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Research in Progress

BAAL/CUP seminars 2008

Conceptualising 'learning' in applied linguistics

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University, UK; 19–20 June 2008

The seminar was coordinated by Paul Seedhouse, Steve Walsh, Chris Jenks and Alan Firth, and about 30 people attended. The objectives of the seminar were to

- explore and unpack the different conceptions of 'learning' involved in research on learning and teaching a language;
- develop awareness of how different conceptions of 'learning' originate in different paradigms, methodologies and epistemologies;
- develop awareness of how conceptions of 'learning' vary according to the particular aspect of language or communication which is being learnt or taught;
- produce a conceptualisation of learning to which members of different schools of SLA will be able to subscribe;
- apply this conceptualisation of learning to a range of data involving learning and teaching a language;
- to explore notions of learning in non-institutional settings.

Themes which emerged in papers and discussions were:

- Why do conceptions of 'learning' vary in research on learning and teaching a language?
- How do different conceptions of 'learning' relate to different paradigms, methodologies and epistemologies?
- Which conceptions of 'learning' are most appropriate to learning which aspect of a language?
- Is it possible to produce a conceptualisation of 'learning' to which members of different schools of SLA will be able to subscribe?
- New perspectives and approaches to 'learning'.
- How can conceptions of 'learning' be applied to data?

In the field of applied linguistics there are currently a number of differing conceptions of 'learning' in relation to learning and teaching a language. In the cognitive psychology tradition of SLA, 'learning' tends to be conceptualised as a change in individual cognitive state. Changes, often in relation to syntax, may be tested and quantified. Pienemann (2005), for example, suggests that an individual who is observed to correctly produce a syntactical item twice in speech with lexical and morphological variation may be assumed to have learnt

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that item. In the social or socio-cultural tradition of SLA, by contrast, 'learning' tends to be conceptualised rather differently and offers a holistic perspective of language learning. The focus tends to be on the processes of language learning and on socially-distributed cognition rather than on discrete items as products.

And yet these two conceptions of 'learning' are not mutually exclusive and it should be possible to develop a perspective which incorporates the best insights and procedures from both traditions. Conceptions of 'learning' involved in research on language teaching in particular tend to vary according to which aspect of a language is being taught. If the focus is on introducing new syntactical structures to students, the conception of 'learning' may logically focus on whether individual students are able to actively produce these structures correctly. By contrast, if the teaching focus is on developing the ability to communicate and to participate in social interaction, the conception and evaluation of 'learning' will necessarily be different. In vocabulary learning, mastering a word 'completely' may require knowledge of its orthographical and phonological form, meanings, grammatical behaviour, associations, collocations, frequency and register (Schmitt & McCarthy 1997).

The seminar aimed, then, to produce a conceptualisation of 'learning' in applied linguistics which is able to explicate and incorporate variation according to (i) the aspect of a language or communication which is being taught, and (ii) the paradigms, methodologies and epistemologies being employed. A key feature of the seminar was that it was attended by representatives of many different positions within applied linguistics and SLA. The fruitful discussion showed that it was possible to achieve a broad consensus on the elements to be included in a conceptualisation of learning, and this will be developed in the resultant publication. A book proposal has already been submitted to a major publisher and is under consideration. The proposal is based on the papers presented at the seminar as well as on chapters which will be written by invited authors.

Plenary speeches

In his plenary paper, Rod Ellis (University of Auckland) explored different approaches to theory evaluation in SLA and suggested that the very nature of SLA as an applied discipline should lead us to accept and welcome theoretical pluralism. The position adopted in this paper is that of 'epistemic relativism' (Lantolf 1996). This differs from 'judgmental relativism' in that instead of viewing all knowledge as equally valid, it claims that theories can be distinguished 'in terms of their relevance and adequacy for attaining particular goals' (Lantolf 1996: 734). Ellis argued that theories should be evaluated in relation to the context in which they were developed and the purpose(s) they were intended to serve.

