Research in Progress

Lang. Teach. (2013), **46.2**, 272–277 © Cambridge University Press 2013
doi:10.1017/S0261444812000559

Research in Second Language Studies at Michigan State University

Background

Since its inception seven years ago, Michigan State University's vibrant Second Language Studies (SLS) Program has grown quickly under the direction of Dr. Susan Gass. Thus far, twelve students have graduated from the program and now hold academic positions in various universities in the United States and elsewhere. In 2011, the department welcomed two new faculty members, Dr. Aline Godfroid and Dr. Bill VanPatten, making a total of eleven core faculty members, and in Spring 2012, Dr. Rod Ellis joined the department as affiliated faculty. The program currently includes 30 doctoral students working on a wide range of research topics.

Interaction

Many students and professors at Michigan State conduct interaction-based research. Dr. Gass, recent graduate Dr. Jennifer Behney, and current student Baburhan Uzum examined the relationship between working memory capacity, inhibitory control, and language gains following an interactive task in which the learners were given feedback on grammatical gender and number (Gass, Behney & Uzum 2013). In addition, Nobuhiro Kamiya is currently investigating how reading research studies influences ESL teachers' stated beliefs and how they practice corrective feedback in the classroom, and Kimi Nakatsukasa is conducting her dissertation research on how teachers' gestures help L2 learning. In her dissertation (2011), recent graduate Dr. Sara Hillman explored the shared repertoire of humor practices in the creation of community within the context of a culturally diverse and multilevel adult Arabic language classroom, while Emma Trentman is finishing her dissertation on access, identity, and Arabic language use during study abroad in Egypt.

Professor Loewen wrote an overview of Focus on Form (Loewen 2011) and has co-authored a book entitled *Key concepts in second language acquisition* (Loewen & Reinders 2011). With Rosemary Erlam (2010), he investigated whether there was a differential effect of implicit and explicit feedback on learning, and he is now investigating the effectiveness of corrective feedback for L2 learners of Chinese. Professor Friedman (2010) also looked at corrective feedback, but from a language socialization framework. She found that corrective feedback is socializing children in the Ukraine to speak pure Ukrainian, rather than the mix of Ukrainian and Russian called *suržyk*.

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Recent graduate Dr. Luke Plonsky is taking a fresh look at study quality both in interaction studies (Plonsky & Gass 2011) and the field of SLA as a whole (Plonsky 2011) through the use of meta-analyses. He also co-authored a chapter that details how to conduct a meta-analysis (Plonsky & Oswald 2012).

Writing

Professor Charlene Polio is currently writing a paper that examines the relationship between theories of SLA and written corrective feedback. She has also recently published two book chapters that examine the acquisition of L2 writing (Polio 2012) and how to do research in L2 writing (Gass & Mackey 2012: 319–334).

In dissertations completed in 2011, Dr. Mark Shea examined whether a pedagogical intervention could improve cohesion in writing, while Dr. Chien-Hsiung Chiu focused on how ESL writers at a Writing Center negotiate linguistic certainty and how they scaffold for language learning during writing consulting. Finally, doctoral student Soo Hyon Kim is currently conducting her dissertation research on learners' metacognitive knowledge in the context of L2 writing.

Assessment

Professor Paula Winke recently assumed the presidency of the Midwest Association of Language Testers. In her research, she has explored the validity of federal tests of the English of immigrant and refugee populations in the United States and examined the impact that English-language tests have on underrepresented minority groups (Winke 2011b). She also received the 2012 TESOL Award for Distinguished Research for her paper 'Evaluating the validity of a high-stakes ESL test: Why teachers' perceptions matter' (Winke 2011a) and is currently writing a book on language placement testing.

Dr. Ching-Ni Hsieh (2011) examined how two rater effects, severity and orientation, differed between ESL teachers' and American undergraduate students' ratings of international teaching assistants' oral proficiency, accentedness, and comprehensibility. Dr. Tetyana Sydorenko (2011) conducted a case study on item writer judgments of item difficulty versus actual item difficulty. Winke, Gass & Myford (2011) explored whether raters' L2 background and the L1 of test takers taking the speaking part of the TOEFL were related through scoring. Finally, Spinner (2011) began work towards a grammatical assessment measure by applying Processability Theory and Organic Grammar to short samples of spontaneous speech productions.

Language processing and learning

Professor VanPatten has continued his work on processing instruction; one of his recent studies examines the roles of explicit instruction and grammatical sensitivity (VanPatten & Borst 2012). He has also recently published an encyclopedia entry on the subject (VanPatten 2012) and authored a chapter on input processing (Gass & Mackey 2012: 268–281).

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Others in the program are also investigating processing. For example, Gass & Behney (forthcoming) looked at L2 syntactic priming of subject and direct object relative clauses and Behney completed her dissertation in 2011 on the role of grammatical gender facilitation and inhibition in L2 learners' spoken word recognition. Doctoral student Hyojung Lim and Professor Godfroid are currently looking at the coefficient of variability as a measure of automaticity in L2 sentence processing.

