Review Article

Research on language teaching and learning: 2001

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Introduction

As is customary in this annual review, the focus is on research which has been published mainly in international research journals and which has a bearing on the teaching of languages and on those aspects of languages learning and use which seem to have implications for teaching. For the most part, it is additional languages which are under discussion, whether of the second, (third, fourth) or modern foreign or some other variety. 2001 yielded a large number of valuable articles of this sort. Rather than seeking to mention them all, I have made a selection in order to allow certain themes to be developed.

Three themes seemed to me to be of particular interest in 2001: 'Focus on form', 'Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and languages' and 'Early language learning'. None of these of course represents a new area of research, but in 2001 they seemed to play strongly. My review begins with a discussion of each of these in turn.

In the sections to follow, cross-reference is made to the abstracts in *Language Teaching*. Thus, Haley (2001: 02–253) refers to the article published in 2001 and appearing as abstract 253 in the 2002 volume of the journal.

Focus on form

Overview

For me, the major theoretical publication of the year to have a bearing on languages teaching was the special supplement of the journal *Language Learning* dedicated to 'form-focused instruction (FFI) and second language learning'. The role of FFI has long been a matter of debate, and the special supplement provides an authoritative overview of the history and current state of the field, as well as some new reported studies. In his introduction, Ellis (2001) defines what FFI stands for in its various manifestations, outlines early FFI research, sets out the effects of FFI on the order and sequence of acquisition, points to the theory-driven nature of much FFI research and describes teacher cognitions about FFI. In a major section on 'conceptualizing FFI', a contrast is drawn with meaning-focused instruction, and three types of FFI are set out: 'focus on forms', 'planned focus on forms' and 'incidental focus on form'. In a section on 'research methods and FFI' there is a discussion of confirmatory studies, interpretive research, hybrid research and measuring acquisition in FFI research. In the concluding section it is claimed that the earlier FFI research was concerned with how FFI worked, but current research asks how it is accomplished in different settings and what the effects are of different types of FFI on second language (L2) acquisition. At present, FFI research tends to be driven more by theoretical than by pedagogical considerations, which mean that the distinction between theoretically- and pedagogically-driven FFI research is now wider than it was ten years ago. Ellis sees a need for descriptive and introspective studies which adopt a more emic and holistic perspective on FFI, viewing this as an organic process.

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Experimental studies

Contributing to the same supplement are a number of specific studies, each selected so as to reflect one particular aspect of FFI research. Day and Shapson (2001) present an experimental study which indicated the benefits (in terms of speaking) of an integrated formal, analytical, functional and communicative approach in a Grade 7 immersion classroom. De Keyser and Sokalski (2001) take issue with Van Patten and Oikkenon (1996) in respect of the effects of processing instruction, claiming that the Van Patten and Oikkenon data are explained by their particular choice of morphosyntactic structure, with the consequence that their findings are not generalisable. De Keyser and Sokalski are more cautious about the effects of processing instruction on production. They suggest that input practice is better for comprehension and output practice better for production. Leow (2001), in discussing the roles of 'attention' and 'awareness' in FFI, suggests that both of these need to be better operationalised, especially in studies conducted in classrooms. It is also argued that multiple elicitation procedures, both on-and off-line, are needed, plus both quantitative and qualitative analysis of elicited data. In reporting one particular experimental study, concerned with the effects of

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'awareness' of particular targeted forms on subsequent written production, 'aware' learners were shown to have increased their ability to recognise and produce these. Norris and Ortega (2001) present a meta-analysis of 46 studies which suggests strongly that both 'focus on form' and 'focus on forms' produce large and equivalent effects, more so than do implicit strategies. However, caution is recommended in generalisation, since in a number of cases there has been a lack of rigorous operationalisation and replication of the central research constructs.

Interpretive studies

Within the same special supplement on FFI, four interpretive classroom studies are presented. Bardovi-Harlig (2001) indicates that, if studies of this sort can have a longitudinal dimension, they can offer something which short-term experimental studies cannot. Her own study featured the acquisition of the present perfect by learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) over a 15-month period, allowing her to track the extent to which they were able (or not) to incorporate targeted forms into their interlanguage. The data pointed to the individuality of acquisition profiles. Lyster (2001) discusses negotiation of form, recasts and explicit correction in relation to error types and learner repair in immersion classrooms. Negotiation of form was found to be more effective than recasts or explicit correction in leading to immediate repair, in respect of lexical errors, grammatical errors and unsolicited use of the first language (L1), though recasts were more useful in respect of phonological errors. The focus of Williams' (2001) study was learner-generated attention to form. The nature of learner-generated initiations was examined, e.g., requests for assistance, feedback on error, modelling or fine-tuning. It was established that learners can and do attend to form, but not very often, with request to teachers for assistance, mainly in respect of lexis, being the most common type. Learner-generated attention to form tended to increase as proficiency levels rose. Finally, Seedhouse (2001) discusses the relationship between pedagogy and interaction, drawing attention to the still widely held belief that making mistakes can be embarrassing and face threatening. In interaction there was shown to be a strong dispreference for direct and negative evaluation of learners' errors, but in pedagogical recommendations the making of mistakes could be seen as contributing positively to the process of L2 acquisition. As such the messages from interaction and from pedagogy did not seem to go hand in hand.

Additional studies elsewhere

'Focus on form' was also taken up in several other studies published elsewhere, including the following. Two types of 'focus on form' were the theme of a study by Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2001: 02–102). One type was 'reactive', whereby corrective feedback in the form of explicit or implicit negative evidence would be offered by the teacher; the other was 'preemptive' whereby teacher or learner initiates attention to form even though an actual problem in production has not occurred. The aim was to establish how often preemptive form-focused episodes (FFEs) occurred, what these consisted of and what sorts of language they addressed. In the case of student-initiated FFEs there would be two obligatory moves (a trigger in the form of a question asked by the student) and a response (probably from the teacher) and one optional move (an 'uptake' in which the student acknowledges, or attempts to use or to produce the form that has been identified). Subjects were a group of twelve ESL students at school in New Zealand, observed and recorded in class. As many preemptive as reactive FFEs were noted and the preemptive variety did not seem to hold back the flow of meaning-based activity. The focus of these FFEs was almost entirely lexis or grammar. There were some differences between the teacher- and the student-initiated varieties, with students more likely to be seeking to deal with actual gaps in their knowledge. Their queries did not seem to arise from any breakdown in communication but rather because they wished to learn about a form. Student-initiated preemptive focus tended to cover information that was explicit and metalinguistic, and as such was potentially useful for 'noticing' or 'monitoring'. Reactive focus on form on the other hand tended to be indirect, implicit and potentially less useful for uptake. There were more uptake moves in student-initiated than in teacher-initiated FFEs. Uptake was successful where learners showed they were able to incorporate the information, e.g., through paraphrase or correct use in their own utterances, and to be less successful if it consisted of simple acknowledgement, repetition or incorrect use. It was concluded that preemptive focus on form has been a neglected aspect of classroom teaching.

Benati's (2001: 01–550) study of 'processing instruction' builds on previous research by Van Patten and Cadierno (1993: 93–426) and Cadierno (1995) but applies this to a different language, in this case Italian. Many beginner learners seem to prefer processing lexical items to grammatical items for semantic information, and thus in relation to future activity for example may give precedence to adverbials of temporary reference over morphological markers. The strategy of 'processing instruction' aims to go beyond this in order to change the way input is perceived and processed by language learners. Subjects in this case were second-semester students of Italian at university in England. Two experimental groups were formed: 'processing' which was comprehension-based, and 'output' which was production-based. A control group was also formed which received no instruction on the target

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features but was subject to a similar amount of exposure to them. Post-tests consisted of the interpretation and production tasks three weeks later. In the 'processing' mode, temporal adverbs were removed from the structured input activities so that the learners' attention was directed to the verb endings as an indicator of tense, with the intention of helping them interpret and comprehend the feature but not produce it. In the 'output' mode there was presentation of the future tense endings and subsequent practice in how to produce sentences in the future tense. Input processing performed better overall than output-based instruction which in turn was better than the no-instruction control mode The findings supported the view that processing instruction has a positive effect on helping language learners focus on morphological detail in order to process input.

In the early stages of L2 acquisition, form and meaning were found by Wong (2001: 02–339) to compete for learners' limited attentional resources, in the case of students at low-intermediate levels of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Canada performing three listening and three reading tasks. Detrimental effects were found for the aural comprehension of meaning when attention was focused on a grammatical form. However, this did not apply to comprehension of meaning in the written mode. Listening seemed more difficult than reading and it seemed that modality of comprehension was a variable which influences how learners process input.

To what extent is a grammar-based approach to learning and teaching a foreign language (FL) universal or culturally-influenced? This question lay behind a study by Schulz (2001: 02–135) in which Colombian and American attitudes to L2 grammar were compared. Instructors and students in Colombia at post-secondary level were compared with teachers and students of FL and ESL in the USA. A strong positive belief was evident on the part of students of both cultures that explicit grammar study and corrective feedback are important in FL learning. However, there was considerable lack of agreement between the cultures concerning whether formal grammar study accelerates the rate of FL learning. The Colombian students showed themselves to be more convinced that an FL improves most quickly if students study and practise grammar rules, and they liked the study of grammar much more than did their USA counterparts. Most teachers agreed that grammar instruction helps in FL learning, but agreement was less strong than with the students, with wider differences among the American than the Colombian teachers.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

Supporting the teacher

To what extent can ICT help reduce teachers' actual teaching time without loss of quality in learning for students? Green and Youngs (2001: 02–460) report on an experiment which had a simple design and which produced a useful result. Their students were in elementary-level classes for French (Semester 1) and German (Semesters 1 and 2) at a university in the United States. In each case one group (control) received four hours per week of tutor teaching, while the other group (treatment) received three hours per week of tutor teaching and one hour per week of web-based activity. The quantitative results showed no statistically significant difference between the control and the treatment groups. Qualitatively, the students in the treatment group had a positive experience of using the web in view of its capacity to offer up-to-date cultural material and to allow students to participate 'virtually' in activities such as touring museums and making hotel reservations. The students' feedback highlighted the importance of clear instructions, relevance to classroom activity, quick response to technical problems, pre-web preparation and post-web follow-up, and of structuring the students' search rather than letting them loose on search engines of their own choosing, since they lacked the skills and the time to find suitable sites of their own. Although the treatment group showed no advantage over the control group, nor did it show any disadvantage. This suggests that if preparation and monitoring time can be built in, it may prove possible to help students become more autonomous and somewhat less teacher-dependent and to help teachers develop a more facilitative and less instructional (and less exhausting?) role, without loss of quality in their students' language learning.

Video-conferencing

There is no doubt that video-conferencing is attracting interest across the world because of its potential for enhancing students' target language development. To be successful, however, careful planning, monitoring and evaluation are necessary. The study by Katz (2001: 01–509) takes excellent account of these considerations and provides a useful list of suggestions for avoiding the sorts of obstacle which can easily crop up. The videoconferencing exchange consisted of two one-hour sessions between third-year students of French in the USA and a group of French students of sociology in France, with the interactions taking place in French. For the French students the benefits lay in gaining insight into other cultural perspectives, while for the American students there was the additional benefit of participating in intellectually demanding discussions in their target language. The discussions focused on racism, xenophobia and immigration, and both groups gained new insight into perspectives from the other culture. There were considerable benefits to the American student's target language development, e.g., increased familiarity with the grammar of

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spoken French and a sense of how native speakers of French express themselves in authentic, natural spoken discourse. The study also offered food for thought, e.g., on clarifying the role of the instructor, since some students tended to look for confirmation during the actual sessions, and in attending to the concerns of the less secure students who might be shy or anxious.