Diane Larsen-Freeman (University of Michigan) suggested that there are many ways to conceptualise learning in applied linguistics. One way that has occupied center stage for some time is to see language teaching as presenting linguistic forms and language learning as a process of taking them in: The 'having' view. A second conceptualisation adopts a more functional approach to language. Language teaching is more about guiding students to get their message across, and language learning is developing discursive routines through participation in communities: the 'doing' view. Larsen-Freeman made the case for language as

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a complex adaptive system, in which every use of language changes the language resources of the learner/user and the changed resources are then potentially available for the next speech event. This view suggests a unity not only between doing and having, between real-time processing and development, but also between language use and language evolution.

Papers

Vivian Cook (Newcastle University) considered what is meant by 'second language learning' and how this relates to an independent discipline of SLA research. He asked the following questions: What is the language in second language learning? What is the second in second language learning? What is learning in second language learning? and Where does SLA research come in?

Simona Pekarek Doehler (Université de Neuchâtel) discussed how notions of CA-for-SLA are articulated to current thinking about language and cognition in other fields. She presented an analysis of French L2 data, showing how a fine-grained study of learners' activities can shed light on both learning as a product (i.e. levels of competence) and learning as a process (i.e. the socio-cognitive-linguistic mechanisms that underlie change across time).

Constant Leung (King's College London) explored some of the conceptual and analytical issues involved in the use of interactional discourse data to explore the notion of learning in the mainstream school classroom with particular reference to ethnolinguistic minority pupils who are learners of English as an additional/second language (EAL).

Manfred Pienemann (Newcastle University) outlined a cognitive view on language learning, demonstrating that there are cognitive constraints on language learning that cannot be eliminated or 'turned off' by factors external to the learner. One such set of constraints is due to the very nature of real-time language processing in the human mind. Many aspects of language processing are carried out by automatic processors that cannot be controlled or monitored by the conscious mind.

Florence Myles (Newcastle University) discussed theory building in SLA research, and in particular how and whether the different schools of research can or need to talk to one another. Her aim was to draw an overarching conceptual map of the field. She suggested that all approaches have a contribution to make to a better understanding of the process of L2 learning, but that it is imperative to be clear about the precise domain of application of each theoretical paradigm.

Melinda Whong (Leeds University) argued that the absence of a unified conceptualisation of learning can be seen as rooted in the absence of a unified perspective on language. The paper explored a theory of language learning that is based on a theory of language, both of which are actively trying to unify strands of thought from the range of sub-disciplines in linguistics and SLA. These, in turn, provide a principled basis for English language teaching.

Sian Etherington (University of Salford) considered two studies of aspects of applied linguistics learning, discussing how this learning takes place in each context and building from these observations towards a more generalised picture of how learning in applied linguistics may occur. The affective aspects of learning and individuals' reactions to these were critical elements of the discussion.

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Mick Randall (British University in Dubai) examined the interrelationship between linguistic theory, psychological models of language, and learning theory. Connectionism and Corpus Linguistics would suggest that the establishment of strong links between surface language elements is an essential for effective use of language. This would suggest that the mechanisms for language learning should return to more associative learning techniques and pay attention to the way that surface features of language interconnect.

Steve Walsh & Paul Seedhouse (Newcastle University) considered a number of the conceptual and methodological problems involved in analysing how L2 learning is related to classroom interaction. The first part of the paper argued that the conceptualisation of 'learning' developed in this seminar needs to incorporate the process of learning as embodied in classroom interaction. The second part of the paper then offered a conceptualisation of classroom interactional competence (CIC), which we define as teachers' and learners' ability to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning.

Finally, Alan Firth & Chris Jenks (Newcastle University) explored L2 learning in the Internet chat community of 'Skypecasts'^{TM}, and reflected on the implications of Skypecast interactions for our understanding and conceptualisations of L2 learning and L2 competence. They argued that the findings permit a reconceptualisation of established notions of L2 competence and L2 learning.

