Biennial research review

Review of research on language teaching, learning and policy published in 2004 and 2005

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Most of the annual reviews which I have prepared for the present journal discuss roughly 100 articles published each previous year in top international research outlets. Even with such a high number per year, considerable selectivity has to be applied – the number of abstracts appearing up to the end of the October 2005 edition of Language Teaching, for example, amounts to 601, mostly published in 2005 and with still more to come for that year. The task of covering 2004 as well as 2005 within the one review, necessitated by personal circumstances, is therefore doubly daunting in its selectivity. For comprehensive coverage then, there is nothing in my view which can compete with the abstracts themselves as published in the present journal.

I should therefore begin by stating that there is a large number of excellent articles published during these two years which do not find a place in my text. This is something I regret, but at the same time it would not make much sense to push inclusion to the point of attempting coverage of (say) 200 articles in the one paper. The 120 or so articles I have chosen are all of high quality but in selecting texts for inclusion I have borne other considerations in mind too, in addition to 'quality', and have attempted to draw on a reasonable range of journals, age-groups, languages, themes, research approaches and countries. Let me also fit in a brief further disclaimer about the 'languages' criterion. The languages which I read most easily are English, French and German, and I always make it my business to include reference to some articles written in the latter two languages. At present, however, I am participating in an EC-funded study in collaboration with colleagues from a number of EU states, and through this collaboration it has become even clearer to me than before that a substantial body of very good research is published in quite a wide range of languages. For my present review, there is nothing much I can do about this, and I greatly applaud the present journal for its policy of periodically commissioning reviews which reflect research in particular countries, in order to raise the profile of research in that country, whether published in English or in one of the country's own languages.

My choice is therefore not intended to constitute a representative sample of the best of what has been published, but I hope it suffices to convey a sense of the trends and developments which have been occurring during a very interesting period. In order to include as many articles as are feasible within the one review, I have in a small number of instances simply mentioned an article rather than discuss it in any detail, in order at least to give the reader a reference which might be followed up. This does not imply that an article briefly mentioned in this way is thought to be inferior to those which are discussed more fully. As in previous years, reference is made to the abstracts. Thus, Belz (2004: 04–476) refers to an article by Belz published in 2004 and reflected in the 2004 series of the present journal as abstract 476.

Most of the review deals with learners from adolescence onwards and the various sections of the review deal with different themes in turn, e.g. acquisition, then strategies, then affective characteristics and so on. As always, however, there is a special section on younger learners at the stages of pre-primary, primary or early secondary school education, and this section holistically embraces all of the themes within it in relation to this particular age group. The term 'primary school' as used in the UK and elsewhere is synonymous with 'elementary school' as used in other countries.

1. Acquisition

Much SLA research is properly focused so much on understanding the minute detail of acquisition that the implications for teaching are not clear. In the present section on acquisition, I have avoided research of this sort and have selected for comment a number of studies which seem to have implications of some kind or another for teaching and learning. At times the term L2 is used. This is not a term of which I approve and I support the critique of it given by Valdés (2005), as reported later in the present paper. However, if particular researchers have used the term L2, then I use it also when discussing their work.

Implicit and explicit L2 learning

For those interested in the relationship between the implicit and the explicit learning of an additional

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language, there is a special issue of *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* (2005), with contributions from a range of top experts in the field. Rather than attempt to deal with each expert's account individually, I will limit myself to Hulstijn's (2005) introduction. It begins by pointing to the almost universal success of L1 acquisition in contrast to the widely differing levels of proficiency reached by L2 learners, even after many years of exposure. Among the factors mentioned as possibly contributing to this difference are brain maturation and brain adaptation, access to universal grammar, L1 interference and sociopsychological factors. Hulstijn claims it is often agreed that L1 acquisition tends to be based on implicit processes but that explicit processes tend to play a bigger role in L2 acquisition. The terms 'implicit' and 'explicit' are helpfully elaborated to include 'implicit and explicit memory', 'implicit and explicit knowledge', 'implicit and explicit learning', 'implicit and explicit instruction', 'inductive or deductive learning', 'and incidental and intentional learning'. There is a section on individual differences in implicit and explicit learning, and one also on theory construction and development which deals with top-down and bottom-up processing. In a few pages a great deal of ground is covered succinctly and with authority – this is a worthwhile read in its own right and is more than just an introduction to a special volume.

Comprehensible input

The term 'comprehensible input' (CI) has been with us for many years now, and it was pleasing to encounter one of the original key proponents of this term, Stephen Krashen, still actively elaborating it. The report by Rodrigo, Krashen & Gribbons (2004) evaluates two different strategies for CI in comparison with traditional methodology. The first CI strategy was based on extensive reading, as students of Spanish at university level were encouraged to read an assortment of assigned and self-selected texts. The second CI strategy involved the students in discussions and debates about the required readings. The comparison group worked within a conventional mode of explicit grammar and vocabulary instruction. Both CI groups were found to be superior to the traditional group in a subsequent check-list vocabulary test and grammar test. Of the two CI groups, the reading-and-discussion group performed somewhat better, possibly because there was aural as well as visual input and also a greater variety of activity. The writers conclude that CI can play an important role in the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar.