Vocabulary support

On-line glosses in an L2 learner's L1 are widely considered to enhance general comprehension, to support retention of new vocabulary and to save time and effort in reading. In addition, they can stimulate students to read authentic texts which go beyond their current target language state but which might seem too daunting if glossing support were not provided. The study by Gettys, Imhof and Kautz (2001: 01–602) compared two different types of on-line gloss: SLE (or glossing by providing a 'sentence-level equivalent' in the students' L1) and D (or, glossing by giving the meaning in the basic dictionary form). If a new word is a verb in a past tense, then SLE would provide a sentence-level translation featuring the verb in an L1 past tense form; on the other hand, D would provide a translation of the verb in the infinitive form as in a dictionary. The subjects were university second-year students of Russian. Of the two treatments, treatment D was found to yield a significantly greater overall retention of vocabulary. This was possibly because the basic dictionary form is not a direct translation of what appears in the target language text and so the reader has to engage in a deeper level of mental processing. On the other hand, in terms of subjective satisfaction and time spent reading, the SLE treatment had the advantage, and providing sentence-level equivalents of the unknown words seemed to give the students a sense that they were genuinely reading a text in real time rather than doing an academic exercise.

The potential of CD-ROMs as dictionaries for language learners was explored by Winkler (2001: 02–443). Working with two such dictionaries for English, her subjects were ESL at university in UK, at intermediate or upper-intermediate level. The students preferred bilingual to monolingual dictionaries, understandably so in part because of their level of proficiency. It was concluded that presentation on CD-ROM offers advantages, e.g., colours, pictures, video-clips, audio, spellchecker, vocabulary book, advanced searches, word games and vocabulary activity, and was thought to offer much better reference and language-building tools than a book dictionary. However, in order to offer maximum benefit to learners of English at this level, a number of additional design features would be needed, e.g., a software solution to mis-spelling in cases where initial letters of a word entry are wrong, inclusion of synonyms and collocations as well as semantically-related words, and a function which offered systematic vocabulary expansion and revision.

Interactive multimedia computer programmes have the great potential advantage of providing L2 readers with the meaning of a target word via hyper-links to multiple modalities. But which combination of modalities works best, and for which levels of proficiency? In Al-Seghayer's (2001: 01–397) study, 30 intermediate-level ESL students were asked to read a narrative English text with annotations for new target words in various modes – text, graphics, video and sound. This allowed the students to read the target word's printed textual definition, hear its pronunciation or view its meaning via a still picture or a video. A double vocabulary test (of recognition and of production), designed to assess the effect of each mode, was taken by the participants after reading the story. The findings showed that a video-clip in combination with a text definition was more effective for teaching new vocabulary than was a picture in combination with a text definition. The video seemed to help the learners build up a mental image, increase their curiosity and concentration and to facilitate recall through its dynamic combinations of image and sound. It was concluded that learners are more able to organise information in working memory so as to commit it to longer-term memory if they are supported in making connections between their visual and verbal systems, and that retrieval is facilitated if the learner is able to draw on multiple rather than single retrieval cues which integrate two or more different forms of mental representation.

Grammar support

Spellcheckers are commonplace in word-processed writing, but very much less use is made of grammar checkers (GCs), and Burston (2001: 02–392) indeed claims that their use is at times discouraged by FL teachers. However, according to Burston, the French language leads the field in grammar checkers and the best are at the cutting edge of what is technologically possible. In an investigation of grammar checking in French with advanced university students, a particular model was chosen for its simple user-interface, its extensive on-line dictionary and its reference grammar. But did this help the students gain greater control over their morphosyntactic errors? The effectiveness of the GC was evaluated in terms of students' attitudes (which proved very positive), their capacity for self-monitoring (which was shown to increase) and their written performance in homework and under testing or examination conditions (where considerable improvements were noted).

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DVD caption options

For many years viewers of FL films have had the benefit of subtitles in their native language, and audiences at operas may now have surtitles available to them. The advent of DVD opens up more flexible possibilities in support of FL visual and auditory input. The study by Markham, Peter and McCarthy (2001: 02–479) sought to establish the effects of three different conditions on the comprehension of Spanish-as-FL DVD soundtrack material in the case of university students at intermediate level. The three conditions were: with English captions, with Spanish captions and with no captions. Students' comprehension was measured by a written summary and a multiple-choice test, both in English. There were clear differences in performance, with the English-captions group outperforming the Spanish-captions group, and with the no-captions group third. The researchers concluded that captions in English might be useful for intermediate to low proficiency students who often struggle with rapid, authentic native speaker FL discourse. For them, it might be useful to use all three DVD options: first, English captions, then Spanish captions, then no captions. The Spanish-captions mode may prove suitable for students who have already acquired a good command of the FL sound system, e.g., through the workplace, but whose reading and writing require development. The flexibility of the DVD system clearly has its attractions and the researchers rightly point to the need for further research. What for example if the measure had been a written or spoken summary in Spanish rather than English? Would the English-captions mode still have been superior? Various research referred to in my reviews of previous years suggests this might not have been the case, on the grounds that visual input (captions) in a learner's first language can tend to obliterate auditory input in their weaker language. On the other hand, with DVD one is not necessarily evaluating one mode against another but rather one combination of modes against other possible combinations, and it would be of interest to ascertain which combination of the three modes was most appropriate for the long-term recall and production of a version in the foreign language, in relation to which levels of proficiency.

Computer-mediated communication

'Does e-mail dialogue provide foreign language students with cultural input?' This was the question addressed by Jogan, Heredia and Aguilera (2001: 02–259) in their study of 15 American students of advanced Spanish and 15 Chilean students of advanced English, each group studying at university in their own country. The project lasted for one semester and had two e-mail exchanges per week, one in each language. The formula allowed each student to learn from but also be an expert informant to their e-mail partner. The results seemed very promising in terms both of the students' motivation and their knowledge of and commitment to the target culture. The process invoked a social and constructivist model of learning and created a sense of continuing discovery which helped challenge cultural stereotypes.

Working with 40 intermediate-level students of Spanish as L2, none of whom had been abroad in a Spanish-speaking country, Lee (2001: 02–476) was interested in how they interacted with each other during on-line discussions, and in particular in the types of communication strategies they used. Data were collected from students' weekly on-line printouts. It was established that the students used a good range of strategies, of the sort they would use in face-to-face oral interaction, including comprehension checks, clarifcation checks, confirmation checks, use of English, self-corrections, word invention, requests, and use of approximation. The students focused more on negotiation of meaning than on form. Although computer-mediated communication (CMC) allows time for reflection, in fact the students made few structural adjustments to initial utterances. Online written discourse was short and brief. There were many instances of ignoring each other's linguistic errors, especially L2 morphosyntax, and there were also abundant mis-spellings, though more proficient learners showed an ability to self-repair. It was concluded that CMC of this sort offers excellent opportunities for the use of everyday communication strategies and for focusing on meaning, but that students at this level need advice on the need to write correctly in order to maintain balance between function, content and accuracy, and to develop corrective techniques which would make them re-examine and revise their exchanges with guided instruction.

A fascinating sociocultural account of German-American telecollaboration is provided by Belz (2001: 02–386). It features network-based language teaching (NBLT) whereby learners communicate with members of the speech community under study using a variety of internet communication tools such as e-mails and web-browsers as well as video-conferencing. Subjects were sixteen English-speaking students of German in fourth semester at university in USA and twenty German-speaking learners of English in a teacher education course at university in Germany. The NLBT telecollaboration project offered exciting possibilities for the development of language learning and intercultural awareness promoted by computer-mediated negotiation of specific tasks. These challenged students to use the new technologies in order to write about and to discuss cultural concepts e.g., racism, beauty, from multiple perspectives, based on dyadic or triadic

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communication. In the event cultural differences emerged not only in respect of the cultural concepts built into the tasks but also in relation to perceptions of the two languages and the use of the new technology. For example, German in the USA was perceived to have a lower status than English in Germany. If e-mail messages were brief because of a fairly low proficiency level on the part of a student, this might be misinterpreted pragmatically as being impolite or a threat. In addition, the German students tended to have a relative lack of internet access, less financial support for this and more limited hours of operation in computing labs, which contributed to the brevity of their correspondence. It was concluded that telecollaboration, though rich in potential, does not automatically guarantee target language interaction, opportunities for assisted L2 performance, negotiation of meaning and inter-cultural awareness.

Furstenberg, Levet, English and Maillet (2001: 01–346) argue that with the new technologies it is important to go beyond the mechanics of language and to aspire towards cross-cultural literacy. As a result of their project, however, they identified a number of essential ingredients if transcultural activity of this sort is to succeed: there needs to be an equal degree of commitment between the partners; both partners need to make culture the focus point of what they are teaching; logistics need to be solved, e.g., days, times of week and frequency of classes at both ends of the communication line; and steady and close maintenance of web-site is essential. In their *Cultura* project 'literacy' encompassed not only knowledge of the media that were being used but also an understanding of how semantic perspectives differ according to the linguistic and cultural background of the users. An understanding of the other culture requires more than a list of knowledge items but is grounded in a curiosity towards the culture of 'otherness'. The project brought together students in the USA learning French and students of English in France. Mostly the students were at university but the project was being extended to school-level also. Its technology had the capacity to bring forward, juxtapose and connect different and multiple types of material on the same screen and allow users to engage in discussion about these materials via a forum where they exchanged viewpoints and perspectives and tried to understand each other's culture through the eyes of the other in an interactive process of reciprocal co-construction. The writers' fascinating and detailed account concludes that a multiple media project of this sort holds enormous promise in bringing to the forefront the 'hidden dimension' of culture and in helping students develop an insider's perspective.

To what extent do students produce different sorts of essay, depending on the particular medium of writing in which they are engaged? The study by Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2001: 01–437) compared word-processing and on-line e-mail in this regard, in the case of two intermediate, intensive ESL classes at university in USA. One assignment was written by e-mail, with the other using a word-processor, on each of three topics – immigration, religion and multiculturalism, in all cases with the prior stimulus of an authentic text. A number of textual features were considered as possible areas where difference might be displayed, e.g., inter- and intra-sentential cohesion, demonstrative reference, lexical cohesion, text length and contextualisation. The clearest differences between the two modes were in respect of length of text and amount of contextualisation supplied at the beginning of the texts that the students wrote. In the word-processed essays they made an effort to provide background information, e.g., title of the source article, author's point of view or message or general introduction to the topic. Only after this background had been provided, did they respond directly to the essay prompt. They did so, even though they already knew their teachers were familiar with this information, whereas when writing by e-mail they did not feel the need to include background information of this sort. This suggested that the students were operating different rhetorical strategies for on-line and off-line writing.