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Paul Seedhouse
Newcastle University, UK
Paul.Seedhouse@newcastle.ac.uk

Integration and achievement in a multilingual Europe: Languages for learning and life

University of Leeds, UK; 18–19 June 2008

Delegates to the seminar came from seven different countries and worked in a wide range of contexts: local authorities, regional agencies, universities and schools. The discussion throughout, both in and out of sessions, reflected the wide range of experience and expertise present. The seminar opened with a keynote lecture by Professor Christine Helot of the University of Strasbourg, focusing on how to educate teachers for plurilingualism. The speaker considered political and socio-cultural barriers to implementing a multilingual curriculum within the European and the French contexts in particular. Highlighting the

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crucial importance of terminology, a colleague questioned Professor Helot's use of the term 'immigrant minority languages'. The explanation was that the term 'community languages' used in Britain simply makes no sense in France where it is against the constitution to have 'communities'. In her conclusion, Professor Helot suggested principles which should underpin education for plurilingualism in multilingual societies:

- glorified native speaker competence is no longer the ultimate goal;
- language teaching should be directed towards a competence encompassing the mother tongue, the national language, regional and minority languages, and non-European languages;
- competence across languages is the goal: not a juxtaposition of distinct competencies, but a skills-oriented complex competence in language use.

Following the keynote, two workshop choices were offered. The first, Learning to Read in a Minority Language: Letters and Literature, was presented by Dr Tina Hickey (University of Dublin). She looked at the difficulty of teaching reading in a minority language, Irish. Even though it uses the same script as English, Irish has a very different orthography, and most children in Ireland must learn this L2 soon after acquiring initial literacy in English. In her presentation, Dr Hickey considered the need to teach not only basic L2 reading SKILLS to these learners, but also to consider increasing pupils' WILL to read in this language. The second seminar, New Opportunities for Language Learning across the Curriculum, was led by Kathy Wicksteed of the Association for Language Learning. She presented the main aims of the Key Stage 2 Languages Strategy in the National Curriculum, where language learning features under 'developing intercultural understanding', 'knowledge about language 'and 'language learning strategies'. As the main opportunities for learning languages, the following were suggested: exploring communication with native speakers within the school community, making links with English, using materials and topics that may be of personal interest and taking languages beyond the classroom. The emphasis on providing opportunities for learners to talk about 'things that matter to them' promises a better use of what Cummins (2001) terms the 'maximum identity investment principle'. It has the potential for more consistent practices that are inclusive of learners' backgrounds, home languages and the wider histories of their communities. After the workshops, delegates had a choice of three discussion groups: Family and community learning and their links with mainstream schools; Inside classrooms: Teaching, learning and curriculum; and Teacher education and development. Attendees were asked to consider the implications of the themes of the seminar for them in the three interconnected dimensions of research, policy and practice. The day finished with a plenary speech.

The keynote on day two, presented by Professor Eve Gregory (Goldsmiths, University of London) gave an insight into the experiences of several children whose multilingual skills were put to use in schools. Professor Gregory's presentation, which included video clips of multilingual learners, created a buzz amongst the delegates. A particularly captivating story was of a boy who took part in her research twenty years ago and whom she recently met to reflect on his experiences as a young learner. She concluded with recommendations for developing multilingual skills in mainstream classrooms.

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Following this, there was again a choice of two workshops: Multilingual Classroom Practices: Learning from the Children, presented by Professor Dominique Portante & Carola Mick (University of Luxembourg) and Bilateral Exchanges in Teacher Training: Developing Multilingualism and Intercultural Competence, led by Claudine Kirsch (Goldsmiths, University of London). Portante and Mick jointly presented some of the complexities of the institutional trilingualism in Luxembourg, focusing on how teachers work on homogenising the trilingualism of schooling and legitimising all languages. Pictures of the classrooms shown clearly reflected a multilingual community of learners. Kirsch's workshop focused on the PGCE (Post-Graduate Certificate of Education) Primary course with a specialism in Foreign Languages that Goldsmiths has successfully run for five years. Student teachers on this course teach abroad for a month. Kirsch discussed the ways in which bilateral exchanges can help students develop their language skills and their ability to act sensitively and culturally appropriately in the classroom.

After a break, everybody joined their discussion groups for the last time, and the seminar closed with a plenary. Notes from the discussion groups were later on kindly recorded by Dr Jean Conteh, available from her at j.conteh@leeds.ac.uk.