Input and/or interaction

The terms 'input' and 'interaction' have, of course, been central to the discourse of SLA for many years, but what might be the relationship between the two? In an impressive study, Gass & Torres (2005) succeed in conveying the complexity of this issue but also in introducing insight and clarity. Students in their case were studying L2 Spanish at university, and four conditions were implemented: input alone, interaction alone, input followed by interaction, and interaction followed by input. There was also a control group, and a pre-test and post-test format was adopted. At stake were Spanish gender agreement (noun + adjective), *estar* + location, and seven vocabulary items. The researchers draw a distinction between internally- and externally-driven enhancement. With less complex forms (such as in vocabulary), they surmise that students may be able to rely on their own internally-driven enhancement capability, whereas with more abstract and complex forms, externally-driven enhancement may be necessary or advantageous. Of the four experimental conditions investigated, those involving both input and interaction seemed to succeed best, with 'interaction followed by input' emerging as the most successful. This interesting finding seems to me to have implications for classroom pedagogy and merits being explored in a variety of contexts.

Comprehension and processing of new morphological form

Leeser (2004a) was interested in how students' comprehension and processing of a new morphological form (Spanish future tense) might be influenced by three particular variables: topic familiarity, mode (listening, reading) and pausing (after sentence boundaries, to allow more time for processing). Students were taking an elementary Spanish course at university in the USA. Of these variables, the one most likely to influence comprehension and processing of grammatical form appeared to be 'mode', in which there was a further advantage for written input. Other more specific findings are also of interest, e.g. that learners who received familiar passages with pauses recalled significantly less information than those for whom pauses were not provided; and readers who were given pauses in the form of increased line-spacing between sentences comprehended significantly less that those who did not. These are interesting findings that have implications for pedagogy and materials design.

Uptake

In the study by Loewen (2004: 04–47) 'uptake' is understood as learner-response to feedback which they have received on a particular linguistic form, during planned or incidental focus-on-form activity. Accordingly, 'uptake' may be useful in helping students to notice and produce linguistically more accurate output. The subjects were of average age twenty-two, and of diverse nationalities at a private language school in New Zealand. The study was concerned with the frequency of uptake in

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incidental focus-on-form episodes (FFEs), what the characteristics of uptake were and what characteristics of incidental focus-on-form predict the success of uptake. Uptake levels were found to be high, as were levels of successful uptake (involving multiple turns between teacher and students). Variables influencing success appeared to be timing (immediate treatment of the trigger) and response (favouring elicit moves over provides), code-related FFEs (as opposed to the message-related variety), and also reactive FFEs in which students' errors were addressed.

Negotiation for meaning

A merit of the study by Foster & Ohta (2005) on negotiation for meaning (NfM) in L2 classrooms is that it is based on a qualitative as well as quantitative approach. Although the quantitative analysis showed that not a great deal of NfM took place, the qualitative aspect revealed valuable information on how the learners (two different groups learning Japanese) engaged in various forms of social learning while using their target language in class, such as assistance (co-construction and other-correction), self-correction and encouragement to continue. From a cognitive perspective, they seemed to be focusing on form in order to prevent their interlanguage from fossilising. From a sociocultural perspective, they seemed to draw on each other in order to progress through their zone of proximal development. The researchers surmise that the absence of very much specific NfM may have been because the students understood each other well, or because they may have wished to avoid potentially face-threatening experiences which would take their attention away from the purpose of the interaction.

Listening, speaking and acquired knowledge of grammar

It is probably true that many teachers consider that the learning of L2 grammar is likely to involve exposure to the written word. De Jong's (2005) study seeks to establish whether listening, within a strategy of implicit instruction, can help students acquire knowledge of grammar that can be used for both comprehension and production. Students were Dutch, learning a Spanish target rule. One group received training in listening comprehension; another in listening and speaking; and a third was a control group which received an explanation of the target rule. Both the listening and listening-and-speaking groups did build up a knowledge base that was useful in comprehension but less so in production; while the control group showed minimal progress. The students in the listening group were fastest in processing sentences containing the target structure, and the control group was slowest; but the listening group made relatively large numbers of errors in production. The listening-and-speaking group were slightly slower in processing comprehension but were significantly more accurate in production. De Jong considers these findings to be interesting but he cautions against over-interpretation, since there was only one target structure, and it was not always clear whether the knowledge that was acquired was explicit or implicit.

Language-related episodes and proficiency

Content-based instruction (CBI), or (as it is known across Europe) CLIL (content and language-integrated learning), almost inevitably tends to focus students' attention on meaning, as they seek to meet the challenge of coping with substantive subject-matter input in the target language. The question then arises as to how they acquire form within this overall process. Leeser (2004b) approaches this issue through two complementary strategies: the use of collaborative tasks that challenge learners to reflect on their own language use (producing LRS, or language-related episodes, in the process) and through grouping learners in dyads according to their proficiency (e.g. high-high, high-low, low-low). The intention of these groupings was to see how they influence LREs in respect of amount, type (lexical or grammatical) and outcome (correct, incorrect or unresolved). The students were adult learners of Spanish. It was found that the learners' proficiency level did influence the outcomes, with high-high being the most successful and low-low the least so. In the case of high-low, it was shown that the low students were engaged with a higher-than-otherwise number of LREs but the precise effects of this were not clear.