The application of MOOs (multiple user domains object-oriented) to FL learning was the object of a study by Von der Emde, Schneider and Kötter (2001: 02–79). MOOs are described as virtual learning environments, containing synchronous Internet databases. Like chat rooms they enable people from all over the world to communicate in real time, but they differ from chat rooms in important respects also. The newest MOOs are fully integrated with the WWW, and so it is also possible to import web pages, jumping from the MOO to these and back. It is also claimed that they are easy for beginners to use. Five potential pedagogical benefits of the MOO are specified and discussed: authentic communication and content; autonomous learning and peer-teaching in a student centred classroom; individualised learning; importance of experimentation and play; and students as researchers, the intellectual dimension. This fifth benefit allowed students to use their own language production in the MOO as a site for combined cultural and linguistic analysis, leading to broader and deeper linguistic insights. In two trial semesters those students with the least developed language proficiency (third semester students of German) showed they could complete in the TL German many sophisticated language tasks that previously were expected only in upper-level seminars. They were not only becoming better at German but were also realising themselves through language, exploring new identities and taking steps towards learning who they were. They seemed to

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have profited enormously both as FL learners and also as curious, motivated individuals and citizens of the world.

To what extent can ICT help FL learners co-construct new roles for themselves which go beyond those which they tend to be assigned in conventional classrooms? Abrams (2001: 02–446) compared synchronous CMC (computer-mediated communication) with GJ (group journals) in order to ascertain which would elicit the wider range of roles. Students were at intermediate level German at university in the USA, and both the GJ and CMC groups had followed essentially the same course topics which they were required to discuss with each other in writing in their particular mode. The GJ mode required each student to provide two contributions, each of minimally 60 words, per week, whereas the CMC mode engaged the group in two 50-minute sessions per week. The CMC mode was found to elicit a wider range of roles, including some which did not appear in the GJs at all: attacker, supporter, challenger, joker. It was surmised that these CMC-specific roles arose because of its greater immediacy, fleetingness and anonymity.

E-mail has obvious potential for intercultural learning and communication, and this was the focus of a study by Liaw and Johnson (2001: 02–53). Subjects were EFL students at university in Taiwan and pre-service bilingual/ESL students in the USA. Data were collected from their e-mail entries and end-of-project reports. Topics which the students chose to discuss in their paired e-mail exchanges included school systems, geography, languages, interpersonal relations and current events. Predictably, some intercultural misunderstandings arose leading at times to something akin to 'culture shock' for which assistance from an informed and sympathetic teacher was important. In other cases, however, these misunderstandings provided an incentive to the student-pair concerned to resolve them. It was concluded that the project had encouraged the students to form and progressively refine their own cultural images of the target group through their e-mail exchanges, with the consequence that pre-existing cultural stereotypes were challenged and more grounded perceptions of the other culture emerged.

The study by Truscott and Morley (2001) involved the use of electronic conferencing software in online discussion. Subjects were UK undergraduate students of FL, partnering a group of counterparts from other countries in Europe who were studying in the UK. Central to the research was the notion of the 'critical incident', designed to illustrate culture clashes between individuals of different backgrounds. The task of each partnership was to discuss why the clash might have occurred and how it might be restored. Analysis of the discussions and the course evaluation suggested the process had increased students' sensitisation to other cultures – not only by discussions to resolve the culture clashes which had been built into the task design but also the culture clashes between themselves as they sought to interpret and resolve the situation – and that an online community can quickly develop

Early language learning

Return of the CPH

The most substantial policy initiative in languages education across the world is undoubtedly the early learning of an additional language in pre-primary or primary education. Accompanying this in the past two years has been a renewed debate among researchers concerning the so-called 'critical period hypothesis' (CPH) which in everyday parlance assumes that 'the younger = the better'. A number of reviews, e.g., Scovel (2000: 00–710), Nikolov (2000), Marinova-Todd, Marshall and Snow (2000: 00–628), Singleton (2001: 01–593), have given fresh life, and not a little spice, to the CPH debate, generally cautioning against any strong view of it. Scovel for example concludes his review by claiming that, in view of the conflicting evidence and differing views which still persist, 'parents, educational institutions, or ministries of education should be exceedingly cautious about translating what they read about the CPH research into personal practice or public policy' (p. 220). Marinova-Todd, Marshall and Snow claim that those favouring the CPH have committed three fallacies of misinterpretation, misattribution and misemphasis, each of which is described in some detail. The debate continues, however, with Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2001) condemning Marinova-Todd, Marshall and Snow for presenting arguments against the CPH which they claim are not tenable, and for presenting arguments about the relationship between age and second language acquisition (SLA) which they claim are misconceived and misleading, to which Marinova-Todd, Marshall and Snow (2001) offer their response. This debate among researchers is to be welcomed. It is true that it leaves policy-makers somewhat confused, since one single clear picture does not seem to emerge from the CPH research. On the other hand being somewhat confused may well be a better state in which to be than being totally convinced that 'the earlier = the better' in all circumstances. In fact, the researchers seem to be in agreement that, however valid or invalid the CPH may be, many factors beyond 'optimum starting age' need to be taken into account before the learning of an additional language at school stands much chance of success, such as provision of appropriate teaching and continuity of experience from one year to the next.

Further insight into the CPH arises from Flege and Liu's (2001: 02–454) study of native speaker (NS) Chinese who had arrived in the USA between the

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ages of 16 and 42 years. Would Chinese residents living in the USA resemble native speakers more closely as their length of residence (LOR) in the USA increased? The results suggested that the amount of progress in English depended less on LOR than on how much NS English input they received. Had the researchers simply tested those adults with long and short LORs without considering their daily activities, they might have reached the false conclusion that an additional five years' residence did not have a measurable effect, which in turn might have been used as additional support for the CPH. On the contrary, it was concluded that adults' L2 will improve measurably over time, provided they receive a substantial amount of input and (one might add) provided they themselves have a wish that their L2 should improve and they are prepared to do something about it.

Play and interlanguage development

When one thinks of children and L2 learning, the notion of 'play' often occurs, yet according to Broner and Tarone (2001: 02–309) the role of play in children's L2 acquisition has received less prominence than it deserves. They in fact challenge the view that the only causal variable in SLA is 'negotiation of meaning' and they claim that ludic language may also play a role in the development of learners' interlanguage. In their study of fifth-grade Spanish-immersion students, they analysed 15 hours of naturally occurring classroom interaction over five months, focusing on three children. The data enabled them to distinguish between two types of play: 'ludic language play' and 'language play as rehearsal in private speech'. Both types of play were considered important in that they exercise learners' linguistic imagination and are not controlled by others, and neither has any overt communicative intent. The 'ludic' type might involve play with language forms and sounds, with rhyme, rhythm, song alliterations, puns, grammatical parallelism and may also involve play with units of meaning, combining them in ways which create fictional play worlds which do not exist. This variety was considered to possibly facilitate L2 acquisition by enabling the learner to internalise many different voices appropriate to different roles. The 'rehearsal' type of play was understood as a form of private speech with the functions of preparing for some future public performance, and of helping students master the L2. Through their playful private speech, the students were mentally asking and answering questions and correcting errors of others, taking note of things or loudly rehearsing while studying alone. This afforded them an opportunity to compare their existing interlanguage systems with recently acquired linguistic information in an off-line way.

Importance of continuities

In a useful and accessible account of issues in SLA research, Foster-Cohen (2001: 02–456) argues that over the age-span from zero to twenty certain capacities rise, e.g., problem-solving, metalinguistic, and those related to theories of mind, while others diminish, e.g., native-like second-language ability, but there are no sharp cut-offs and across individuals there are different configurations of capacities and skill. What SLA research should be doing, she argues, is focus on continuities within this period between L1 and L2 and within L2.

Bi-multilingual education

Immersion and political conflict

Immersion education is widespread across the world and has many different justifications which take account of the social, political, historical and linguistic context of particular states. A fascinating account of immersion in an area of high political conflict and tension is provided by Tankersley (2001: 02–376) who describes a dual-language (Macedonian-Albanian) kindergarten in a part of Macedonia near the Serbian border where the children were ethnic Albanians or Macedonian (with Serbian names). Each class had teachers who spoke monolingually in one language or the other. The use of the two languages supported contact between the two groups, positive attitudes to inter-group friendships, appreciation of the minority Albanian group and allowed inter-ethnic conflict to be discussed. However, the actual use of the two languages did not prove to be equal, with Macedonian coming to be the preferred language of all of the children. This did not appear to be because of any lack of intention on the part of the teachers but possibly was linked to factors such as there being more Macedonian-speaking children in the classes and more materials available in Macedonian. A conclusion was that immersion education should go beyond the purposes of achieving bilingualism and an appreciation of other cultures and should aspire towards a more transformative role which fosters a more active stance in the face of injustice and which encourages critical thinking about discrimination. Possibly so, but despite the apocalyptic background of the Kosovo crisis, two of the three classes were able to survive as communities in which the children played and learnt together – a considerable achievement in the circumstances.

Differences of perspective

Late partial immersion in two languages distant from English is the focus of Lotherington's (2001: 02–371) study of two bilingual content-based programmes in an Australian high school. The programmes were

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Vietnamese-English and Mandarin Chinese-English, featuring in each case two native speakers of the language other than English. A characteristic of the project was the collaboration with a university research team which allowed it to be developed within an action research framework. There were joint discussions of the four teachers and the university staff to share concerns, problems and possible solutions. This process however did not promote universal consensus and by the end of the year differences of perspective had emerged in respect of bilingual education. These differences reflected partly the styles and ideologies of the teachers (with the Vietnamese pair working more closely together) but partly also the subjects taught and the differing languages backgrounds of the students. Given the many complexities within the overall domain of bilingual education, certain factors were considered to be of high importance. These included: choice of language; awareness of literate conditions to be mastered and importance of biliteracy; importance of pre-requisite study to develop a threshold level which would support content-based learning; avoidance of monolingual assessments; and need to help participating teachers become well-informed about the differing notions of additive and subtractive bilingualism.

Content and language-integrated learning

CLIL (content and language integrated learning) is the term increasingly used for describing the teaching of a non-language subject through the medium of a foreign language. Montet and Morgan (2001) exemplify this in respect of Year 9 students (in their third year of French) learning geography through the medium of French. As part of their linguistically rich programme the students also received an initial experience of German, Italian and Russian. A feature of this particular study was its thoughtful approach to differentiation whereby different levels of material were produced to support as wide a range of students as possible. This included the preparation of simplified texts, but with cultural integrity always maintained. The study is also interesting in that it embeds the project in a network of current research themes relevant to languages education, e.g., 'social constructivism', 'intake' and 'output', showing how the project draws on each. Although it was presumably too soon to be providing evidence in terms of national examination 'outcomes' in French and geography, the 'process' benefits appeared considerable, making this a study which is equally useful for other teachers considering this form of provision and for those in teacher education and research who might work with them.

Collaborative talk

The role of collaborative talk between immersion students as a means of integrating language and content was the focus of Swain's (2001: 02–298) account which offers an excellent summary of the insights abut language teaching which research in this area had yielded. Among these insights were that collaborative tasks can encourage students to notice gaps in their linguistic knowledge as they try to express meanings, leading them to search for solutions by formulating and testing hypotheses. This process enables students to externalise their knowledge, which in turn led them to reflect on it, revise it and apply it. With all students participating actively, their use and knowledge of the target language was increased.

