaster University

Much recent research has attempted to investigate the nature of task-based language and learning. However, this usually assumes homogeneity in the discourse and by implication in the learning experience, an assumption that may not always be warranted. This presentation questions this assumption through an empirical study of the demands of a picture sequencing and story telling task as reflected in students' talk. The study will use transcripts and post-task interview data to explore how five different groups carried out the same task. Using topic-based discourse analysis, the data will be analysed in terms of the ways in which the students' talk implies the presence of different challenges in the tasks, the extent to which in response to those challenges they structured their talk into distinct phases, the nature of each phase, and the ways these phases were sequenced. The analysis will conclude with an account of the apparent difficulties experienced by the learners, and argue that this suggests the need for more investigation into the internal structure of on-task talk. The discussion will consider implications for conceptualising and researching task-based language use and learning. It will also suggest implications both for task design and for the classroom use of tasks.

Collocations in learner writing

Philip Durrant
University of Nottingham

Both corpus linguists and psycholinguists have proposed that ‘collocation’ – the frequent co-occurrence of words in texts – cannot be explained by real-world co-occurrences or semantic constraints, but rather are a product of mental associations between words (Ellis 2003; Hoey 2005). If this is the case, then part of what second language learners need to acquire is an appropriate set of collocational associations. Since collocation is held to be important in distinguishing ‘natural’ from archetypically ‘foreign’ language, and since some researchers claim that the mechanisms involved in collocation learning may be crucial to language learning in general, studying the acquisition of collocation is an important task. However, there are as yet no well-established means for assessing the learning of collocations.

This presentation discusses one way in which collocation learning might be assessed. It describes a study in which advanced learners’ use of collocations is evaluated through a quantitative comparison of learner and native-speaker writing. In contrast to the often-cited view that non-native language tends to be unidiomatic because learners fail to absorb collocations, focusing instead on learning individual words (Wray 2002), this study finds that non-native writers use significantly more high-frequency collocations than natives, and are significantly less likely to use novel collocations. The apparent lack of idiomaticity in learner language can be explained by non-natives’ failure to use some low-frequency, but strongly associated, word pairs which are probably highly salient for native speakers. These results suggest that L2 learners do form collocational associations on the basis of input.

References:

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- Hoey, M. (2005). *Lexical priming: A new theory of words and language*. London: Routledge.
- Wray, A. (2002). *Formulaic language and the lexicon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The acquisition of adjectives in instructed Spanish: The role of individual characteristics

Pedro Guijarro-Fuentes¹, Alejandro Cuza², Tiffany Judy³ & Jason Rothman³
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This paper addresses the effect of L1, and length and type (i.e., learning context) of input, on the acquisition of narrow syntax (gender and number features) and syntax-semantic interface (adjective placement) in L2 Spanish. Previous research on adjectives has been largely limited to American English-speaking learners of French (Anderson, 2007a, b; 2008; Gess, & Herschensohn, 2001; authors, under submission); to this end, narrow syntax and syntax-semantic interpretations of adjective placement by language learners with varying L1s (German (N=20) and British English (N=20)) was studied using a Grammaticality Judgment Task designed to test the participants' knowledge of gender and number accord between nouns and determiners and nouns and adjectives as well as knowledge of syntactic positions of Spanish adjectives (e.g., *Det-Adj-Noun and related counterbalances), a Semantic Interpretation Task designed to test whether they intuit interpretation differences of pre- and post-nominal adjectives and, finally, a context-based Collocation Task (fill-in-the-blank) that also tested for semantic knowledge of felicitous post- and pre-nominal adjectives. German and English do not mark the gender nor possess movement of D to N. A French L1 group (n= 20) was also included in order to examine the role of transfer. Results show that individual variation is neither directly linked to L1 nor to the context of language acquisition. Our results show that there is variation according to both linguistic (narrow syntax vs. syntax-semantic interface) and individual characteristics (including language transfer). Implications for the role of input in SLA will be addressed and this new research will be discussed in light of previous research on adjectives and interfaces. (258 words).