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Jean Conteh
University of Leeds, UK
j.conteh@leeds.ac.uk

What do primary teachers need to understand, and how? Developing an applied linguistics curriculum for pre-service primary school teachers

University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK; 29–30 May and 1–2 September 2008

The seminars brought together 55 delegates working in the fields of Applied Linguistics, Initial Teacher Education, Speech and Language Therapy, English Literature, Psychology, Educational Psychology and Teaching English as an Additional Language as well as staff working for children's charities, Local Authority Quality Improvement and National Policy Development units in both England and Scotland.

The seminars were designed to encourage debate about the applied linguistics understandings that are most helpful to primary school teachers in designing and teaching the language and literacy curriculum, in working with pupils with identified speech and language needs, and in working with other professionals such as educational psychologists and speech and language therapists. Participants were invited to consider what would be most helpful for primary-school teachers to understand about applied linguistics perspectives, and how this understanding could best be developed. These seminars are possibly the first UK opportunity

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for such a wide range of people to discuss these issues. Discussion came not only from the different professional concerns and research perspectives but also from differences in how Scotland and England make, implement and monitor language and literacy education policy.

The two seminars were designed to run as a conversation, and the papers in the second seminar developed themes and issues raised in the first, as well as introducing new themes of their own. The first seminar made the case for how applied linguistics perspectives can, and do, inform the curriculum and pedagogy in primary schools. Professor Debra Myhill (Exeter University) began by reporting on her research on Writers as Designers. She summarised some of the research on young writers' linguistic development – their lexical choices, syntactic features, and thematic variety – arguing that linguistic knowledge is necessary for good writers but not sufficient: good writers need also to have access to a thinking repertoire from which they design, craft and shape texts that meet their communicative goals. In doing this, the relationship between the writer, the text and context is central, and teachers need to draw on knowledge from all these perspectives.

Papers by Dr Maggie Vance (Sheffield University) and Dr Rosie Flewitt (Open University) offered two very different ways to analyse the issues facing children with identified communication difficulties. Vance explained the speech and language therapist's analytic approach, highlighting the insights that a diagnostic view of semantic, syntactic and phonological knowledge can offer. Flewitt presented an analysis from the perspective of linguistic ethnography, showing how the individual and institutional dynamics of the context affect how a child negotiates her way into literacy, how she is considered by the adults around her and how this affects their assessments. Separately, each paper demonstrated implications for assessment and pedagogy but together they painted a rich picture of the breadth and depth of knowledge that should inform primary teaching.

Dr Gemma Moss (Institute of Education, University of London) reported her research on children's discourse around books, showing the importance of attending to how children and young people position themselves in relation to literacy and how this shapes both what they learn and how they learn it. In doing so, she made a powerful case for teacher education to go beyond discussion of the teaching content of literacy to consider the cultural and social identities of children and young people as readers, and how these interact with local and institutional contexts to determine reading engagement.

The paper by Dr Alison Sealey (University of Birmingham) outlined the potential of corpus-based approaches to inform the early-years literacy curriculum and to revolutionise the teaching of grammar in schools.

Professor Kate Nation (Oxford University) made the case for attending much more closely to children's comprehension, and the need for both researchers and teachers to notice and understand comprehension difficulties and the importance of the relationship between oral and written comprehension.

Professor Angela Creese (University of Birmingham) spoke about bilingual pedagogy and her research in community schools, challenging assumptions about language-switching and optimal instructional usage. Dr Carolyn Letts (Newcastle University) reported from an ESRC seminar series on communication impairment and children learning English as an additional language. She spoke of the assessment challenges when the child's home language may not be known, and debunked the myths that still surround dual language use, pointing out that

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children restricted to one language were invariably restricted to English – usually their weaker language. She also noted that there were fewer direct references to English as an Additional Language in the new QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) standards for England.

The second seminar began with a paper by Professors Terezinha Nunes & Peter Bryant (University of Oxford), who provided a data-rich account of the knowledge-base children need in learning to spell and read words, outlining the different situations in which morphological knowledge was useful and their research evidence that children's awareness of grammar and morphology is a predictor of their later ability to represent morphemes systematically. Their data provides a powerful critique of the 'simple' model of reading (the model of early literacy promoted in the National Literacy Strategy of England), which encourages teachers to consider comprehension and phonology as separate and, at least in the early literacy curriculum, independent processes.