Impact of instructional setting

Two of the main contexts in which research on language-learning and -teaching is conducted are the classroom and the laboratory. *Prima facie*, there appear to be considerable differences between them, and in view of this one would be inclined to expect that these contextual differences would lead to differences in outcome, even in the case of similar or identical tasks. The study by Gass, Mackey & Ross-Feldman (2005) found that interactional feedback (a focus of their study) occurred in classrooms as well as in controlled laboratory settings, and differences were in fact not found according to the setting (though there were differences according to the task which had been set). They draw a properly cautious conclusion which is that it is inadvisable to make an automatic assumption that findings will necessarily vary according to setting. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that their subjects were university students. Perhaps the setting would have had a greater influence in the case of younger learners at primary (elementary) school.

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'Task essentialness' and positive evidence

It is always interesting to come across a good research report which produces findings that seem to go against the grain of received opinion. One such report is that by Sanz & Morgan-Short (2004: 04–56) who wished to understand the effects of positive evidence versus explicit rule presentation and explicit negative feedback in the acquisition of Spanish word-order. Subjects were studying Spanish at first- or second-year university level in the USA and received one of four computer-assisted treatments: plus or minus explanation, and plus or minus negative feedback. Current received opinion, according to the writers, would be likely to favour the provision of explanation and of explicit negative feedback. However, in this study no such effects were found. By way of explanation, the authors invoke the concept of 'task essentialness', i.e. requiring students to attend to the target form in order to complete the task successfully on the basis of positive evidence rather than of explanation or explicit negative feedback. They conclude that language acquisition 'is associative in nature and triggered only by exposure to input through task-essential practice, unaffected by metalinguistic input' (Sanz & Morgan-Short 2004: 72). This seems to me to be a big claim to make on such a narrow basis, but I applaud the authors for providing a thought-provoking and well-researched contribution.

Processability theory and categorical analysis in acquisition of Chinese forms

Learning Chinese, I find, is good for the soul, because it teaches me to be humble in the face of the monumental challenge of mastering a language in its spoken and written forms that is so different from those others I know. From the experience, I know what it means to be a slow learner, something which brings pleasure as well as frustration. It is very welcome indeed that articles on different aspects of learning Chinese are increasingly appearing in research journals, and surely this tendency will continue in view of the enormously increased numbers across the world who are learning one or other of the major Chinese languages. The study by Zhang (2004) is one such valuable appearance on the scene, dealing with the acquisition of the adjective marker *-de* (*ADJ*) in Mandarin. Subjects were three beginner students on a first-year course at an Australian university. A feature of the study is that it explores the relationship between processability theory and the learner's categorical analysis of Chinese adjectives (and stative verbs) in the students' overall acquisition of the language.

2. Strategies

All of the studies referred to in the present section exemplify strategies of some sort but they differ considerably from each other, e.g. in the extent to which they are operated by teachers or learners, are fully explicit or (at least partly) implicit, are micro (e.g. dealing with small points of linguistic detail) or macro (e.g. dealing with an entire approach, as in TBT), and are focused on actions or on beliefs.

Learner strategies across the curriculum

As Harris & Grenfell (2004: 04–496) point out, one of the barriers impeding potentially useful collaboration between teachers of English as L1 or L2 and teachers of foreign languages has been the differing views of grammar in each camp. However, they argue convincingly that this does not mean collaboration is impossible, and they highlight 'learning strategies' as a fruitful pathway which teachers of both subjects might explore jointly. In identifying a possible agenda for a cross-curricular approach, they identify memorisation strategies and reading strategies as being potentially fruitful. They also see 'reading in L1' as a useful launching-pad for reading in L2 and suggest it would be useful for an audit of L1 reading strategies to be undertaken, in order to identify ways in which L1 reading might support L2 reading. More specifically, they see 'reading headings', 'predicting' and 'identifying key information' as being common to both.

Effects of strategy training

Harris & Grenfell have established a major reputation as exponents of the merits of strategy-training, a theme also taken up by Nakatani (2005: 05–54). Students were Japanese and female, aged 18–19, who had been learning English for six years. They were assigned to one of two groups: one receiving normal instruction but with strategy-training incorporated (for oral communication) and the other receiving normal instruction but no strategy training. The strategy-training group a) showed significant improvement in speaking test scores, in contrast to the comparison group; b) were able to produce larger utterances and as a result were more able to negotiate meaning and maintain the flow of conversation; and c) showed a significant increase in the use of strategies such as modified interaction, modified output, time-gaining and maintenance; d) showed fewer reduction strategies such as message abandonment. The training process also helped the students to become more aware of specific strategies they might use in order to communicate better or to improve their discourse. There were no differences between the groups in help-seeking or self-solving. Another good example of strategy-training is offered by Pani (2004: 04–462) in respect of mental modelling as a strategy to help students in their target-language reading. This entails the teacher demonstrating to teachers on a particular ELT training programme such mental processes as are

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considered to be associated with superior readers as they make sense of a written text.

Beliefs and behaviours

In a very interesting small-scale study of the beliefs of three teachers, one of the topics investigated by Basturkmen, Loewen & Ellis (2004: 04–119) was the extent to which there were differences between the teachers' stated beliefs and their actual behaviours. It should be added that these behaviours took place in incidental rather than planned focus-on-form activity. It was found that to some extent the teachers' beliefs were in accordance with their actual behaviour, and at times not so. A number of interesting thoughts are offered as to why this might be so. They conclude that investigations of teacher beliefs regarding unplanned elements of teaching should be focused both on their stated beliefs and on their actual behaviours.