Performance in immersion mathematics over the years

One of the many blessings of immersion research in Canada is that it has been researched for over 30 years. This provided an opportunity for Turnbull, Lapkin and Hart (2001: 02–378) to establish whether findings from evaluations conducted two or more decades ago would still be corroborated. Thanks to a new provincial testing programme in Ontario it became possible to evaluate French-immersion students at Grades 3 and 6 in respect of their performance in literacy and mathematics, and to compare this with the earlier data. The findings revealed that, as was the case 20 years ago, students at Grade 3 in early total immersion were somewhat behind students in the regular programme in English with regard to literacy skills in English, though this did not apply where some English had been fed into the French-immersion programme. However, by Grade 6 the French-immersion students' English-literacy scores were notably higher than were those of students in the regular programme. In mathematics, the scores of immersion and regular students were almost identical, even though the immersion students had taken their mathematics in French from Grades 1–3. The study confirmed the findings of the earlier research that performance in literacy and mathematics skills in English were not negatively affected by immersion in French. There was an interesting sub-text to this story, concerned with the language of testing, with the findings suggesting that students who had been taught mathematics in French at least up until Grade 3 were not disadvantaged in taking their tests in English. Another blessing of immersion in Canada is that it has provided an invaluable model and stimulus for researchers in many other parts of the world – including my colleagues and myself in Scotland (Johnstone, Harlen, MacNeil, Stradling & Thorpe, 1999), where our national evaluation of the attainments of pupils receiving Gaelic-medium primary education, using a national assessment framework which seems comparable to the one introduced in Ontario, yielded highly similar results.

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'Mathematics' and 'language of testing' in French-immersion programmes featured also in the study by Bournot-Trites and Reeder (2001: 02–366), this time in Vancouver. Two models of immersion were compared: one in which the use of French was increased from 50% to 80% (the 'treatment' model) with the other remaining at 50% (the 'comparison' model). The reason for increasing the percentage of French in the 'treatment' model was to overcome a perceived plateau-effect in French. However, many parents feared that there might be a loss to their children if for example mathematics were to be taught in French rather than English. In the event, the results showed an advantage for the 'treatment' over the 'comparison' model when the students' mathematics were tested in English, thereby offering evidence of transfer of knowledge. It was concluded that content in one language can be retrieved in another language, provided that a sufficient level of proficiency has been attained in each language.

Trilingual education

A brief but helpful overview of key issues in trilingual education and L3 acquisition is provided by Cenoz, Hufeisen and Jessner (2001: 02–208). They claim that, whereas bilingual education and L2 acquisition have received massive attention from researchers, very much less attention has been devoted to third and additional languages. Their account touches on the role of sociolinguistic context, on psycholinguistic issues and on linguistic distance – all of these in respect of trilingual education and L3 acquisition. They also raise some interesting questions which bear on the inter-relations between L2- and L3-learning, the strategies which learners use in acquiring a third or additional language and the most appropriate pedagogical approaches in L3 instruction and trilingual education.

What trilingual education is, is not self-evident. Ytsma (2001: 02–215) argues that in fact it is a highly complex phenomenon which can mean at times fundamentally different things, with the consequence that care must be taken in planning for it and in interpreting research findings. A provisional typology of trilingual primary (elementary) education across Europe is offered in which three key criteria are used: first, linguistic context (trilingual; bilingual; monolingual); second, linguistic distance (three related languages; one not related; two not related); third, programme design (simultaneous; consecutive). It is not claimed that the typology is complete, since other criteria might also be applied, e.g., nature of teacher (native speaker or other). The typology may however be a useful starting point for researchers seeking to clarify how a particular instance of trilingual education which they are proposing to investigate fits into the overall pattern.

There has been much speculation over the years concerning the possible effects of learning one language on the subsequent learning of another, e.g., on the effects of learning an L2 on the learning of an L3. A merit of Griessler's (2001) study was that it looked at the process in reverse, i.e., on the possible effects of learning an L3 on learners' proficiency in their L2. Three schools in Austria were involved: an international school offering bilingual education via immersion in English from Grade 5 (10–12 year olds) and with other foreign languages becoming available from Grade 7; a school in which students received up to five English lessons per week from Grade 5 and a similar amount of French from Grade 7; and a regular high school where English was taught from Grade 5 for up to five hours per week. Students in all three schools were given the same task: to tell a picture story in English in as much detail as possible. Predictably, the students in the bilingual school receiving immersion in English achieved the highest attainments, both in vocabulary knowledge and grammatical proficiency. Next came the students in the school where French as L3 was taught from Grade 7, with the students from the regular high school clearly in third place. The use of English as language of instruction was considered to account for the superiority of the immersion group. The learning of French as L3 appeared to have a positive effect on the L2 English performance of students in the second school, especially with regard to vocabulary learning. As such, the experience of learning an L3 appeared to interact supportively with the learning of an L2.

Learners and learning

Metalinguistic awareness

Renou's (2001: 02–488) study investigated the relationship between metalinguistic awareness (MLA) and L2 proficiency, while also exploring the influence of different prior L2-learning approaches at school on this relationship. Her students were all at an advanced level of proficiency in L2 French, some of them having previously experienced a grammar-based approach and others an approach more based on communication. The students' proficiency was measured by the French Proficiency Test of the University of Ottawa. They were given two grammaticality judgement tests, one oral and the other written, to measure their MLA, and also a questionnaire to ascertain the nature of the prior approach they had experienced. Across the sample as a whole the findings showed a significant correlation between the oral judgement test, the written judgement test and the proficiency test, suggesting strongly that increases in MLA are associated with increases in L2 proficiency, though not necessarily in a causal sense. What I found particularly interesting about this

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study was the way in which it analysed what was involved. Use was made of Bialystok and Ryan's (1985) model of information-processing which posits two inter-related concepts. First, there is 'analysed knowledge' which is conscious. Grammaticality judgement tasks drawing on this required the students to perform three steps of detecting, correcting and explaining the detected errors, making 'analysed knowledge' particularly useful for achieving accuracy. Second, there is 'control' of this knowledge which involves the selection of knowledge or information, the co-ordination of this and the extent to which the selection and co-ordination are performed automatically. 'Control' is needed for fluent performance. Differences emerged within the group of students. Those used to the grammar-based approach performed better on the written judgements which made less demand on 'control', while those used to the 'communicative' approach performed better in the oral judgement test which did make more demands on 'control'. Sometimes, students' performance in one situation is not necessarily indicative of their performance in other situations, and analysing tasks in relation to the demands they make on 'analysed knowledge' and 'control' and in relation to their prior experiences may help in interpreting why they performed as they did.

Affective variables

The investigation of language anxiety by Kitano (2001: 02–470) focused on two possible causes: 'fear of negative evaluation' (FONE) and 'self-perceived language ability' (SPLA). Subjects were students of Japanese at two American universities covering three levels of proficiency: elementary, intermediate and advanced. Data-collection was by means of questionnaire. FONE was considered to be a personality trait rather than a temporary condition and was shown to influence language anxiety, exercising a more negative influence on students at an advanced level (rather than on those at the other two levels) and on students who had been to Japan (rather than on those who had not). In the first case this was possibly because advanced level work in Japanese was much more authentic and sophisticated, and in the second case possibly because the students who had been to Japan felt an expectation that they should be highly proficient and might thereby have put pressure on themselves. SPLA also had a strong relation to anxiety, and it was suggested that teachers should strive to create an ethos of support and collaboration regardless of ability-level. However, the effect that FONE had on language anxiety did not depend on SPLA, nor did SPLA's effect on anxiety depend on FONE. That is, although both FONE and SPLA influenced anxiety, there was no evidence thus far to suggest that they interacted with each other in order to achieve this influence.

The concept of 'language anxiety' has been explored by several researchers, but the focus of the research by Spielmann and Radnovsky (2001: 02–138) was 'tension' rather than anxiety, and in particular the concepts of 'euphoric' and dysphoric' tension. Their study was set in a seven-week intensive FL summer programme in a college which obtained high-calibre students, set high standards, had a rapid pace of instruction and had high expectations from teaching staff. An important notion to arise from the research was the importance of the emerging L2-self. The students, despite being beginners or false-beginners, still needed to be given as many opportunities as possible to develop L2 personalities as complex and meaningful as their L1 personalities, even if different from them. In cases where the tension was 'dysphoric' and cognitive, a feeling of being 'infantilised' would arise if they were required to spend much time on choral repetition or decontextualised grammatical manipulations. Tension was a very individual phenomenon, closely linked to personal expectations and private beliefs. This seemed to contradict the conventional model of tension where it varies only in degree, but here there were euphoric/dysphoric and cognitive/affective dimensions. In cases where the tension was of the 'euphoric' variety, this triggered a self-perceived challenge to re-invent themselves successfully in the TL, and achievement of linguistic or communicative proficiency mattered less than the satisfactory development of an emerging L2 self.

A 'willingness to communicate' (WTC) construct was the focus of a study by MacIntyre, Baker, Clément and Conrad (2001: 02–328) who view it as both an individual difference variable affecting L2 acquisition and a goal of L2 instruction. Working with 79 9th graders at junior high school in Canada, they investigated WTC as it applied both inside the classroom and in the social milieu outside. WTC was found to correlate positively to five orientations to studying an L2 (travel, job, friendship with francophones, personal knowledge, and school achievement). In addition social support from friends, especially outside school, was associated with higher levels of WTC, but less so in class. In respect of all four skill areas (listening, speaking, reading, writing) students showed a higher WTC in their L2 inside the immersion classroom than outside. It was concluded that WTC outside the classroom implied that a student must expend additional effort to actively seek communication opportunities, and clearly the support of friends was beneficial in this regard. It was found that adolescent students do employ the L2 outside the classroom, especially in certain kinds of instance, e.g., when speaking to relatives, when using the L2 as a secret code between friends and when being mischievous. Their WTC was less strong in situations which emphasised performance, error correction or where they were being formally evaluated.

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The relationship between attitudes and attainment was studied by Altaha and Al-Easa (2001: 02–90) in respect of female Qatari students of EFL. All were found to have similarly positive attitudes, mainly reflecting an instrumental orientation, but their attainments varied and so it was concluded that in this particular context there was no significant correlation between these two constructs.

A further instalment of their elaboration of L2 motivation within a framework of self-determinaion theory is provided by Noels, Clément and Pelletier (2001: 01–585), this time in the case of francophone students at seven levels of ESL on an intensive university course in Canada. As components of self-determination they focused on extrinsic motivation in three sub-scales (external regulation, introjected regulation and identified regulation), intrinsic motivation and amotivation, while taking account of integrative motivation also. They concluded that intrinsic motivation may be enhanced by relevant others such as teachers and family if they encourage learners' sense of autonomous learning and competence. It was not always possible to predict learners' persistence on the basis of internal or external pressures on them, and a better predictor was if they perceived learning English to be valuable and fun. There seemed to be a link between intrinsic and integrative motivation in that those who wished to learn English because it was enjoyable tended also to be those who wished to interact with members of the English-language community. Account should also be taken of the socio-political context of a country, e.g., in their case the issue of political sovereignty for Quebec, if the role of orientations in L2 motivation is to be understood.