Dr Viv Ellis (University of Oxford) & Jane Briggs (University of Brighton), in their paper 'Teacher education: What applied linguistics needs to understand about what, how and where beginning teachers learn', contextualised the debates about linguistic content-knowledge in a different way. By positioning teacher education as an academic discipline in its own right and providing an analysis of what we know about how teachers' understandings develop and change, they effectively re-framed the linguistic perspectives and firmly addressed the 'and how' part of the seminar title. Mary Hartsthorn (I CAN; www.ican.org.uk) continued the theme of how to develop teacher knowledge and outlined The Speech, Language and Communication Framework developed by The Communication Trust. The framework is an online audit tool that individuals and institutional managers can use to assess their skills and knowledge of language and communication, and identify staff training and development opportunities that will enable them to contribute to the 'Every Child Matters' agenda. Professor Henrietta Dombey (University of Brighton) provided an illustration of how one teacher education course builds student teachers' knowledge about language alongside an understanding of how to teach this important aspect in schools. She emphasised the importance of students understanding how effects are achieved through written language as well as the patterns of progression in phonological awareness and the opaque relationship between phonemes and graphemes in English. Re-visiting Ellis & Briggs's theme about how student teachers learn, she argued that students should demonstrate the relevance of this knowledge to their role as primary teachers.

Professor Jane Medwell (University of Warwick) presented her research on what teacher trainees DO know, and how they use this knowledge when teaching writing. In her study, more experienced teachers with a secure knowledge-base were more likely to take account of features of the overall text and respond to them whereas less experienced teachers responded to lexical and syntactic features.

Sue Ellis & Dr Elspeth McCartney (University of Strathclyde) addressed a different kind of question, namely, how to support children in mainstream classes whose speech and language difficulties were most evidenced as literacy difficulties. Their research-based approach outlined a model of language support for teachers that was embedded in the institutional system of the primary school.

Three papers argued for a different kind of content in teacher education programmes. Professor Greg Books (The University of Sheffield) presented a passionate and closely-argued

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case for introducing student teachers to the International Phonetic Alphabet in his paper, 'Supporting accurate phonics teaching'. Dr Elspeth Jajdelska (University of Strathclyde) presented her research on the history of reading, suggesting that there was a revolution in the way texts were written in the eighteenth century in response to a surge in fluent, silent reading. She argued that understanding the history of this process can give teachers a useful narrative with which to understand continuing issues in text comprehension, including punctuation and sentence structure and made a plea for spaces in the crowded teacher education programmes for students to study such potentially useful historical analyses. Vivienne Smith (University of Strathclyde), in her paper 'The text of picture books', pointed out that picture book illustrations had received more critical attention than the literary affordances of the words. She suggested an analysis of the written text in terms of its pedagogic functions, literary quality and the ideological functions and assumptions of language that would provide a more secure knowledge-base for teachers.

The final seminar paper was given by Dominic Wyse (University of Cambridge), which summarised the incremental shifts of curricula control for schools and teacher education between the 1980s and the present in England. He examined the influence of globalisation and the increasing role of politicians in determining the model of understanding that has been adopted and called for greater scrutiny of the extent to which such models theorise understanding, are based on research evidence and reflect coherent theories of language in use. He argued that meta-linguistic knowledge is of limited value. For him, experience with the processes of reading and writing together with the ability to reflect on these in relation to children's learning, is the most valuable form of 'subject knowledge'.

The seminars generated much fruitful discussion. They did more than identify the potential contribution of applied linguistics to the curriculum and pedagogy of the primary school; they contextualised this in terms of teacher education and of what the research tells us about how such knowledge is best developed. Delegates came from very different disciplines and had different immediate concerns, but the debates showed a genuine desire to develop a breadth of understanding and to contextualise the issues in different ways. The discussions found common ground as well as differences, and have provided a foundation for future collaborative projects.

Sue Ellis, Elspeth McCartney & Jill Bourne
University of Strathclyde, UK
sue.ellis@strath.ac.uk

Research in applied linguistics at Birkbeck, University of London

Background

The Department of Applied Linguistics and Communication at Birkbeck was established in 1965 by Professor Michel Blanc, making it the first university department in England to focus on the study of applied linguistics. It has recognition from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) of Great Britain for research training and studentships. The Department has a well-established Centre for Multilingual and Multicultural Research, houses the *International*

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Journal of Bilingualism (published by Sage) and produces its own web journal, the *Birkbeck Studies of Applied Linguistics* (http://bisal.bbk.ac.uk).