References:

- Anderson, B. (2001). Adjective Position and Interpretation in L2 French. In J. Camps & C-R. Wiltshire (Eds.), *Romance Syntax, Semantics and L2 Acquisition*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Anderson, B. (2007a). Learnability and Parametric Change in the Nominal System of L2 French. *Language Acquisition*, 14(2), 165–214.
- Anderson, B. (2007b). Pedagogical Rules and their Relationship to Frequency in the Input: Observational and Empirical Data from L2 French. *Applied Linguistics*, 28(2), 286–308.
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Language proficiency and cross-linguistic influence in vocabulary development

Christopher J. Hall ¹ & Areli Reyes Durán ²
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Cross-linguistic influence (CLI) at the level of vocabulary is commonly assumed to be driven by detection of similarities between novel L2 words and L1 words. According to the Parasitic Model of vocabulary learning, this leads to the development of connections from novel L2 representations to L1 'host' entries at the levels of phonological/orthographic form, syntactic frame (e.g. argument structure in verbs), and/or perceived meaning. This study explores whether parasitic effects at the level of frame are a function of word novelty alone, or whether overall proficiency plays a role. 45 Spanish-speaking learners of L2 English from three institutionally classified proficiency levels were given a grammaticality judgement test requiring a choice between pairs of English sentences differing only in verb frame. One version used the target frame and the other a non-target frame based on that of the closest L1 translation equivalent (to induce CLI). Advanced learners judged 'novel', 'familiar', and 'known' verbs; intermediate learners judged 'novel' and 'familiar' verbs; basic learners judged 'novel' verbs only. Choice of the L1 frame was taken as a manifestation of CLI. Comparisons of rates of CLI across word groups and proficiency levels showed higher rates across the board for 'novel' items, but with the advanced learners showing significantly less CLI than the basic and intermediate levels. We discuss the results in the context of the Parasitic Model and argue for a more nuanced view of vocabulary learning proficiency which is independent of word familiarity. Pedagogical implications are also briefly addressed.

L2 proficiency: Measuring intelligibility at word and discourse levels

Sara Kennedy¹, Pavel Trofimovich² & Randall Halter²
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Listeners may focus on different aspects of second language (L2) speech in judging a speaker's proficiency. However, one central element in all such judgements is intelligibility (extent to which a speaker's message is understood). To date, intelligibility has mostly been measured through the recognition of isolated, read-aloud words or sentences. Do these measures (word-level intelligibility) reflect the intelligibility of extended speech in context (discourse-level intelligibility)? This study's objective was to investigate L2 intelligibility at both these levels, with the aim of developing a discourse-level intelligibility measure.

The participants were 4 native English speakers and 6 L2 English university students. Each participant recorded three personal anecdotes (for a total of 30; mean length = 2.5 min), all subsequently presented to English listeners. The first listener group (n = 45) heard the anecdotes, then retold them. This task yielded a discourse-level intelligibility measure (number of inaccurately retold story elements over the total number of elements). The second listener group (n = 30) listened to the same anecdotes and noted all unclear words. This task yielded a word-level intelligibility measure (number of unidentified/misidentified words over the total number of words).

Results showed that many L2 speakers were as intelligible as native speakers at the discourse level while being significantly less intelligible at the word level. These findings demonstrate that word-level intelligibility measures do not accurately reflect the intelligibility of extended speech in authentic communication. The relationship between L2 intelligibility and proficiency, as well as approaches to teaching and measuring intelligibility will be discussed.

Measuring processing instruction secondary effects

Cecile Laval & Alessandro Benati
University of Greenwich

Research on Processing Instruction has so far investigated the primary effects of Processing Instruction. In this paper we present the results of an experimental study investigating possible secondary effects of processing instruction on the acquisition of French as a second language. L2 learners of French will receive Processing Instruction focused on French past imperfective aspect, the *imparfait*, that occurs as a word final morpheme and can be made redundant with a lexical temporal/aspectual indicator. L2 learners will be taught to rely on and process the morpheme as a tense and aspect indicator. Can they then transfer that training to another word final verb morpheme? The other linguistic feature we assess is the French subjunctive, a form that is triggered by the meaning expressed in the main clause of the sentence. We also explore if learners can transfer their training on processing verb morphology to appropriately processing a word order phenomenon, the French causative construction with *faire*.