TBT in the dock

Building communicative tasks into a teaching approach is without doubt a worthwhile thing to do in many types of language course. This, however, is not the same as task-based teaching (TBT), of which a masterful critique is offered by Swan (2005), who claims that proponents of TBT tend to make unproven or exaggerated claims about its value as a means of accounting for learners' language development. He claims that in particular three hypotheses are associated with TBT: an on-line hypothesis, a noticing hypothesis and a teachability hypothesis, and he casts a sceptical eye over each of these, pointing out in each case a number of problems. He also claims that proponents of TBT have too readily dismissed conventional notions of language-teaching arising from the accumulated wisdom of the profession. He accepts that much foreign-language teaching has not been particularly successful but questions whether this is because of any absence of TBT and indeed offers some possible explanations for lack of success which to me make some sense. This is a most welcome article which in a properly scholarly way takes issue with what for many may have amounted to received wisdom. May the gauntlet be picked up.

Code-switching in advanced CBI lessons

In CLIL classrooms it is natural to expect students to make extensive use of the target language, through the medium of which they are learning important subject-matter. This might be especially so in the case of advanced learners. However, Liebscher & Dailey O'Cain (2005) found a somewhat different picture, in the case of a group of mainly English-speaking students taking an advanced course in German at a Canadian university. They found regular instances of code-switching between English (L1 for most) and German (L2 for most). These changes occurred not only when a student did not know a particular German word and sought clarification or other support in English, but also because the students perceived the classroom as a space inhabited by a bilingual community, and their interactions seemed to have something in common with the sorts of code-switching interactions which can occur in natural (out-of-school) bilingual settings.

Discourse of L2 history lessons

One of the many interesting challenges in making a success of CLIL is to help students acquire not only a cognitive academic language proficiency but also one that takes due account of the types of discourse which are associated with the particular subject-matter that is being taught through the target language. The discourse of science lessons and textbooks, for example, differs from that of history. It is indeed with the discourse of history texts that the study by Schleppegrell, Achigar & Otéiza (2004: 04–153) is concerned when working with middle-school and secondary-school teachers on an in-service mummer programme. Their study brings out the key discourse characteristics of history textbooks and the problems associated with these, such as identifying events, identifying participants and identifying the relations between events and participants, and identifying how history information is organised. They claim that in order to come to terms with the discourse of history, much more than lexical and grammatical evidence are needed.

Assessment for learning

For many years it has been considered good practice to introduce assessment for diagnostic (or formative) as well as summative purposes. Yet, I am not aware of any systematic evaluation of the impact of formative assessment, at least not in the language-learning area. So, does formative assessment make a positive impact on (say) eventual learning outcomes? The eight-year longitudinal study by Ross (2005) examines a series of important issues in this general area in some detail. Subjects were undergraduates aged 18–20 taking a two-year course in English for academic purposes. An approach containing systematic assessment for formative as well as summative purposes was compared with one based on summative assessment alone. The findings show a substantive positive effect for formative assessment, in the academic listening domain, with smaller effects for academic reading. Ross's findings represent a welcome endorsement of the value of formative assessment, particularly as this is being encouraged nowadays in many educational systems, and with learners of all age-groups. In my own country of Scotland, for example, there is a national project on 'Assessment is for Learning' in which a wide range of everyday classroom processes become available for

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formative purposes. Clearly, this has implications for teachers' knowledge and practice, because teachers need to know what they are doing when conducting and subsequently exploiting formative assessments. Much remains to be learnt through research, in which context Ross's report offers an excellent impetus.

Avoiding false associations

Without the benefits of formative assessment, it is not difficult for busy and possibly stressed and overworked teachers to fall into the trap of making false associations. This is well exemplified by Sparks, Ganschow, Artzer, Siebenhar & Plageman (2004: 05–26). They found that foreign languages teachers were good at distinguishing their 'good' from their 'poor' learners. They consider that this is a useful basis for helping students to improve their language skills. However, they also came up with an important and cautionary message, when they found that foreign languages teachers did not distinguish between low proficiency foreign language learners by affective characteristics when the students were grouped by L1 proficiency, but did do when the students were grouped by foreign language proficiency. In other words, with foreign language learners, they assumed that those students with low attainment were also low in affective characteristics, which in fact was not necessarily the case. They conclude that foreign languages teachers should not assume that if a foreign language learner is unsuccessful, then necessarily they must lack motivation, have negative attitudes or be highly anxious. Another study focusing on students with language learning disabilities is by Difino & Lombardino (2004: 04–486) who discuss the obstacles to learning a foreign language experienced by university students with dyslexia and other language-learning difficulties. Their report provides useful advice on how such problems might be identified and offers useful ideas on alternative ways of teaching.