In an overview of second language motivation research, Dörnyei (2001: 01–553) outlines theoretical advances in the concept of motivation, new approaches in research methodology and new themes which are beginning to emerge, arguing that in recent years research in this area has opened out and become more multifaceted. This is not only an excellent text for researchers but also, I believe, one which might usefully be read by a wider readership of languages professionals and policy-makers who rightly believe that motivation (and de-motivation) remain highly problematical in many contexts. For my own part, I believe that globalisation is making it increasingly necessary to consider motivation for learning LOTE (languages other than English) differently from motivation for learning English as L2 or FL. This applies not only in countries such as the UK where motivation to learn any language other than English is increasingly problematical but also to the continent of Europe where English as second language is putting pressure on the learning of any second or foreign language other than English. I have exemplified this problem in relation to the UK and continental Europe, but it is much more widespread. I have a concern then that the undoubted excellence of the 'new wave' of L2-motivational research is not necessarily being sufficiently directed to the most serious motivational trouble spots in the world, in order for example to address the low motivation (or, de-motivation) in learning languages other than English in many countries where English is the L1 or dominant L2, and the low teacher morale which often accompanies this.

Strategies and styles

A useful account of the FL-learning strategies of successful learners is provided by Bruen (2001: 02–96), in the case of 100 students of German at university in Ireland. She sought to establish which strategies were associated with higher levels of oral proficiency and to ascertain how more proficient and less proficient students implemented these. It was found that the orally more proficient students drew on a wider range of strategies than did their less proficient counterparts. In particular, ten specific strategies were identified, of which four were meta-cognitive, two were cognitive, two were memory-related, one was social and one was affective. The orally more proficient students were able to draw on these systematically and to apply them to a wide range of tasks. Less proficient students on the other hand were considered insufficiently able to develop their own strategies and so an element of strategy training was considered essential. The favoured model for this was the 'completely informed' approach, and four steps for implementing this are outlined.

Mackey, McDonough, Fuji and Tatsumi (2001) investigated learners' reports about the L2 classroom. Their subjects were 16 adult learners of ESL on an intensive programme at university in the USA, at a high-intermediate level. The study evaluated three different forms of report, all of them geared to helping learners notice particular features. The first had a language focus, e.g., pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, content. The second had a language and context focus, e.g., in respect of vocabulary a student might note 'I said …', 'A classmate said …', 'The teacher said to me …'. The third had a structure focus, e.g., relative clauses, modals. Analysis of the reports showed that the language focus generated the greatest quantity of reporting, e.g., more vocabulary and more grammar, while the language plus context focus encouraged greater quality in terms of more detailed reporting. It was concluded that reports of this sort may help learners pay attention to linguistic form within meaning-based instruction, and were found by the students to be helpful.

Research on the teaching of communication strategies to FL learners has tended to feature learners at intermediate or upper levels of proficiency. The action research study by Brett (2001) is

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all the more welcome in that it focused on Year 7 students (aged 11) at an elementary level learning German at a comprehensive school in England. Over a period of eight weeks the intention was to see if (a) communication strategies could effectively be taught and employed, (b) there were already any strategic tactics inherent in the FL speech of the students, and (c) such strategies as they were able to use were compatible with the prescribed levels of the National Curriculum in modern languages. A range of structures was taught, including: turn taking, requests for help, clarification and repetition; phrases expressing agreement and disagreement; pause fillers; and greetings. Generally, the results were encouraging in that the students did incorporate some of the strategies into their on-going work in class. They used a much wider range of social strategies, suggesting a capacity to draw on their knowledge of how L1 conversations work. They believed that paired work was beneficial to their speaking, suggesting they had gained a sense of joint responsibility for collaboration. They spontaneously used tactics such as repetition and talking in English, possibly in order to gain additional time. On the other hand, the teaching of pause fillers in German proved unsuccessful and it was surmised that this might require a higher level of FL proficiency. The use of strategies seemed influenced by students' personality and general ability, with slower learners making little use of them and possibly requiring more scaffolding; and fewer strategies were used in the test, possibly because of an increase in perceived pressure. The fact that the strategies contained instances of improvisation did not fit particularly well with the National Curriculum which made no provision for behaviour of this sort at beginners' level. More's the pity, but perhaps this excellent study will encourage those responsible to think again.

Multiple intelligence

The notion of multiple intelligence (MI) has attracted considerable interest in education and other fields since first elaborated by Gardner (1983) but does not appear to have had substantial uptake in L2 research. An interesting preliminary contribution is made by Haley (2001: 02–253) in the first stage of her investigation of the impact of implementing an MI approach in daily L2 classroom activities. Working with her were 15 FL and 15 ESL teachers and 450 students at Grades 8–12 in the United States. The theory of MI posits at least eight different intelligences that humans have in varying degrees. In this investigation use was made of a special MI survey which plotted students on eight separate intelligence dimensions: verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, bodily/kinaesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist. This helped the students become more self-aware and also helped their teachers in better understanding how individual students differed from each other. In the investigation there was an experimental group for which lesson plans and activities were designed so as to accommodate the range of multiple intelligences identified by the survey, and a control group that was more teacher-centred and which drew on rote drills and memorisation. For each intelligence a range of activities was drawn up, designed to activate it. Thus, visual/spatial intelligence would be activated by L2 activities involving graphs/diagrams, drawing a response, video exercises, computer slide shows, multimedia projects, mind mapping and graphic organisers. The project was still on-going and it was not clear whether there were significant differences in attainment between the two groups, but both students and teachers seemed enthused by the MI approach.

Gender, cognitive style and identity

The relationship between gender and learning styles was the focus of Maubach and Morgan's (2001: 01–578) work with students studying A-level French or German at secondary school in England. The survey took account of a range of learning-style variables, including field dependence-independence, deductive-inductive learning, tolerance of ambiguity, reflectivity, visual-auditory stimulus, self-esteem, oral work, asking questions in class, peer-group work, presentation of written work and skill preference. The findings suggested that there were some differences between the 15 male and 57 female students. The male students seemed more characterised by willingness to take risks, to talk spontaneously in the foreign language and a greater self-confidence in asking questions of the teacher to aid their comprehension, while the female students showed greater interest in reading and in presenting well-organised written work. However, the differences between individuals seemed greater than those between male and female students, and it was concluded that teachers might treat their students as individuals rather than run a risk of stereotyping by treating them primarily as members of one or other gender-related groups.

Standing somewhat on its own in the present review, but of considerable interest nonetheless, is Pavlenko's (2001: 02–131) account of 'language memoirs'. These, she argues, are a distinct genre within the tradition of American cross-cultural biography, and 16 full-length biographies and seven essays were examined. The narrative voices of females and of males are discerned, with the finding that the female voices invoke issues of gender more than do the males. She was able to document the learning experiences of middle-class Causasian, Asian and Latina females, but there was less evidence in relation to heterosexual males, gay or lesbian learners, working-class persons, African immigrants, or

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unsuccessful learners who had been victims of marginalisation or discrimination.

Teachers and teaching

Articulation/Continuity

Sometimes national officials, not to mention the media, are quick to blame 'quality of teaching' if FL/L2 curricula fail to meet public expectations. Views such as this can be highly misleading, because it is often with 'provision' factors rather than with 'process' factors where the problem really lies. A key provision factor associated with the success or otherwise of such programmes is 'articulation' or continuity of learning experience from one year or one sector of education to another. Kleinsasser (2001: 02–41) provides an insightful account of factors affecting articulation in the case of students studying LOTE (languages other than English) as they progress from primary (elementary) school to secondary school education in Australia. The study shows how complex and almost intractable the problem is. A number of barriers to articulation are identified, including 'unavailability', 'teacher inability', 'administrative decisions or policies' and 'loss of interest' by students. It is argued that articulation issues are probably best dealt with at local level but that this is also a matter of national and indeed international importance, and that a range of stakeholders should be consulted in developing a local articulation strategy that is as feasible and desirable as possible. It is also argued that the issue of articulation cannot be divorced from other key questions such as the extent to which a LOTE should be taken by all students and for how long, when it should start, which languages should be involved, and the extent to which choice is possible. Although set in Australia this study identifies an issue which has become highly relevant to many countries across the world and which raises vital issues for officials in national ministries, e.g., in relation to providing an adequate supply of teachers of particular languages at particular levels so that the desirable benefits of articulation may in fact be achieved.

Tasks and conversations

Those seeking a succinct and readable overview of a number of key variables in task-based research might turn to the account by Robinson (2001: 01–590). Among the variables addressed are 'cognitive task complexity' (involving cognitive demand), 'task difficulty' (as perceived by the learner, and including both affective variables such as motivation, anxiety and confidence and ability variables such as aptitude, proficiency and intelligence), 'task conditions' (which set the frame for interaction and include both participant variables and participation variables), 'task sequencing' (whether simpler to more complex, or the reverse) and 'task performance' (in terms of fluency, lexical variety and accuracy in speaking). Of these, the key variable under discussion was 'task complexity' which is viewed as the cognitive demands on a learner's attention, memory, reasoning and other forms of information processing which arise from the way in which the task is structured. From a study of Japanese EFL students it was concluded that more complex tasks lead to greater lexical variety and less complex tasks to greater accuracy. Increased complexity was also associated with perceptions of increased stress and difficulty but not with loss of interest or motivation to complete the task, possibly because it was also associated with increased authenticity. It was found that hearers were much more confident and less stressed than were speakers. From the data an argument is made for sequencing tasks in terms of their 'complexity' rather than their 'conditions' or their 'difficulty'.

In their investigation of the negotiation of meaning within native speaker-non-native speaker (NS-NNS) interaction, Nakahama, Tyler and Van Lier (2001: 02–483) were particularly interested in how the NNSs performed in two types of interaction: relatively unstructured conversations and a two-way information-gap task. They found that the conversations had an advantage over the information-gap task in offering the NNSs a wider range of opportunities for language use, e.g., the use of pragmatic knowledge and the production of longer and more complex utterances, with complexity having three measures: turn length, syntax, morphology. The conversations made the NNSs feel more challenged in that they had to understand the NSs in a fuller and more personal way. The information-gap task on the other hand triggered more repair negotiation, but there was no evidence to suggest that the conversations encouraged the NNSs to drop troublesome topics and switch to new ones in order to avoid the negotiation of meaning. Conversations therefore had much to offer which benefited the language use of NNSs and it would be inappropriate to dismiss them simply on the grounds that they do not appear to offer as much repair negotiation as does information-gap activity.

Three different task conditions (NS-NNS dyads, NNS-NNS dyads and NNS groups) formed the context for Shehadeh's (2001: 02–492) study of the extent to which ESL learners were able to produce modified output (MO) in response to self- and other-repair. Students were at postgraduate level taking English for academic purposes in a UK university. It was found that MO by the NNS students was more frequent when arising from self-repair than from other-repair. However, their capacity to achieve this seemed linked to their level of proficiency and it was also concluded that learners need time and opportunity, if the self-initiated, self-

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completed repair of their messages of which they are capable is to take place.

Németh and Kormos (2001: 02–127) investigated how the pragmatic aspects of task performance are affected by task-repetition, the long-term development of language skills and a short-term focused intervention. Very few experimental studies have been conducted in this field. The tasks involved argumentation, e.g., expressing an opinion, making claims and counter-claims, offering supports and counter-supports. Their subjects were 24 EFL students aged 16–18 from three groups of two different secondary schools in Hungary. Task repetition was found to influence the total number of supports and counter-supports, and the increased familiarity with the structure of the task was considered to free the learner's attentional resources to allow them to pay more attention to informational content. However, task-repetition did not produce a better quality of pragmalinguistic performance. Nor was the language development that was assumed to have taken place within a year found to result in better performance in terms of quantity of arguments or pragmalinguistic expression. The results suggest that rhetoric needs to be taught more intensively and for a longer period of time, possibly involving more extensive training or more intensive interaction with NSs, if FL students are to internalise L2 pragmalinguistic rules that are different from rules in their L1.