A personal culture and context identity crisis

Ewa Lucas-Gardiner
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This paper was prompted by the experiences of simultaneously having to acquire a command of the English Language during my formative years whilst making a personal journey through an alien and somewhat hostile English culture and context within an urban city environment. My research confirmed that many of these issues continue to be mirrored by successive immigrant groups. I intend to focus upon some of the processes which contributed to my acquisition of fluency in the English language and which impacted upon the formation of my identity by briefly examining the issue of acculturation, the perplexities of parallel two culture education and the sensation of confusion and alienation engendered as I quickly became aware of the dominant English culture and an immigrant culture both insistent upon constantly vying for superiority. It is difficult to generalize the experiences of a second generation which grows up in the United Kingdom. This generation ranges from being confused about their identity and place in society to being knowledgeable and inquisitive about their immigrant and acquired cultural heritages. Issues that shape this second generation cultural identity stem from the conflicting messages received from English society and those of their home communities. I further discuss current sociolinguistic research with particular reference to bi-lingualism and suggest that the frustrations and being educated in a 'foreign language may encourage spontaneous (Scarr and McCartney 1988) and adaptive learning (Rohrkemper 1989) which does not necessarily conflict with the ideas of key theorists such as Vygotsky's and Piaget.

What might priming techniques be able to tell us about factors that are involved in attaining L2 proficiency?

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There have been many calls to develop ways of measuring implicit knowledge and implicit learning processes (Robinson, 2003; Segalowitz, 2006). One potential avenue for this is to use and adapt techniques from cognitive psychology, such as priming. Priming techniques have recently been used in interactional research to investigate the existence of syntactic priming in L2 learning (McDonough 2006; McDonough & Mackey, 2008). However, the use of priming techniques to investigate developmental changes to input processing mechanisms in the oral mode appears to remain untapped (though see Trofimovich, 2005 for a study using acoustic priming; Marsden, under review).

This paper discusses the potential of priming techniques for investigating the impact of different characteristics of an exposure phase on the speed and accuracy of *subsequent processing of the input*. The aim of such techniques being to inform our understanding of the factors which provoke change in the learner's language system. Factors which have been suggested to affect L2 input processing mechanisms include: the L1, proficiency level, communicative redundancy of the form, salience, sentential comprehension, and working memory (e.g. VanPatten, 2007).

This paper will

- a) review the literature about using priming for researching L2 learning;
- b) suggest ways in which priming techniques might inform our understanding of how L2 proficiency is attained;
- c) discuss whether evidence from priming research makes any assumptions about theories of learning i.e. whether there are particular frameworks (e.g. generativist, associative-cognitive) for which evidence from priming studies is more appropriate.

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Log files: Innovative method of measuring attainment

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Second language acquisition and computer-assisted language learning have remained relatively separate. As both fields focus on the same construct, one would expect to find a considerable amount of research that links the two fields, but this is not so. A main thread that does link these fields is the ongoing debate about which type of input best facilitates language acquisition. Although the role of input has been at the heart of much SLA and L2 instruction research, the role of technology in promoting language acquisition has received little attention (Chapelle, 1997; Cubillos, 1998). Since 1991, there has been a call for research that investigates the use of technologies in SLA research (Garrett, 1991; Ervin, 1993). Researchers advocate the harmonization of CALL materials with what SLA research findings have revealed about how languages are acquired (Levy, 1997; Pennington, 1999; Chapelle, 1997, 2001).

This study investigates two issues: methods suitable for the measurement of and factors contributing to the attainment of L2 proficiency. It is assumed that the use of log files in such a study will provide us with 'unprecedented insights into learners' SLA processes' (Cubillos, 1998, 45).

The study approaches these issues by investigating the effectiveness of three computer-delivered types of input on L2 learners' acquisition of reported speech: Input Flood, Focus on FormS and Focus on Form. The study was conducted through comparing three groups of 30 learners with varied L1s. Pre- and post-tests measured performance. This paper discusses what data tracked through log files can reveal about learners' processes.

Seeing language: L2 proficiency in sign language learners

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This paper will address the theoretical issues of teaching a language that is based in the visual/corporal channels to learners who are accustomed to using a language based in the aural/oral mode. I will also consider the physical practicalities that are required in order to make the teaching and learning of a visual language effective.