Anxiety-reduction

Working with students on basic English courses in Central Japan, Kondo & Yang (2004: 04–283) were interested in strategies which might help the students lower their levels of anxiety. They identified 72 different tactics which were then clustered into five strategy-groups: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer-seeking and resignation (the latter may seem a 'cop-out' but has its own authenticity in that it consists of minimising anxiety by refusing to face the problem, e.g. by giving up or by falling asleep in class). It did not appear that a particular level of anxiety was associated with particular anxiety-reducing strategies, and thus it seemed that even those students who were relatively low in anxiety still used anxiety-reducing strategies. This is a neat and useful study, written in a clear style that would be of interest to busy teachers as well as to the researchers.

Out-of-school strategies

In many contexts, especially if the target language is English, students have opportunities for acquiring aspects of the language outside the classroom and the school. In the case of 11–12-year-old Indonesian children, as Lamb (2004:05–50) points out, they showed themselves to be well capable of putting their own out-of-school strategies in place and thereby of developing themselves as autonomous individuals, contradicting in the process any assumption that autonomy is difficult to achieve in Asian societies. Lamb rightly points out that this might have consequences for what happens at school. If the teachers were to ignore this informal learning and simply teach and examine to the set textbook, then a rich opportunity would be lost and possibly disenchantment with the school system might set in.

3. Affective characteristics

It is of course always pleasing to encounter further articles from well-established world authorities on motivation, and on some of these I report, but what I find particularly encouraging about the motivational studies in the present section is that a number of them focus on real societal issues – two in particular. One of these is concerned with attempts to understand and perhaps deal with problems of low motivation in anglophone countries where many people assume that their command of English will meet all of their needs anywhere in the world, and the other is concerned with motivation in countries (such as China, Taiwan, Japan) which have cultures very different from those of the west and where the importation of western concepts of motivation is not always welcomed.

Motivation change

On what dimensions is motivation for language-learning likely to change during the course of a year's instruction? The students in the study by Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant & Mihic (2004:04–36) were taking a first-year university French course at intermediate level. It was established that during the one-year period the possibility of change was not great but was greater in the case of variables relating to the classroom environment. That is, of the five sets of variables examined (integrativeness, attitudes to the learning situation, motivation, language anxiety and instrumental motivation), the potential for change was greatest in attitudes to the learning situation, including especially evaluation of the teacher.

Centrality of integrativeness

Csizíér & Dörnyei (2005a:05–37) draw on Hungarian data in order to probe the contribution of a number of key components of motivation to students'

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learning behaviour and achievement. Using structural equation modelling, they take into account components such as self-confidence, vitality of the L2 community, attitudes to the L2 speakers/community, integrativeness, milieu, cultural interest and instrumentality. They emphasise they were dealing with stable, non-situation-specific and generalised motives in respect of the criterion measures of L2 choice and intended effort. They conclude that these criterion measures were directly influenced by integrativeness only, though their concept of integrativeness is expanded to subsume the notion of instrumentality within an overall view of the ideal self, thereby asserting that these two concepts (integrative and instrumental) are not necessarily incompatible or antagonistic to each other.

Correlates of WTC

'Willingness to communicate' (WTC) has become one of the dominant concepts in motivation for learning and using an additional language. Of particular interest in the study by Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide & Shimizu (2004: 04–63) is the setting for the research: Japan, where the culture and the education system are very different from what obtains in western countries, hence some considerable interest in whether WTC would exist and what it might consist of. The students, aged 15–16, were at high school, receiving content-based instruction in English. Students with higher WTC scores tended to talk more in class, to ask questions or to engage their teachers in conversation outside the class. Their WTC seemed strongly influenced by their perceived level of communicative competence, more so than by their anxiety. In a related study, based on a study-period in the USA, students scoring high in WTC tended to interact more frequently with their host nationals, and again perceived communicative competence was found to be an antecedent of WTC. Self-confidence was an important factor in both cases, being viewed as a combination of perceived communicative competence and lower anxiety. Another interesting concept was identified, concerned with interest in international affairs which for the researchers became the construct of 'international posture', indicating a desire to be involved in international activity.

Motivational attributions

In anglophone countries the motivation to learn a language additional to English is normally unlikely to match the motivation in non-anglophone countries for learning English as dominant international language. Graham's (2004) account is set in England at upper-secondary-school level in the case of students aged 16–19 learning French. This means they have gone beyond the compulsory period of language-learning and are likely to be high or fairly high achievers. Graham's study seeks to explore their attributions for the success they have achieved. Attributions such as 'effort', 'high ability' or 'effective learning strategies' seemed associated with success. Among the attributions for non-success were 'low ability' and 'task difficulty' which correlated negatively with examination grades. For such students, motivation seemed low, their disposition seemed passive, there seemed to be a lack of strategy awareness, and success seemed beyond their grasp. Graham concludes that something may be gained by helping such students to become more adaptive in their attributions, more positive about success and more strategic in their learning. This is a top-class study which is of relevance to many anglophone societies.

Another excellent attributional study, also set in England, focuses on learners' own explanations as to why they think they have succeeded or failed. Williams, Burden, Poulet & Maun (2004) use an interpretive approach based on a simple open questionnaire, with subjects who were 285 school students aged 11–16 in five UK state schools. They were interested not only to learn what were the students' attributions for their successes or failures but also how these varied according to gender, age, perceived success and particular languages studied. The most common attribution was 'effort' (or the lack thereof) in respect of both success and failure. Other common attributions were 'ability', 'strategy use', 'interest' 'contribution of the teacher' and 'nature of the learning task'. The researchers were struck by the absence or very low frequency of other potential attributions such as 'rewards', 'feedback', 'parents' or 'peer group'. Among students, there seemed to be a lack of clarity about strategy and a lack of focus on metacognitive strategies in particular.