According to Storch (2001: 01–385), few studies have investigated the nature of group or pair interactions to establish the extent to which they operate collaboratively; nor have there been many studies which have utilised tasks requiring students to produce a written text in pairs. Subjects were three self-selected pairs of adult advanced ESL learners. The writing task consisted of preparation of a report based on a survey diagram. The researcher took observational notes and used these for analysis along with transcriptions of the pair talk and copies of the joint composition. Considerable differences were identified in the way in which the three pairs approached the task differently. One pair was non-collaborative, one was highly collaborative, showing evidence of co-construction, extension of knowledge and provision of scaffolding assistance, while the third pair was in-between. The collaborative pair produced the longest and most accurate but not necessarily the most complex text. It had previously been assumed that collaboration would possibly be difficult if there were marked differences in proficiency within a pair, but in fact in this study the most collaborative pair contained the biggest difference in proficiency. As a consequence, it was concluded that successful collaborative pair work requires not only a good task design but also account to be taken of learners' attitudes to pair work and to the task, and their motives and goals.

Buckwalter's (2001: 02–310) study aimed to investigate the ways in which adult classroom learners of Spanish would cope, socially and cognitively, with difficulties encountered when using the TL in dyadic discourse. Subjects were lower-division university students of Spanish as FL. The notion of 'repair' was central to overcoming any such difficulties. The benefits of pair work were not derived from other-regulation but rather from self-regulation during L2 production, and of the various possible forms of repair, self-initiated self-repair (SISR) was overwhelmingly the most common in the data. Support was found for the Vygotskyan notion that L2 learners use speech and language for purposes that are cognitive and regulatory as well as social. The students were able to work their way from the experience of a trouble source to its resolution, with cognitive processing observable though their use of private speech. In some cases they even seemed to perform generative transformations on their utterances, advancing towards a correct utterance after several repetitions of the same thought in different forms. Collaborative repair operated almost exclusively in terms of vocabulary, whereas SISR was the only sequence in this study to operate on morpho-syntax. It was concluded that activities promoting long turns at talk may be highly beneficial to L2 development at the lower proficiency levels.

Corrective feedback

The provision of feedback to L2 learners is widely acknowledged as a good thing, but there has been extensive debate over the respective merits of positive and negative feedback. The notion of 'corrective feedback' has also been much discussed, particularly in respect of error correction, and there has been much discussion of what is meant by the term 'error'. The background to this important topic is usefully and succinctly reviewed by Han (2001: 02–461) in a report dealing specifically with 'fine-tuning' corrective feedback. Fine-tuning occurs when the teacher targets a single error, seeks to ascertain its underlying causes, accesses the learner's knowledge system and perceptions and brings the learner's attention to the underlying problem and not just to the surface features of a correct version. In Phase 1 of the case-study the teacher did not use a fine-tuning approach and offered correction either on the basis of professional judgement or by comparing the student's utterances with the target language norm. This failed to help the student re-structure her knowledge system. The student did notice the teacher's corrective feedback but either misconstrued it or failed to make sense of it. In Phase 2, corrective feedback with fine-tuning was introduced as a two-way interdependent process, with both teacher and learner viewed as information providers. This facilitated a probe into how the learner actually

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constructed her knowledge-system and it elucidated the multiple underlying causes of her persistent error which included L1 transfer and transfer-of-training. This was a case-study of one learner from Thailand learning Norwegian at university in Norway, and the researcher properly claims that the findings are not intended to be universally generalisable. It may be the case for example that naturally occurring developmental errors will not need detailed fine-tuning corrective feedback of this sort. In the case of persistent errors on the other hand this approach may help considerably in helping learners move their interlanguage system forward.

Teacher knowledge and beliefs

Teachers' perceptions of knowledge about grammar (KAG) and their practice in teaching grammar were the object of Borg's (2001: 02–04) study. Although it was small-scale (involving two teachers), it was revealing in that it suggested the importance of teachers having confidence in their own KAG. The more confident of the two was willing to encourage impromptu discussion of grammar points and to formulate rules on the spot. The less confident teacher was more likely to provide direct responses, to minimise or defer discussion or to hedge in some other way. In addition, the confidence factor seemed related to a teacher's level of pedagogical content knowledge. The more confident of the two possessed a well-developed variety of instructional strategies for teaching grammar, whereas the less confident had a more limited repertoire which was applied less successfully.

If teachers' classroom practice and the beliefs they hold about language teaching are documented separately, there will not necessarily be a strong connection between the two. A merit of the study by Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver and Thwaite (2001: 02–388) is that it brings these two processes together. In their research with eighteen teachers of L2/FL in Australian schools, classroom teaching was observed, followed in each case by a one-hour interview directed specifically at the lesson. From this combination of observation and discussion a number of 'principles' were elaborated, each of which was accompanied by a number of 'practices'. It is not surprising that not all of the teachers shared exactly the same principles, but it is interesting to note that there was not a 1:1 relationship between principles and practices. The same principle might be reflected in different practices, and the same practice might reflect different principles, depending on teacher, context and other factors. Rather than seeking to impose *a priori* concepts and frameworks in the positivist tradition, the researchers sought to derive their principles and practices from the integration of their observational and elicitational data. In doing so, they perhaps offer some form of answer to the problems experienced by Rossiter (2001: 02–491) who takes a candid and refreshing look at the dilemmas which SLA researchers can face in busy classrooms. The attempt to investigate the role of affective and communication strategies encountered a range of practical difficulties which included non-equivalent classes, lack of teacher commitment, limited numbers of participants, changes in student dynamics, equipment failure and poor recording facilities, insufficient coding guidelines, task inconsistencies and data analysis constraints. Six second-language research manuals were consulted to see what practical help they might offer. Each had its strong points but they did not seem to deal adequately with the wide range of contextual realities which were making the pursuit of the research difficult. The hope was expressed that more comprehensive research manuals would be developed which reflected the dilemmas which researchers often have to face in the field – arising, one might add, at times from attempts to impose frameworks where these are just not appropriate. As suggested earlier, Norris and Ortega (2001) have questioned the extent to which SLA research has often enough attained high levels of theoretical validity and reliability, and here Rossiter is questioning whether current SLA research methodology as expressed in well-known manuals adequately addresses the real practical problems in the field. Much to do, it would appear. The approach adopted by Breen and colleagues (as discussed above), whereby observation of action integrated with reflection on action lead to the construction of a theory of pedagogical practice in action in actual contexts has much to commend it.

Use of L1

Debate about the role of a learner's L1 in the learning and teaching of an L2 extends back over centuries. Not that the terms L1 and L2 are unproblematical – in the same class one student's L1 may be another students' L2, L3, or L4, and another student's L2 may be the L1 of most others in the class. Assuming however that a class consists of students who share the same L1 and are learning the same L2, what might be the role of their L1? Cook (2001: 01–491) seeks to justify use of the L1, though not in absolute terms, since languages education may have several different goals, and the role of L1 is likely to vary in relation to which goals are in fact being pursued. For Cook, the L2 classroom is a situation of L2 where (at least) two languages are permanently present, and a reasonable aim of L2 education is to produce students who have developed an overarching system which allows them to operate both languages, rather than aspire to become native speakers of the L2. While agreeing that exclusive use of the TL in L2 or FL teaching is not theoretically justified, Turnbull (2001: 02–76)

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emphasises the importance of TL use. He claims that not only theoretical perspectives on acquisition but also evidence from published empirical research strongly support the use of the TL as much as possible because of its positive effect on learners' TL proficiency. For my part, I believe both Cook and Turnbull are right, and that much depends on context. I have observed many classes taught by a communicative approach and exclusively through the TL in which the students were unable to cope with a non-stop TL flow from the teacher and who switched off mentally; but I have also observed as many other classes where 80% of the language used was L1 and where very obvious opportunities for exploiting the L2 to the learners' advantage were ignored. Turnbull is right to argue that more process-product studies are needed if a clearer picture is to be developed, based on evidence rather than argument, of the relations between use of L1 and TL in the development of a learning group's TL.

Macaro's (2001: 02–417) research with six student teachers focused on the issue of code-switching as part of a more general debate regarding practitioners' beliefs. The student teachers were teaching FL students between ages 11 and 14 in state comprehensive schools in England. Fourteen lessons were observed and recorded. The student teachers were found to make little use of the L1. On the other hand there was little evidence to suggest that the insertion of infrequent short bursts of L1 led to students using the L1 themselves. Moreover, students' use of L2 was not brought about by higher measures of the student teachers' use of L2, and it seemed not unreasonable in certain types of context to use L1 for procedural instructions, for keeping control of students.

Upton and Lee-Thompson (2001: 02–513) claim that L2 readers have access to their L1 and that many use it as a strategy for comprehending an L2 text. In order to investigate more closely the role of L1 in L2 reading, think-aloud protocols and retrospective interviews were used with 10 NS Chinese and 10 NS Japanese at intermediate, advanced or post-ESL level at university. The results show that L1 is certainly 'turned on' and actively used by L2 readers of this sort. However, their reliance on L1 declined as proficiency in their L2 rose. It was argued that traditionally the dominant role of L1 in L2 reading has been translation, but this study suggests that the role of L1 may have additional useful functions. It may help L2 readers wrestle with sentence-level problems, confirm comprehension, predict text structure and content, monitor text characteristics and reading behaviour. This was considered to support a sociocultural view of language as a tool for thought, with the L1 serving as a mediating instrument which helps students think about and make sense of what they are reading. In other words, L2 learners might engage in their own 'self-scaffolding' by means of their L1 in order to push their L2 through its zone of proximal development and beyond its current level.

A question which has exercised many FL teachers in helping their students write FL essays has been whether to encourage them to write directly in the FL or to do so initially to some extent at least in their L1 and then translate into the FL. Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001: 02–148) examined the role of L1 in the writing of short FL essays by comparing a 'direct' and a 'translated' mode in the case of intermediate-level learners of French at university in the USA. They were also interested in how students' strategies of L2 and L3 writing compared and for this were able to draw on a sub-group of Spanish-English bilinguals learning French as L3. Some two-thirds of the students were found to do better in the 'direct' mode and one third better in the 'translated' mode. However, translation was not totally absent from the 'direct' mode, since students reported thinking in English when operating this mode, thereby engaging in mental if not written translation, and the bilinguals reported using English rather than Spanish when writing in L3 French. It was concluded that thinking through the L1 or dominant language may be of benefit for students at intermediate level in certain types of writing task, and particular consideration might be given to the role of mental or written translation in this process. It was not assumed however that there would be one single 'answer' which would apply across all types of task but rather that translation strategies might depend to some extent on the nature of the task, e.g., whether it was spontaneous or planned and was in real-time or delayed, and on the learning styles of the learner.