Research into signed languages began with the pioneering research on American Sign Language by William Stokoe in the early 1960s. Since then, there has been some investigation of the acquisition of British Sign Language (BSL) (Kyle and Woll, 1985) but we have yet to see this applied to the teaching of BSL in a theoretical framework. There is general consensus amongst BSL tutors that the main obstacle is that students who are native spoken language users have to adjust to learning a language based in the visual and corporal channels. Learning to 'see' a language instead of receiving input via sound is a skill that requires a great level of cultural adjustment; students must learn to think visually and this paper will explore avenues available to the sign language learner in order to enable this skill to develop. The practical requirements of the L2 learning process will also be considered in this paper. I will suggest strategies for effective BSL learning, including the student's access to a visual language lab and to native language users in order for productive skills to develop in line with receptive skills.

Second language reading proficiency and word recognition: The concept of saliency and its application across different scripts

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There has long been an interest in studies of Second Language Acquisition and Learning of the concept of noticing as the mechanism by which specific language instruction in the L2 can direct the learner's attention to significant features of the L2 leading to a restructuring of the learner's IL. Such renewed attention to what are essentially bottom-up processes are a movement away from the emphasis on top-down processes which have for so long dominated thinking in second language pedagogy. Nowhere has this emphasis been more important than SL in reading. This paper examines the case for a greater emphasis on bottom-up processes in reading, especially with learners using a radically different script such as Arabic. It argues that word recognition is the major factor involved in SL reading and becomes the essential site where bottom-up and top-down processes unite. It then goes on to examine different 'saliency' factors in the process of word recognition and reading and the way these may vary between Arabic and English. From this analysis, methods are suggested which will help SL readers notice the salient features of the SL and thus become more proficient readers in the SL.

Taking a back seat: A student-centred syllabus

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Much lip service is paid to the importance of action based, holistic approaches to teaching, focusing on skills, competences and overall student development and not merely on linguistic output. Despite the advances in applied research, all widely publicised in the literature, traditional talk and chalk methods prevail, particularly at university level, in many European countries. This perception of education is widespread not only in teachers but also students even though it suits language learning even less than other disciplines. This paper investigates whether a student-oriented, action based approach where assessment is in the form of tasks, and not exams leads to increased student involvement, heightened motivation, a more responsible independent approach to language learning and ultimately to better outcomes than the instructed, focus-on-form language courses and written exams still prevalent in Italian Universities.

The Advanced English language course consists of student led seminars, where students select readings, lead the discussion, prepare exercises and set the follow-up essay questions which then form the basis of a writing workshops. The seminars are conducted by the students, the teacher literally taking a back seat, and are recorded for feedback and assessment purposes (teacher, self and peer). Rather than drop off, as is the norm, attendance (not compulsory in Italian universities) and involvement in all the activities increased over the academic year. Student feedback revealed that they considered the seminars a moment of debate of topics they were genuinely interested in. They also thought continuous assessment a much fairer, if more demanding, method of assessment.

Metalinguistic knowledge: A stepping stone towards L2 proficiency?

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This paper reports on a small-scale empirical study involving 16 university-level L1 English learners of L2 German and L2 Spanish. We sought to identify the potential contribution of metalinguistic knowledge – defined as explicit knowledge about language (Ellis, 2004; Roehr, 2008) – to participants' development of L2 proficiency. With the help of test-based measurement as well as analyses of learners' reported use of metalinguistic knowledge during performance on a form-focused task, we identified L2 features which showed a correlation between learners' more accurate and more sophisticated metalinguistic knowledge on the one hand and successful task completion on the other hand.

Drawing on a taxonomy adapted from Ellis (2006) and DeKeyser (2005), we profiled these L2 features for implicit and explicit learning difficulty. Our findings led us to suggest that aspects of L2 German and L2 Spanish with a characteristic profile might be particularly suitable for explicit learning and teaching regardless of individual learner differences. In this case, metalinguistic knowledge appears to offer a safe stepping stone towards L2 proficiency. By contrast, other aspects of L2 German and L2 Spanish might only be amenable to explicit learning and teaching with certain types of learners; here metalinguistic knowledge seems to offer benefits to a specific population of learners only. In conclusion, we briefly present ongoing work that is intended to put our hypothesis to the test.

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Word processing in the 00's: A tool for improving writing quality and encouraging revision in the EFL classroom?