Motivation and input-processing

A special feature of the article on motivation by Manolopoulou-Sergi (2004) is that it posits a link with an information-processing model of foreign-language learning. In this model three stages are assumed – input, central processing and output – and the claim is made that motivation can influence all three of these, e.g. by helping to activate different sorts of strategy which go with each stage. This possible link between an affective factor and a language-learning or language-using process is well-discussed and seems worthy of further exploration.

Motivation and L2 listening proficiency

Two of the key variables influencing L2 proficiency are undoubtedly motivation and awareness. In the excellent study by Vandergrift (2005) the awareness is of the metacognitive variety and the L2 proficiency relates mainly to Listening. As regards motivation, Vandergrift was interested particularly in those components associated with self-determination theory, i.e. intrinsic (IM) and extrinsic (EM) motivation.

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Students were aged 13–14 from several cultural and linguistic backgrounds studying core French as second, third or fourth language. Vandergrift found that the sophisticated self-determination framework as developed by Noels et al. (2000), with its six subscales of IM and EM, was not readily applicable to this age group, and concentrated instead on the broader categories of IM, EM and A (amotivation). I find this perception interesting because (although impressed by self-determination theory and the work of Noels et al), I had myself developed considerable reservations as to whether students below the age of (say) 17 would be able to make much sense of the verbal distinctions which were being made through use of the six sub-categories. Vandergrift's article is full of fascinating detail. It does suggest that there is some connection between IM/EM, self-regulated learning and L2 listening proficiency, though there was less evidence of an effect for integrative or instrumental motivation.

Attitudinal and other constraints on proficiency

The fact that positive attitudes do not necessarily lead to communicative proficiency is well-illustrated by Takanashi (2004: 04–353) who argues that many Japanese school students have great difficulty in learning to communicate through English, despite their positive attitudes, hard work and increasing opportunities to gain exposure to English through the media. What then holds them back? A range of possible reasons are suggested. These include limited opportunities to use English in natural contexts, and the considerable 'language distance' between Japanese and English. However, Takanashi's research uncovered other possible reasons also, such as the relatively late start at school, the limited number of hours, the large class size and the strong instrumental motivation to pass exams which hinders teachers' attempts to develop communication skills. Going even deeper, reference is made to the two different communication styles of Japanese people (one of which in particular does not sit well with western notions of communication), the high value placed on receptive skills, the value attached to formality in Japanese society, and the Japanese sensitivity to status, power and social distance among interlocutors.

Profiling

The study by Csiziér & Dörnyei (2005b) uses a statistical procedure (cluster analysis) which had seldom been applied in languages motivational research before. The purpose was to identify different L2 learners' individual motivational profiles. The students were Hungarian 13–14-year-olds, and four distinct profiles were identified. The least motivated learners were not interested in languages, cultures or learning. The most motivated seemed to have developed a salient, ideal self which was associated with foreign languages in general. A learner's motivational profile could vary according to the target language, and it was encouragingly found that only 1/5 of the students did not qualify for the most motivated group in any of their languages. There did, however, seem to be some competition among the target languages for learners' limited learning capacity, and world English had emerged as the clear winner.

Predictors of anxiety

To what extent is foreign language anxiety related to difficulty in learning the language? Chen & Chang's (2004: 05–36) subjects were aged 16–28 and studying English in a technical and vocational education programme at ten universities in Taiwan. Positive correlations were found, including that students experiencing difficulties in learning the foreign language tended also to experience higher levels of anxiety. This was particularly so for those with a history of foreign-language learning difficulties and low grades. The three best predictors of anxiety were English-learning history, classroom learning characteristics and developmental learning difficulties. At the same time, though, there were other language-anxious students who did not possess learning difficulty characteristics and still did not do well in their foreign language. For them, anxiety seemed more associated with the social aspects of language-learning, such as learning activities, particular teachers (e.g. those who lecture, talk fast and do not much use the blackboard) and classroom climate. This is a most worthwhile study which shows how diverse is the notion of language anxiety and which therefore suggests how important it is not just to identify language anxiety but also to diagnose those factors which seem associated with it.

Boys' disaffection

In UK schools it is commonplace that girls outperform boys, but according to Davies (2004: 04–323) the gap is particularly great in respect of modern foreign languages at school. Her small-scale study, set in a mixed comprehensive school in England, drew on students in Years 7 and 10. Contrary to the popular notion that boys' disaffection increases with age, Davies concludes that boys in Year 7 may never have got really started, rather than becoming switched-off.

Persisting

Much of the research on language-learner motivation has been quantitative in nature with positivist assumptions lying behind it. Undoubtedly, however, there is a welcome move towards more qualitative approaches to complement these. For an interesting account of a qualitative study with underlying

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phenomenological assumptions, reference can be made to Shedivy's (2004) exploration of what it is that leads foreign languages learners to persist in their language-learning and -use. Her data were collected from five students who had spent time abroad in a Latin-American Spanish-speaking environment and who had successfully seen the experience through, finding 'beauty and joy' in the process. From discussions with the students, she identifies concepts such as 'the spark', 'blending in', 'desire to immerse', 'pragmatic orientations' and 'political awareness' as being salient, and her very interesting text conveys a sense of the individual routes the students found as they proceeded on their particular voyages, the cross-cultural connections they formed and the types of proficiency which they began to acquire.