Over the years, Birkbeck's Department of Applied Linguistics and Communication has not only developed a distinctive academic identity but also helped to redefine the field of applied linguistics as a science of human sociality. We are best known for our research in the areas of codeswitching and other language contact phenomena, language development and disorder from a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective, intercultural communication, discourse analysis, language and emotion, and language and identity. We have also developed new areas of research and teaching in communication studies focussing on the human, interpersonal and social dimensions of communication. Unlike many of the applied linguistics departments across the world, our work does not deal directly with language teaching, although it clearly has implications for educational policy and practice.

Research themes

The special character of the research at the Department of Applied Linguistics and Communication at Birkbeck derives from our strong belief that the diverse phenomena of multilingualism are, linguistically speaking, the rule rather than the exception, and that it is through rigorous, critical examination of these phenomena that the nature and functions of language more generally can be understood. Our research problematises the concept of 'the language user' and questions assumptions, constructs and methodologies derived from the monolingual situation. Our staff represent a unique combination of expertise in sociolinguistics, neurolinguistics, clinical linguistics, language acquisition, syntax, phonology, discourse and pragmatics, with all working in more than one of these fields. Our research is typically cross-linguistic, seen in our studies of Alsatian, Arabic, Cantonese, Dutch, English (especially L2 varieties), French, Cypriot Greek, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Punjabi, Spanish and Taiwanese. Individual members' research, while necessarily concentrating in specific areas, addresses shared conceptual, theoretical and methodological concerns and challenges established paradigms. Our research is organised around three principal areas: socio-interactional linguistics, language learning, and clinical linguistics and neurolinguistics.

Socio-interactional linguistics

A collaborative group focuses on the interactional architecture of human sociality on the themes of the Diaspora, Migration and Identity Programme and of multilingual practices in complementary schools. We have developed critical approaches to language maintenance and language shift, and initiated a new research agenda for areas such as L1 development in L2 context, trilingual interaction, autochthonous linguistic minorities and European immigrant languages in the UK, and multilingual practices in complementary schools for minority ethnic children. Zhu Hua is researching inter-generational conflict talk in immigrant families (Zhu 2008). An overarching theme of Li Wei's work is critical examination of assumptions behind

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traditional rational choice models of bilingual and multilingual behaviour. His research (Li 2002, 2005) focuses on linguistic choices bilinguals and multilinguals make as part of their daily communicative practice. Instead of using models based on abstract notions of 'rationality' or 'identity', he has tried to develop a 'Common Sense' approach which is informed by ethnomethodology.

With respect to the conceptual and methodological problems in the analysis of 'grammar' in codeswitching, Malcolm Edwards and Penelope Gardner-Chloros have argued against approaches which postulate two discrete, interacting grammars, and for an alternative, interdisciplinary approach in which the role of the speaker is central (Edwards & Gardner-Chloros 2003, 2007). Methodological innovation has been achieved in a database of bilingual texts for researchers (Gardner-Chloros 2008).

With respect to socio-pragmatics and ethnography, relational talk is examined under the notion of RAPPORT-BUILDING, which integrates various proposals for the study of small talk and phatic communication in a series of studies by María Elena Placencia. She examines particular sets of service encounter interactions to throw light on how relational talk is co-constructed by customers and service providers, and how it is used by participants to bring to the fore different social identities, shift frames of participation, and achieve different interactional goals (Placencia 2004, 2007). These various domains of pragmatic variation are examined at the sub-national level investigating service encounter interactions in two varieties of Ecuadorian Spanish – Andean and Coastal Spanish (Placencia 2008).