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This paper reports on a longitudinal study which took place over a whole school year. The study investigated the effects of the word processor on the quality of writing and number of revisions of Greek Intermediate L2 English learners in private language schools. It followed a comparative design based on using a computer (experimental) and a handwriting (control) group. To date research shows inconsistent results about the effects of word processing on writing quality improvement and amount or types of revision. However, exams are now turning into their computer-based counterparts all over the world, making it a matter of urgency to research the use of this writing medium. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate to what extent this tool can make a difference to L2 students' writing proficiency. The main aims of the study were twofold: first of all to assess and compare the quality of writing between the two groups; second, to examine the number and kinds of revisions carried out in the two different modes of implementation. All revisions made by the computer group were recorded by using computer keystroke logging software.

This paper presents a general overview of the research project and discusses the effects of the word processor on quality and revising in students' compositions. The findings established that although mixed results were yielded in relation to different aspects of writing and kinds of revisions, there were statistically significant differences in the quality of writing and in the total number of revisions between the control and experimental group overall, suggesting that the word processor can positively influence the writing process.

Entering the 'argumentative fray' of Anglophone academia: How learner identity and agency interact with affordances

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The struggle faced by many international postgraduates on masters courses at British universities has traditionally been explained by lack of linguistic proficiency and cultural/educational factors. A socio-cultural view of learning would suggest that factors such as learner identity, power relations, agency and affordances offered by the learning context are key to the success of such learners in that they contribute to negotiating membership of the 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This suggests a far more complex theoretical framework than the one provided by linguistic proficiency; it also suggests that the process of academic acculturation is a dynamic dialectic, involving a multitude of factors.

In order to capture such complexity, qualitative research has developed the tradition of the case study, which enables a detailed multi faceted account of learning (Stake, 1995). This paper documents the experience of one international postgraduate as she enters the 'the argumentative fray' (Belcher and Braine, 1995: xiii). By investigating the learner's trajectory, first on an EAP course taught by myself, and then on the MA, I explore factors relating to agency, identity and affordances which affect participation and success on the masters course.

This context enables a situated ethnographic longitudinal study in which the learner's assignments and journals are triangulated with video recordings of classes, my field notes on classroom observation, and interviews with the learner and her lecturers. Thus the study strives to uncover the dynamic interaction of the processes that affect the cognition of learners, by viewing them as 'embedded'.

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Adapting a model of first language speaking for second language speakers

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The Levelt Model represents something of a consensus regarding first language speaking and its component sub-processes, which are seen to operate in a modular, parallel fashion. There is currently no comparable second language model, although it has been proposed that the Levelt model can be extended. But there are considerable problems in attempting to do this. The use of parallel processes is dependent on an extensive and well-organised lexicon, typical of native speakers. The interesting point is then to explore what happens with non-native speakers who do not have such a mental lexicon. An interesting source of information in this regard is the literature on task-based performance. The presentation will draw on this literature and the generalisations which are emerging from it, and it will be proposed that the relevance of the Levelt Model depends on not only level of proficiency but also a series of task characteristics and task conditions. These factors can be facilitative for the operation of the model with second language speakers, e.g. with tasks containing clearer macrostructure, dialogic conditions, supportive planning opportunities, or can make the model less relevant for such speakers, e.g. with tasks involving more extensive input, or which are more demanding lexically, which are non-negotiable etc. Implications will be discussed for pedagogy, in that the task findings provide suggestions as to how the speaking skill can be nurtured with second language learners in a principled manner, as they are able to engage psycholinguistic processes which operate in parallel, rather than serially.

Second language teacher and learner perceptions of task difficulty

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There is little doubt that defining and determining task difficulty has been of central importance to research in language teaching and learning for more than two decades (Candlin, 1987; Skehan, 1998; Robinson, 2001). Research in this area has predominantly looked at how different tasks, task characteristics and conditions influence task difficulty and learner performance on tasks (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Wigglesworth, 2001). While defining and determining task difficulty through studying learner performance has been a growing research area, the way task difficulty is perceived by language learners and teachers has not been fully investigated. Neither has there been much research investigating how they identify and define task difficulty, whether learner and teacher perceptions of task difficulty match, and whether these perceptions can correspond to either of the two cognitive models of task difficulty, i.e. Skehan's (1998) scheme or Robinson's triadic framework (2001) for task difficulty.

Twenty language teachers and learners teaching/studying EFL or ESOL courses at a college in London took part in this study. The participants were asked to perform four oral narrative tasks of varying degree of structure before they were interviewed about different aspects of task difficulty. Through micro and macro analysis of the data, their perceptions of and criteria for task difficulty were carefully studied. Unlike some studies that report considerable perceptual mismatches between learner and teacher perceptions of teaching activities and classroom aims (Hawkey, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2003), the findings of this study show that the learners and teachers agree, to a great extent, on what contributes to the difficulty level of a task and the criteria they consider in determining task difficulty. More importantly, these results shed light to the cognitive models of task difficulty and demonstrate ways through which using tasks may facilitate language learning.