Language attrition

The concept of 'language attrition' within individuals deserves much more space than it has conventionally received, especially when the context is one in which the language which has been learned is not regularly used. Riemer (2005) provides an excellent account, written in German, of language attrition research. In her own study of 98 students, she found that after completing their programme in French as foreign language, contact with the language had been sparse. Substantial language-loss occurred in respect of both speaking and reading comprehension. Students with integrative or instrumental motivation (particularly integrative) were less likely to experience severe attrition. There is an interesting discussion of a range of associated concepts such as 'the L2 incubation period', the 'last-learned-but-first-forgotten hypothesis', the 'best-learned-last-forgotten hypothesis', and the nature of the 'critical threshold' which it appears must be reached if stored information is to withstand the threat of being forgotten.

East is East: the 'Chinese imperative'

The cultural dimension of motivation is brilliantly exemplified by Chen, Warden & Chang (2005) in respect (mainly) of L2 English learning in Taiwan. They found that the conventional constructs of integrative and instrumental did not make a great deal of sense there, and indeed they claim that these in fact reify western values. Instead, they focus on the concepts of 'investment' in a future that will be different from the past and they develop a construct which they entitle the 'Chinese imperative' which reflects the values and requirements that are internalised within the Taiwanese context. Among these values emanating from the traditional structures of Chinese society are filial piety, respect for teachers and excellence in examinations. Innovators from elsewhere take note.

4. Intercultural understanding, diversity, literacies and identities

In this section three key themes emerge which are of importance for all languages learners, including those from minority communities. They are: 'diversity' as having rich educative potential but also as a topic on which teachers may need to examine their beliefs in order to avoid negative stereotyping of groups such as minorities or low achievers; 'identities' as a possible motivating force which might stimulate languages learners to put their target language to actual use, whether to engage in functional communication or to pass the language on to the younger generation; and 'literacies' as a basis for helping languages learners raise their levels of linguistic, cognitive and intercultural proficiency.

Literary texts and the cultural gap

Given that not all university students of an additional language are able to spend regular amounts of time in the target-language environment, the question arises as to how they might acquire intercultural understanding associated with the languages they are learning. The study by Zapata (2005) explores the capacity of literary texts to fill at least some of the cultural gap, in the case of students of L2 Spanish in the USA. Use was made of an approach by Hanauer (2002) which claims that literary texts offer the benefit of being interpretable in diverse ways. The approach required the students to read and discuss text(s) as a group; then to be exposed to cultural insiders' views of these same texts; then to revisit their original interpretations in the light of the cultural insiders' views and their own further reflections. It was concluded that the students acquired heightened awareness not only of the target-language culture but also of their own, plus a greater insight into the relativity of their own world view.

Perceptions of diversity

One of the main effects of globalisation has been to create much greater ethnic diversity in many communities, as a result of migration for a wide variety of reasons. One of the many challenges which this poses is the challenge to teachers as to how they will perceive ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity, especially in their school and classroom. An interesting study on this topic is reported by Dooly (2005) in Spain who documents the perceptions of three groups: one in pre-service teacher education; another also pre-service but from elsewhere and identified as the intercultural group; and the third consisting of practising teachers and identified as the in-service group. The concept of diversity seemed to be generally perceived as problematic, but there were some interesting differences, especially between the pre-service and in-service groups. The pre-service

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group seemed to view diversity as potentially a good thing and a challenge to be addressed, whereas the in-service group were more negatively and perhaps more stereotypically oriented, tending also to assume that mental capacities were innate and hardly susceptible of strong development through pedagogical intervention. Two challenges therefore seem to emerge from this study: one would be to find ways of encouraging pre-service teachers to maintain their positive views about diversity when they actually become real practising teachers; and the other would be to help (some if not all) practising teachers raise their expectations and seek to build on every learner's potential, whatever their ethnicity, culture or first language.

Identity and minority language use

In the Republic of Ireland one promising development in support of the Irish language are the *Gaelscoileanna*, or all-Irish schools, and O'Rourke (2005) cites evidence that 54 per cent of the Irish student population in her study would send their children to such schools, if one such were available to them. Clearly, if threatened minority languages are to survive, then 'use' needs to be maintained and increased, in terms of the numbers who speak the particular language regularly and pass it down the generations. Lying behind the notion of 'use' however is the notion of 'identity', and O'Rourke's paper explores the relationship between identity and use in the case of Irish (in the Republic of Ireland) and Galician (in Spain). Her subjects were 815 Irish and 725 Galician students. Both groups placed high value on the symbolic role of the language in contributing to ethnic identification and as an intrinsic cultural value in its own right. However, in the case of the Irish students, the Irish language was not entirely central to their understanding of Irishness, whereas Galician was seen by the Galician students as being much more central. In both cases there was a gap between the language as a marker of identity and actual use of the minority language. Only 4 per cent of the Irish students and 26 per cent of the Galicians recorded themselves as habitual speakers of the particular language. For the majority of these students, then, the functional use of the minority language was largely ritualistic and the language was not seen as a marker of a struggle of some sort against a dominant ethnic or other group.