In another domain, Professor Debra Hardison is continuing her work on speech perception. In 2009, she was the guest editor of a special issue of *Language Learning and Technology* on technology and learning pronunciation. She recently published a timeline on research in visual and auditory input in L2 speech processing (Hardison 2010) and a chapter devoted to L2 speech perception (Gass & Mackey 2012: 349–363). She also co-authored an article on the development of perception of L2 Japanese geminates (Hardison & Motohashi Saigo 2010). Currently, she is continuing her work on the evaluation of the relative contributions of contextual and facial cues in spoken language processing by native and non-native speakers of English. Doctoral student Solène Inceoglu is conducting similar work on French. Finally, in a project funded by CLEAR (Center for Language Education and Research), Hardison is exploring the changes in the oral skills and psychosocial profile of L2 learners of German and Japanese following short-term study abroad, and Tomoko Okuno is conducting her dissertation research on learners' perception of L2 Japanese durational contrasts.

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL)

Professor Senta Goertler currently serves on the CALICO executive board. Her research focuses on the benefits of hybrid and online learning for language instruction and she has recently published two book chapters on the topic (Goertler 2011a, 2011b). She has also researched students' readiness and attitudes towards foreign language instruction (Goertler, Bollen & Gaff 2012). Furthermore, along with Winke and doctoral student Grace Amuzie, Goertler looked at the difference between learners of commonly taught versus less commonly taught languages with respect to CALL and online language learning (Winke, Goertler & Amuzie 2010). Finally, her current project investigates the use of online modules and commercial software to address individual differences in language courses. Doctoral student Baburhan Uzum published a paper in CALICO in 2010 that examined alignment during computer-mediated communication (CMC) from a sociolinguistic perspective. In her doctoral dissertation, Sydorenko investigated whether different types of task planning could improve pragmatic competence over time. Specifically, she compared groups that planned computer-delivered automatized structured tasks (CASTs), in role-playing dyads and a control group. Finally, Loewen is working on a project that investigates the effects of modality (face-to-face, written CMC, and oral CMC) on task-based interaction.

Eye-tracking

The SLS Eye-tracking Lab was launched in 2009 to provide broader opportunities for faculty and graduate students to carry out in-depth research on cognitive and psycholinguistic

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000559 Published online by Cambridge University Press

processes in SLA (http://sls.msu.edu/research/labs). Presently, the lab is equipped with an SR Research Ltd Eyelink 1000 eye-tracking system (with three mount types) (www.sr-research.com) and a Tobii TX300 TSE (www.tobii.com) with E-Prime 2.0 extensions. SLS faculty and graduate students are currently employing eye-tracking methods to investigate various constructs such as (a) learners' use of morphosyntactic and morphophonological information in L2 sentence processing, (b) video-based, caption-reading behavior by second and foreign language learners, and (c) attention and awareness in relation to L2 input enhancement.

Winke, Gass & Sydorenko (2013) investigated caption-reading behavior by English learners of Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Spanish, and explored the extent to which the orthographical relationship between the native and target language affected that behavior by triangulating the eye-tracking data with qualitative findings from interviews. Spinner, Gass & Behney used an eye-tracker to explore the use by L2 learners of Italian of syntactic and/or morphophonological information when determining appropriate gender marking on adjectives. Loewen & Inceoglu investigated the effect of textual enhancement and glossing in Spanish L2 reading. In a partial replication of Lee (2007), Winke looked at whether enhancement drew the learners' attention to the English passive construction and whether enhanced forms were processed differently by individual adult learners of English. She also added a measure of working memory and her results suggest that input enhancement may interact with working memory. In her dissertation, Dr. Maren Schierloh investigated processing and acquisition of stem-vowel changing (irregular) verbs by beginner learners of German. She looked at whether the amount of attention (measured by eye-fixation durations) was predictive of learners' acquisition of the verbs.

In addition, several projects involving eye-tracking technology are currently under investigation in the department. Jens Schmidtke is looking at online processing of indefinite articles by native and non-native speakers of English in a visual-world paradigm study. Se Hoon Jung is investigating the processing of wh-filler/gap constructs by late learners of English, Godfroid and Le Anne Spino are looking at whether eye-tracking or think-aloud protocols influence the reading process, and Winke and Hyojung Lim are using a Tobii eye-tracker to investigate raters' cognitive behaviors as they rate essays with analytic rubrics. Finally, because (apart from a few scattered articles) little attention has been paid to eye-tracking methodology in SLS journals, Professors Gass, Winke and Godfroid are editing a thematic issue of *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* (2013) summarizing research done thus far and guiding future research in the field.

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Solène Inceoglu
inceoglu@msu.edu

Le Anne Spino
spinole@msu.edu
Ph.D. students
Second Language Studies
Michigan State University

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000559 Published online by Cambridge University Press