Language learning

Our research in this area questions fundamental assumptions regarding language learning mechanisms. Jean-Marc Dewaele's research has developed a nuanced analysis of psychological variables such as extraversion in L2 production and of the complex interactions between situational, socio-biographical and psychological variables in SLA. He has also pioneered a new field of research in emotion and SLA, working intensively on a database on bilingualism and emotions collected via a web questionnaire. Dewaele (2004, 2006, 2008) has explored the individual differences in the perception multilinguals have of the emotional strength of expression as it relates to self-perceived language dominance, context of the L2 acquisition, age of onset of L2 learning and degree of socialization.

Marjorie Lorch, in collaboration with Heather McDowell, has been investigating the implications of writing systems for models of SLA acquisition, focussing on the effects of acquiring a non-alphabetic L1 writing system (Chinese) on key aspects of L2 acquisition of English such as reading processes, spelling and metalinguistic awareness (McDowell & Lorch 2008).

Clinical linguistics and neuro-linguistics

Language and communication disorders in children and adults are the focus of another strand of our research. Our work problematises the notion of 'norm' in child language development.

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Lorch recently published a significant case study, in collaboration with Keith Atkin, of a child with autism and hyperlexia developing language in a unique manner which challenges current models of language acquisition, word learning and literacy (Atkin & Lorch 2006).

Zhu, in collaboration with Dodd, explores phonological issues in child language development. She adopts a cross-linguistic perspective that also includes speech- and language-disordered children to demonstrate the inadequacy of standard models of phonological development. She has studied phonological acquisition and disorder of Chinese-speaking children, including children with hearing impairment, and developed the notion of Phonological Saliency to account for cross-linguistic similarities and differences in early sound acquisition (Zhu 2002; Zhu & Doold 2006).

Lorch (2007) uses Applied History as an approach to examine how current theoretical and clinical assumptions regarding polyglot aphasia and memory disorder emerged from the interaction of socio-political and economic forces and scientific assumptions. Critical examination of this process yields novel questions and insights leading to new strategies for hypothesis development.

Our research in all three areas shares a common concern with methodology. Our staff has developed a number of major assessments for language and communication disorders and transcription, including the world-famous *DEAP: Diagnostic Evaluation of Articulation & Phonology*, and corpus analysis systems for multilingual speech data such as LIDES (Language Interaction Data Exchange System). A number of staff have edited and contributed to *The Blackwell guide to research methods in bilingualism and multilingualism*, a flagship volume of Wiley-Blackwell published in 2008.

Activities

In the coming years, we intend to enhance our national and international standing as a centre of excellence in multilingual and multicultural research through high-quality research output and increased collaborations with researchers in London and worldwide. We are creating an interdisciplinary research network and forum on human sociality, utilising expertise in the Bloomsbury area of London and beyond. We ran a highly successful Round Table on Applied Linguistics in the spring of 2007 and plan to launch an annual Bloomsbury Round Table, in collaboration with University College London, Institute of Education, School of Oriental and African Studies, and King's College London, in 2009.

Birkbeck College Applied Linguistics website:
http://www.bbk.ac.uk/llc/subjects/applied_linguistics.

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Marjorie Lorch & Li Wei
Birkbeck, University of London, UK
m.lorch@bbk.ac.uk, li.wei@bbk.ac.uk

Colloquium – Comparing Child L2 and SLI (Specific Language Impairment): Crosslinguistic Perspectives

Presented at the Second Language Research Forum, the University of Hawaii at Manoa, USA; 19 October 2008

This half-day colloquium, organized by Theres Grüter (Stanford), was held as part of SLRF (Second Language Research Forum) 2008 at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, with the aim of bringing together researchers from the fields of second language acquisition and communication disorders who are investigating the recently observed similarities between

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children acquiring an L2 and children with SPECIFIC LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT (SLI).[1] Over the past fifteen years, several research studies have shown that errors made by children learning an L2 are remarkably similar to those made by (monolingual) children with SLI in their FIRST language (Håkansson & Nettelbladt 1993, 1996; Paradis & Crago 2000, 2004). These surprising parallels raise a number of theoretical and clinical concerns. In particular, given these similarities, diagnosing SLI in children who can only be formally tested in their L2 – typically, children from immigrant families – is an extremely difficult task for speech-language pathologists, yet one they are increasingly confronted with in today's growing multilingual environments (Kritikos 2003). In consequence, immigrant children are at an increased risk for both over- and under-diagnosis of language disorders, each of which is likely to have unfavorable consequences for the child's academic and social development (Genesee, Paradis & Crago 2004). The further exploration of the similarities between these two groups, and crucially, the potential identification of clear DIFFERENCES between the two, thus presents a priority for research in both L2 learning and communication disorders.