Factors affecting the attainment of proficiency by ESOL learners on vocational courses: Learner and tutor perspectives

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There has been growing emphasis in Britain from the government and the Learning and Skills Council on the provision for workbased and workplace learning. The Leitch Report (2006) outlines the need for UK to develop a world class skills base to compete with economies in South and Southeast Asia. Parallel to this, there has been debate in the media and in the forums of government and policy making on skills shortage in Britain and the contribution of immigrants to the economy. We also know that migrants don't necessarily arrive with enough English to live and work in Britain (Home Office, 2008. Schellekens, 2001).

In this climate, we need to examine aspects of current ESOL provision for migrants and their affect on learner progress on workbased courses. This paper presents findings from a study which investigated student and tutor perceptions of progress on a vocational programme and in language skills, with a group of learners over nine months. Focus groups, questionnaires and interviews were used to gather student and tutor perceptions of factors affecting progress. A major finding is that students chose talking in English outside the classroom and reading magazines and newspapers as two of the top contributory factors. This reflects what Norton and Toohey (2001) and Bremer et al (1996) found in case studies of individual learners. The paper also presents a provisional operational model and suggests how factors reported by students could enrich this further.

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An application of item response theory to item analysis

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This paper presents the results of applying three widely-used Item Response Theory (IRT) models to analyse English reading and listening proficiency tests that are currently developed for placement purpose in Taiwan. The unique feature of the research design is that it involves up to 1760 participants to make it possible to use a rivalling model approach to determine which IRT model can best explain the test data. The models used for data analysis are one-, two-, and three-parameter logistic model, respectively. One-parameter (1PL) model was used for modelling difficulty factor of the test items; two-parameter (2PL) model for both difficulty and discrimination factors; three-parameter (3PL) model for difficulty, discrimination, and guessing factors.

The purpose of the study is to determine which of the three IRT models should be used for analysing the test data given the advantages of item response theory over the classical test theory (Hambleton, Swaminathan, & Rogers, 1991). The test items of both the reading and the listening tests are multiple-choice items with four options. BILOG-MG 3.0 was adopted to execute the analysis, and the criterion of '-2 log likelihood ratio' as generated by the software was used to determine the fit of the three models. The results showed that for the reading test, the 2PL model functioned best, while for the listening test the 3PL model outperformed the other two rival models. The findings showed that both the 2PL and 3PL models fit the data better than did the 1PL model, and that the listening test seemed more easily subject to guessing effects. It is therefore argued that IRT has important implications on the way in which language proficiency should be assessed.

The role of working memory in the process of second language acquisition

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Even after immersion, native Mandarin speakers of English (MSE) exhibit varying degrees of proficiency in complex questions such as (1) *What did John say Mary ate?* or (2) *Who did Mary say liked John?* (White & Juffs 1998, Han 2004, Wright 2006). Discussions of the interface between L2 linguistic knowledge and development (Carroll 2000, Towell 2003) provide a context for analysing the role of memory (Paradis 1997, Ullman 2005), specifically verbal working memory (Baddeley 2003), i.e. the capacity to store and process language. This study adds to the growing body of research into WM and L2 proficiency (e.g. Service 1992, Harrington & Sawyer 1992, Fortkamp 1999) by empirically investigating the correlation between WM capacity and grammatical proficiency in L2 (Ellis & Sinclair 1996).

The heart of this paper discusses data from a semi-longitudinal study of 40 advanced MSEs (IELTS 5.5/TOEFL 525 and above) who were followed during a year's immersion in the United Kingdom. Oral and grammaticality judgement data on complex wh-questions were gathered on participants' arrival in the UK (Stage 1) and again after 9 months (Stage 2), using elicitation and reaction time (RT) tasks. Results from Stage 1, presented here, show asymmetries in accuracy across different wh-question types and different tasks, correlating to varying extents with working memory capacity. These findings provide some support for the hypothesis that WM correlates with L2 grammatical proficiency, but indicate that further research is required to understand the role of WM in L2 proficiency.

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