Content and language

Globalisation, the 'new economy' and mobility are tending to introduce greater linguistic and ethnic diversity into local school populations in many countries. Early's (2001: 02–244) study reports on an elementary school in Vancouver with 20 different home languages and with more than 70% of the students speaking a home language other than English. Early argues that in these circumstances schools may need to re-think their approaches to pedagogy, organisation and professional development in order to adequately address these changing demographic realities. A 'language and content' pilot project was developed, based on a view of language as discourse in the context of social practice. ESL and content teachers worked regularly together to plan units of instruction which would be appropriate for both ESL and NS English students in their classrooms. Common elements were introduced in the design of the instruction for both mainstream and ESL groups: a social practice was selected which students wanted to know about, their background knowledge was taken into account, contexts were promoted for building extended and complex dis-

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course, and where necessary direct teaching was provided of both a content skill or a concept. The collaborative pairs of teachers discussed language explicitly and critically, seeking to raise their students' awareness of forms, functions and different genres as these were realised and transferred across different contexts. The study focused particularly on two pairs of ESL + content teachers, and although these two pairs operated in different ways, the project successfully sensitised both sets of teacher to the role of language as a medium of learning in education for all students. Their collaborative effort was viewed as beneficial and remains in place .

Action research

Action research, whereby practitioners seek to answer questions which they themselves have posed about their practice, can be highly beneficial both for the findings it produces and for the professional development of those participating in it. However, given the many existing pressures on the teaching profession, it can prove extremely difficult to embed this successfully and consistently in practice. The study by Crookes and Chandler (2001: 01–634) is set in the context of foreign language instruction at post-secondary level in the United States. A key feature of this context is the dominance of literature and/or the structural characteristics of a language, with little attention paid to pedagogy. As a consequence, intending teachers may receive little support in this respect. In order to address this issue, an action research component was integrated into an existing graduate course recommended for graduate teaching assistants whereby the students were introduced to notions and processes of action research and were encouraged to apply this, often working in pairs, to their own practice with first-year university classes. This was clearly a worthwhile thing to do, but a merit of the study is the way in which it shows that attempts to embed action research in a specific context such as this are unlikely to be straightforward. The report documents not only the clear enthusiasms but also the anxieties which the students at times felt, their views on how suitable action research was at a very early stage in their teaching career, and the impact the scheme had on relations with more experienced instructors who were one notch higher up the hierarchy but whose job does not contain a research function. This is a valuable text which sets out the advantages of action research but which also asks us to think carefully about how it may be embedded in professional practice within any given context.

Aspects of proficiency

Vocabulary

My reviews of previous years have regularly drawn attention to research on the incidental learning of second-language vocabulary. This theme is further developed by McCafferty, Roebuck and Wayland (2001: 02–480) who concluded that the conditions for incidental learning may be important. It may not suffice simply to provide opportunities for exposure to new words in meaningful contexts. There appears to be a better chance of learning and retention if new lexical items become the focus of goal-directed activity. Their concept of 'task-essentialness' may serve to promote increased mental effort and the productive use of new words which the students perceive to be central to the successful completion of the task in which they are engaged. This suggests that for 'incidental' learning to occur successfully more than subliminal exposure is needed but that the meaning and use of the new word need at some point to be consciously processed for a purpose which is perceived by the learner to be important.

A similar view is expressed by Laufer (2001: 02–475) who challenges the view that reading, even when backed by the use of a dictionary, is necessarily the best or main way of acquiring vocabulary incidentally, i.e., as the by-product of another task. A superior approach is through 'work-oriented tasks', whether oral or written. These may involve looking up new words in a dictionary, putting them in given sentences, using them in original output in the form of isolated sentences, or incorporating them into compositions. It is claimed that doing something with words is more effective than encountering them in the input. In order to explain this finding, Laufer and Hulstijn (2001: 01–572) draw on the notion of 'task-induced involvement', a motivational-cognitive construct which they consider explains and predicts the degree of task effectiveness with regard to the retention of new words. 'Involvement' of this sort is considered to have three components: need, search and evaluation, and it is claimed that when word complexity factors are held constant, tasks with a higher involvement load will generate better vocabulary learning than tasks with a lower involvement load.

An additional strategy of vocabulary learning was explored by Morin and Goebel (2001: 01–582) in a 13-week observational study of four first semester classes learning Spanish as L2. The strategy was one of 'semantic mapping' which involves the grouping of vocabulary according to 'thematic clusters' such as *frog*, *pond*, *swim*, *slippery*, *green*, as opposed to 'semantic clusters' such as *peach*, *plum*, *pear*, *apricot* (cf. my discussion of Tinkham, 1997, in a previous review in this series). All four classes were taught by essentially the same approach, except that two of them were taught to use 'semantic mapping' as a means of learning, organising and retaining vocabulary. By the end of the semester there seemed to be no clear differences between the two groups in the number of vocabulary items learnt but there was a clear difference in favour of the 'semantic mapping' group in

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the extent to which they felt really familiar with these words. In addition, the 'semantic mapping' group were superior in the extent to which they could recall items which were thematically related, since this skill was consistent with the strategy they had experienced. Overall, the findings pointed to the potential usefulness of 'semantic mapping' in helping novice learners recall and organise L2 vocabulary which they had learnt.

The classroom study by Kitajima (2001: 02–469) also investigated the respective merits of input- and output-focused approaches to the learning of vocabulary. In her case, the students were in their fifth semester of Japanese at an American university. The input-dominant condition entailed the viewing of video vocabulary exercises accompanied by questions and explanations from the teacher, with students permitted to use L1 in their responses. The output-dominant condition also made use of video-input and some questions from the teacher but it also put the students into small groups with an instruction to talk in Japanese and in so doing to incorporate the new target language words which were to be learnt. At the end of a lesson they would produce a minitalk containing these new words. After an interval of two months there were clear differences between the two groups, both in what they retained and in what they could produce, with the output-dominant mode clearly the more successful. An implication of this may be that output-focused activity may be superior to input-focused activity in helping students encode surface-level linguistic forms into their memory. In turning their minds to output they are forced to attend to forms of this sort, which might explain why they are better able to retain them in their memory.

Dobinson's (2001: 02–100) study of vocabulary learning was geared to what students could learn through interaction in class. The students were mostly from Asian backgrounds studying ESL at university in Australia, and were at the upper-intermediate to advanced level of proficiency. After each lesson the students were asked to complete a vocabulary sheet to check what vocabulary they could recall. In addition they were tested at two-weekly and six-weekly intervals for longer-term retention. It was found that vocabulary items which had been attended to in the interaction of the lesson, e.g., had been mentioned, repeated, focused on, talked about, were better recalled and retained. At the same time, though, some new words which had received little or no attention in classroom interaction still became salient for some students, suggesting that ways of learning vocabulary can be idiosyncratic. It was found that if interaction in relation to new words went above a certain level, i.e., was over-attended to, the effect on recall and retention could be negative. It was also found that not all students needed to participate overtly in the lesson. Participation could be covert as well as overt, without this being detrimental to the vocabulary-learning of those participating covertly.

How much vocabulary does one need in order to ……? This is a question which many syllabus planners and teachers have strenuously avoided asking. In my own country of Scotland, for example, levels A to F (ascending) of the national guidelines for modern languages at school make no mention of the amount of vocabulary needed for any purpose at any level. No doubt this is partly explained by an understandable reluctance to appear prescriptive and an apprehension that specification of vocabulary might lead to teaching lists of words by rote. On the other hand, the question remains important and does not go away. The study by Zahar, Cobb and Spada (2001: 02–144) addresses it in relation to a capacity to read independently. Their subjects were (mainly) francophone ESL students at five levels in a private boys' school in Montreal. The weaker ones were found to be more dependent than the stronger ones on frequency of exposure, and this had facilitated the acquisition of some 1000 words. It was argued that in natural texts readers of L2 English would encounter some 2000 high-proficiency words but that after this the next 2000 words occur much less frequently. A threshold for independent reading was considered to be some 3000-word families, a level well above that of the students in the present study. It was concluded therefore that the incidental acquisition of vocabulary through naturally-occurring exposure in texts needed to be supplemented either by teaching vocabulary directly or through instructionally-enhanced reading.

Reading

In 'input-poor' environments where students receive very little natural exposure to their target language outside their course material and where there may be very limited opportunities for conversing with native or highly fluent speakers, the receptive skill of reading may assume particularly high importance. Zhang's (2001: 02–497) study of the metacognitive knowledge of EFL reading strategies is set in a context of this sort: two universities in a large city in north-west China. The study had 10 subjects: five EFL 'high scorers' (HS) and five EFL 'low scorers' (LS), and mentalistic data on their perceptions of reading strategy were collected by retrospective interview. Some clear differences emerged between the HS and LS groups. The HS students had a clear awareness of the reading strategies which they possessed and did not possess, and were more able to verbalise these understandings. Among the reading strategies which they favoured were 'anticipating text content', 'monitoring their comprehension', 'skimming for main ideas' and 'guessing meaning by making inferences from context'. The LS students by

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contrast tended to handle their reading tasks by detailing every linguistic item in print, by being reluctant to stop using dictionaries for accessing meaning-detail of this sort, and to translate into Chinese in order to make their meanings clear. This meticulous approach could affect their reading speed and was possibly influenced by cultural background as well as by language-proficiency level. It was concluded that if LS students received support for developing and articulating a more conscious awareness of their own current strengths and weaknesses as EFL learners, this might help them not only to appreciate the usefulness of using strategies such as anticipation, skimming, monitoring and inferencing, but also to assume more personal responsibility for improving their own processing skills.

When students read L2 literary texts they are invited to engage with a process that goes beyond the comprehension of information. Liaw's (2001: 01–609) study focused on a 'reader-response' approach whereby students assume an active role in responding to the text in an aesthetic and reflective manner. The students were studying L2 English, though not as a major, at a College of Management in Taiwan and were at an intermediate level of proficiency. When given five literary short stories to read, they engaged in reader-response activity in three phases. During the pre-reading phase there were pre-reading questions, brainstorming and group discussion. During the actual reading phase the students wrote entries in their personal response journals which helped them develop and refine their responses to the stories. During the follow-up phase there was further group discussion plus role-playing, dramatisation and reconstruction (by making a summary of the stories). Analysis of their personal response journals showed that the students were engaging deeply with the texts and were capable of multifaceted interpretations. They were able to organise their thoughts into logical and articulate writing and their proficiency in English developed accordingly. The process of writing their personal responses was considered to have helped them organise and control their reading experience over time. Thus, creative and critical thinking had been encouraged in an atmosphere which produced a community of readers who did not feel constrained to learn the one and only correct response or to vie with each other for the best interpretation.

Rinnert and Kobayashi (2001: 02–167) investigated the extent to which Japanese readers at different levels rated and perceived English compositions with different rhetorical features. Four levels of reader were included: IS (inexperienced EFL), ES (experienced EFL), JT (Japanese teachers of EFL) and NST (L1-English teachers of EFL). The rhetorical features of interest were culturally influenced rhetorical patterns, paragraph-level coherence/incoherence and errors at the sentence/word level. The IS group was found to focus more on content, whereas the ES and JT groups were more able to deal with organisation and the logical coherence of ideas, with the JTs very close to the NSTs. It was thought that the IS group's prior focus on content, e.g., originality, redundancy, was possibly influenced by rhetorical aspects of their L1. Among the pedagogical implications of the study were that writing instruction should take account of students' levels of proficiency when they receive feedback or when they are asked to provide feedback to peers. There were also implications for 'perceived role' since students seldom commented on grammar or vocabulary, perhaps in their culture assuming that it was the teacher's job to correct these aspects.