In this colloquium, representatives of six independent research groups from France, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States addressed the following questions, based on their own on-going research:

- Are similarities between child L2 and SLI observed CROSSLINGUISTICALLY?
- What DOMAINS OF LANGUAGE seem to be particularly (in)vulnerable in child L2 and SLI crosslinguistically?
- Are there aspects of grammatical development that clearly DISTINGUISH child L2 learners from children with SLI?
- What are the implications of these similarities (and potential differences) for theoretical accounts of both (child) L2 acquisition and developmental language disorders?

Monika Rothweiler & Solveig Chilla (Hamburg/Bremen), presenting data from the acquisition of German sentence structure, showed that children whose first significant exposure to German was after the age of four did indeed resemble German children with SLI. However, this was not the case for children who began learning German before the age of four, arguing that AGE OF ONSET must be taken into consideration in the comparison between the two populations.

Theo Marinis, Vicky Chondrogianni & Halit Firat (Reading) demonstrated that English children with SLI and Turkish children learning English as an L2 with similar vocabulary levels both performed poorly on a measure assessing the comprehension of English pronouns, whereas only the latter had problems with the interpretation of reflexives, an effect that was shown to be attributable to the children's L1. However, the L2 group was considerably younger than the SLI group, raising the question whether the L2 learners might eventually outgrow

[1] SLI is a congenital developmental disorder typically diagnosed when a child presents with a significant delay in language ability relative to age-norms, in the absence of auditory, neurological and socio-emotional impairments, and with non-verbal intelligence within the normal range. The prevalence of SLI in the pre- and early-school-year population has been estimated at 5–7% (Tomblin et al. 1997; for further detail, see Leonard 1998).

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their difficulties. This led to a discussion regarding the basis on which child L2 learners and children with SLI should be compared (e.g., age, length of exposure, vocabulary/language level), with a consensus emerging that, ideally, both age- and language-based comparisons should be performed.

Maureen Scheidnes, Sandrine Ferré, Martin Haiden, Philippe Prévost & Laurie Tuller (Tours) showed that French children with SLI and English children learning French as an L2 both avoid more complex *wh*-questions in their production, yet their comprehension of these constructions appears to be unimpaired, suggesting that Computational Complexity (Jakubowicz 2005) affects language production in both groups.

Gabriela Simon-Cereijido & Vera Gutiérrez-Clellen (San Diego) examined narrative samples from English-speaking children with SLI and Spanish-speaking children learning L2 English with regard to the correct use of three-argument verbs (e.g., *put*). They observed that while both groups performed more poorly than typically developing English-speaking children, the difference reached significance only for the SLI group ($p = .03$), but not for the L2 group ($p = .06$), suggesting verb/argument use as a potential difference between the two.

Finally, two groups of researchers, Antje Orgassa, Jan de Jong, Anne Baker & Fred Weerman (Amsterdam) and Sharon Armon-Lotem & Joel Walters (Bar Ilan) reported on child L2 learners diagnosed with SLI (L2-SLI). Orgassa and colleagues, looking at verbal and adjectival inflection in Dutch, found that their L2-SLI group performed more poorly than both monolingual Dutch children with SLI and typically developing child L2 learners of Dutch, suggesting a CUMULATIVE EFFECT of L2 and SLI. However, no such cumulative effect was found by Armon-Lotem & Walters, in a comparison between monolingual Hebrew-speaking children with SLI and English-speaking children with SLI learning Hebrew as an L2, in their use of verbal inflection and prepositions. Yet Armon-Lotem & Walters observed an interesting between-group difference with regard to error TYPES: only children with SLI (monolingual and L2), but not typically developing L2 learners, were found to omit obligatory prepositions in Hebrew, suggesting that this may be a clinical marker for SLI in both L1 and L2 learners of Hebrew.

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Theres Grüter
Stanford University, USA
tgruter@stanford.edu

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