Writing

'Noticing' has been the object of research as a cognitive process influencing SLA for many years, e.g., Schmidt (1990), but in a study by Qi and Lapkin (2001) it was investigated in relation to L2 writing improvement. The subjects were two L2 learners at different levels of proficiency, and the research focus was on 'noticing' at each of three stages of an L2 writing task. The subjects composed an L2 text in response to a visual stimulus (Stage 1). They subsequently received an improved version of this which had been reformulated by a native speaker, followed by an immediate retrospective interview which sought to clarify what had been noticed (Stage 2). One week later they were given back their original version and asked to composed a revised version (Stage 3). 'Noticing' featured in all three stages: as they composed the original text, as they compared this with the reformulated version, and as they wrote their revised version. The findings suggested that language-related noticing might indeed contribute to L2 writing at all three stages. Quality of noticing at Stage 2 had direct implications for what was produced at Stage 3. However, the effects varied according to level of proficiency. The higher-proficiency learner was more able to conduct more language-related noticing and to solve 'noticed' problems, in each case while composing alone. The lower-proficiency learner had more difficulty in noticing the gap between her own version and the reformulated one. The study had implications for L2-writing pedagogy in that a strategy of reformulation plus noticing may be more helpful than error-correction (negative feedback). Teachers might consider how best to teach language-related noticing strategies, especially to learners of lower proficiency, and to encourage verbalisation of learners' rationale for their grammatical decisions, since this might promote metacognitive processing.

Does error feedback help student writers to edit their texts successfully? This question was addressed by Ferris and Roberts (2001: 02–501) in respect of

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ESL students on a preparatory course for university. They also sought to ascertain the effects of two different feedback strategies. On the basis of a diagnostic essay, their students were assigned to one of three different groups, two of which received feedback and the third of which, the control group, did not. Of the two feedback groups, the 'codes' group had all errors in five key categories underlined and coded according to one or other of these five categories, while the 'no codes' group had all errors in the same five categories underlined but not coded according to category. The students were then asked to spend 20 minutes self-editing their essays. The results of these attempts at self-editing showed a significant and substantial difference between the two feedback groups and the control group, to the advantage of the feedback groups, but no difference within the feedback category between 'codes' and 'no codes'. An implication of the study is that for some if not all types and levels of learner it may suffice to identify errors for students without having to designate these by error type. If so, this would make marking faster and easier for teachers which in turn might make it possible over time for students to receive larger amounts of feedback.

Feedback on ESL learners' written texts was also studied by Hyland and Hyland (2001: 02–502) but this time in relation to 'end' rather than 'in-text' comments – 'end' comments being considered to be longer and more substantive. The students were preparing for entry to undergraduate or post-graduate studies in New Zealand and the written end-comments from their teachers were collected over a 14-week period of instruction. They were broken down into feedback points which were then coded in terms of praise, criticism or suggestion. There was a tendency for the teachers to use a strategy of 'mitigation', especially in relation to criticism. This might take various forms, e.g., by presenting a criticism as a suggestion, or by using a 'paired unit' (e.g., preceding a negative comment by a positive one), or by inserting 'hedges' (e.g., using weakening devices such as 'I wonder if' or 'a little'), or by reflecting a criticism as a personal opinion rather than as a fact, or by employing 'interrogative syntax' (e.g., 'Did you check your spelling carefully?'). Such mitigations no doubt reflected an intention on the part of the teachers of not appearing too negative, but the effect was at times to cause confusion and misunderstanding in their student's minds. 'Hedging' for example was more likely to be used in relation to criticism than to praise, and the confusion it caused possibly made it less likely that the students would engage in sufficient revision. It was concluded that learners whose English proficiency is not highly developed might benefit from feedback that was less subtle and more direct and frank, without being over-directive.

The action research study by Yamada and Moeller (2001: 01–547) shows how writing can be moved from being a rigid process focused mainly on language forms to one that is more constructive, creative and intercultural. This was achieved by setting up a pen-pal exchange between second-year L2 Japanese students at a college in the United States and Japanese counterparts in Japan. The students were motivated to learn new expressions and to use what they had learnt. Reading the letters was challenging but doing so together in class helped with the detail, and a range of strategies were developed for comprehending meaning. The possibility of furthering the exchange by e-mail was attractive to the students who could see advantages in its speed and informality and in having written products 'showcased' on the website. At the same time they continued to attach importance to the arrival of a traditional letter with a stamp, suggesting that these different modes are complementary. Of particular interest is the way in which the processes and outcomes of this project are documented in some detail in relation to five key domains within the National Standards for Languages: Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. One of the Standards within Communities, for example, 'Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting', was exemplified by one student as the feeling that this was not an artificial project and that there was a real person in Japan with whom the letter exchange was taking place.

The study of reading-to-write by Ruiz-Funes (2001: 02–171) highlighted two important features: the ways in which students represented a particular writing task to themselves, and the relationship in their production between linguistic criteria such as grammatical accuracy and syntactical complexity and non-linguistic criteria such as cognitive sophistication and elaboration of ideas. Students were in their third year at university at an intermediate-to-advanced level of Spanish as FL. The task was to write a paper based on the reading of a selected literary text. It was found that the students interpreted the task in different ways: some conceived it as a summary, others as summary plus comment, and others still as interpretation with a rhetorical purpose. A number of factors seemed to influence this, including awareness of the conventions of academic writing, experiences as readers and writers in L1 and L2, and level of literary interpretation skill. It was found also that the ability to write with grammatical accuracy did not necessarily indicate an ability to express elaborate ideas, though it did appear linked to an ability to write syntactically complex sentences. The ability to write syntactically complex sentences in turn was not necessarily linked to an ability to write cognitively sophisticated material. It was concluded therefore that grammatical and syntactical control are not necessarily linked to sophistication in writing style, since students may

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choose to avoid taking risks and may opt for linguistic accuracy rather than cognitive elaboration. The ability to read critically and write insightfully in an FL appeared linked to complex cognitive processes rather than primarily to the linguistic skills of the students. As a consequence, in the teaching of reading-to-write, the emphasis should be on processes of interacting with a text, elaborating on it and transforming it into a product that is consistent with the writer's purpose.

Languages in the workplace

This was an emerging theme to which I drew special attention in my review of 2000, especially in Canada. The Canadian tradition was maintained through a study by Wong, Duff and Early (2001: 02–225) who report on the outcomes of a project for immigrants to Canada whereby they took a health care aide programme which combined ESL skills and occupational training. The programme was judged to be highly successful, with positive benefits to the immigrants' English-language ability, their self-confidence, their acquisition of marketable skills and their contacts with new people. In this way, L2 development was strongly connected to personal and potential professional development. However, in two senses there was a downside. First, despite their success in completing the programme the immigrants, especially those who were female, found it difficult to obtain employment, because of childcare or other domestic responsibilities, transportation problems, lack of local experience and contacts and at times a need to work on-call. Second, the programmes themselves were vulnerable, being subject to government cuts, with the consequence that planning had to be on a year-by-year basis, with little job security or long-term prospects for the staff. Completing the programme then offered clear benefits but the participants were still at the start of a long and difficult process of adaptation and acculturation into their new society.

In many contexts, students' motivation for learning and using an additional language can be difficult to sustain if the experience is confined largely to a teacher and course materials in a classroom setting. One way of going beyond this is by exploiting opportunities for target language use in the local community, if such opportunities exist. Morris (2001) reports on a 'service learning' initiative at a university in the United States which developed productive links with the local community, some of which was Spanish-speaking. Students spent a minimum of three hours per week doing community work in Spanish, e.g., acting as interpreters or as counsellors at women's shelters, day care units, law firms, and employment agencies. In addition, they participated in a weekly class at university, conducted in Spanish, at which they discussed academic issues of race, gender, current problems of power and the roles of citizens in the system, while simultaneously seeking to relate these issues to their community experience. As a consequence, their attitudes and motivation improved as they learnt to negotiate meanings and to deepen and to connect their academic and their everyday understandings of one cultural and communicative context in which their target language was used.

Concluding thoughts

To bring this review to an end, I offer five thoughts which have occurred to me in doing the work.

First, it is possible to do excellent research and achieve a high-quality publication without having had the benefit of an externally funded research project. Many of the best accounts which appear in the present review are based on a researcher obtaining data from within his or her own institution. Of course special arrangements and support are likely to be required within one's own institution, before research of this sort can be successfully completed, but nonetheless this must be encouraging news for many researchers who are keen to do a good job but who are unlikely to have much chance of obtaining 'serious' funds. It also puts a responsibility on those who do achieve significant external funds to make absolutely the most of this.

Second, a number of studies have pointed to the importance of self-regulation by learners, whether in relation to learners learning to regulate their own output within an SLA frame or to enhance and fine-tune their motivation within a self-determination frame, or in some other way.

Third, much of the research seemed to me to be in the rather intimate domain of personal or small-group practice. This enables it to achieve depth and contextual relevance, but it raises two slight frustrations in my mind. There may be a question as to its universality and generalisability, and relatively little of it seems to bear on the major, large-scale policies which are sweeping across continents and creating major reverberations for institutional and classroom practice and for teachers' and students' thinking. 'Early language learning' is one such example. There is some very interesting research which has a bearing on this, but very little which suggest to us how soundly based (or otherwise) or how successful (or otherwise) these policies are. I have also suggested in this respect that it would be good if the excellent research currently undertaken on motivation could be directed at those areas where motivation and morale are manifestly low.

Fourth, substantial progress is being made in research on ICT and languages, but there seems still to be two camps: those who do high-quality research on aspects such as SLA and motivation and who perhaps at times incorporate something from ICT into their work – and those who do high-quality

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research on ICT and languages and who from this base make claims about SLA, motivation and other aspects. I think it would be good if the two camps could come closer together, with perhaps the very best SLA and motivational researchers putting the exciting and persuasive claims of ICT-related research under scrutiny, so that we can all learn more about the particular processes which ICT can engage and the extent to which these processes contribute something distinctive and important to learners' language, personal and cultural development.

Fifth, the language of international research publication on L2/FL learning seems overwhelmingly to be English. One research journal of impeccable credentials, to which I have referred in my present review, contains in one of its issues nine articles and 603 references, the quality of none of which I would wish to contest. However, only four of these references are in a language other than English. Personally, I believe there are very high-quality research publications in other languages, and I would not like to think that the L2 research community – of all communities! – is perhaps inadvertently helping to tilt the global languages-balance even more to English. I take my leave therefore by making special mention of an issue of the *Zeitschrift für Fremdsprachenforschung*, the German-language *Journal for Foreign Language Research*. Edited by six distinguished researchers (Vollmer, Henrici, Finkbeiner, Grotjahn, Schmid-Schönbein & Zydatiß, 2001), a special issue offers a state-of-the-art outline of a number of key parameters for applied second language research, one of which is so comprehensive in scope that it seems a veritable latter-day Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It covers cognitive, attitudinal-affective, interactional dimensions in learning and teaching, addresses individual and group-specific characteristics of learners, discusses FL instruction at school in Germany in relation to institutional, curricular and evaluative developments, and at the end of each section it offers a number of key research topics which warrant investigation in the specific context of Germany. The very impressive range of German-language references shows what a wide range of valuable research has been published in that language. Those who are able to read academic German will be able to access information and ideas which are otherwise not available. Although most or all of the editors are highly proficient in English, reading this text allows the reader proficient in L2 German to eavesdrop on how the leading exponents of research in one particular culture address their themes in their own language.

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