Complementary identities

The theme of identity is also taken up by Creese, Bhatt, Bhojani & Martin (2005: 06–541), this time mainly in relation to Gujarati as a heritage and community language in Leicester (England). The students were attending two complementary schools for Gujarati, i.e. schools which have been formed voluntarily by members of particular ethnic or linguistic communities in order to pass down a heritage to their children, there being inadequate provision for state bilingual education in the particular area. Three types of identity were explored: heritage/community identity; learning identity; and multicultural identity, though the researchers acknowledge that other identities exist also. The two Gujarati schools provided an opportunity for young people to meet, to use the language and explore concepts such as nationality, culture, ethnicity, bilingualism and learning; thus a safe and unthreatening environment was created. The children were considered to have acquired a flexibility in moving to and fro between their languages to an extent that would not have been possible in the mainstream education that was also available to them.

Benefits of bi-literacy in ethnic/linguistic minorities

Literacy is not only something that is taught at school. It can also be acquired in natural settings, e.g. in the home and the local community, especially perhaps in the case of bilingual children from ethnic and linguistic minorities. The study by Kenner, Kress, Al-Khatib, Kam & Tsai (2004) focuses on a small number of 10-year-old children who were becoming biliterate in English and in Chinese, Arabic or Spanish. It was found that the children did not become confused between the two systems and managed to cope well with them and to gain some cognitive benefit by being able to look for and understand differences between the two systems. Given this capacity for biliteracy in children, the writers argue it becomes important for schools to become aware of this and to afford such pupils sufficient opportunity to develop it further.

Teachers' role in bi-literacy development of minority language learners

The theme of literacy in the home language of minority-language students is reviewed in German by Ehlers (2004). Literacy acquisition in L1 and L2 are compared, including a discussion of the role of oracy in supporting it. There is also a useful discussion of theories underlying bilingual education, such as facilitation-theory and time-on-task theory. Success is considered to depend not solely on quantity of input and time, but also on a range of qualitative processes. These include a teacher who is learner-centred and encourages co-operative forms of learning; teacher language that is attuned to the learning group; taking account of literacy skills acquired out of school; and a learning environment that allows for flexible arrangements and more differentiation.

5. Computer-mediated languages learning (CMLL)

In this section, four themes are highlighted: first, studies which reflect (and to some extent, agonise)

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on the current status, quality and effectiveness of research in the area of CMLL; second, studies which indicate that in fact CMLL research is beginning to generate its own interesting insights into how languages are learnt and used and, in so doing, to make its own distinctive contribution to SLA research; third, studies which show the potential benefits of CMLL but which also identify a number of obstacles which might have to be overcome; and finally, studies which highlight affective and social issues when students attempt to engage in CMLL I prefer the term CMLL but of course the term CALL (computer-assisted language learning) is also widely used, so I use this latter term if it is used in a particular report which I am discussing.

CALL research on the margins

The paper by Coleman (2005) provides a thought-provoking account of CALL research within the overall field of languages-related research. Coleman believes it is firmly situated on the margins and has not made much impact on the most prominent writers who occupy a central position in the SLA or intercultural research fields. As evidence of his claim, he states that CALL research is hardly ever mentioned in their publications. In one of my previous annual reviews, I pointed out something similar and hoped there would be a 'coming together' which would enhance the work of prominent SLA and intercultural researchers as well as being a new impetus to the CALL research field. With a small number of exceptions, this has not happened thus far. Coleman sets out a number of useful ideas which would foreground CALL research by minimising ephemerality and maximising generality.

Meta-analysis of CALL research

Another overview of CALL research, this time from the perspective of meta-analysis, reaches a similarly sober conclusion. Felix (2005: 06–215) asks what meta-analyses can tell us about CALL effectiveness. Her overview discusses issues such as what is meant by effectiveness, defines affect-size, evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of meta-analysis research, and then proceeds to her own meta-analysis. She finds a correlation between excellence in research design and caution exercised in reporting results. This chimes in well with my own impression that, in the initial years of CALL research, some papers (however useful and inspirational they may have been) were in fact hardly research at all but were enthusiastic descriptions of new software and tended to make extravagant claims. Felix finds relatively little to report about the effectiveness of ICT in L2 learning and claims that the clearest gains are in relation to L1, especially in writing. As with Coleman (above), this is a well-informed and salutary account.

ICT and the SLA research agenda

An equally important but this time forward-looking account of a possible research role for CALL is offered by Chapelle (2004) who provides a useful and succinct account of how ICT can help expand the SLA research agenda by bringing in new contexts of use and new methods of collecting and analysing data. Her overview develops this theme in relation to the nature of 'interaction', learner language, individual differences, linguistic analysis, individual differences, language learning and teaching. It also raises ethical considerations. She makes the salutary claim that at present researchers' capacity to collect large amounts of data on acquisition and performance considerably exceed the capacity to analyse this appropriately.

Output theory

A further example of the welcome trend to embed ICT language-learning research in the mainstream SLA tradition is provided by Leahy (2004: 04–339)). In this, she draws on Swain's (1995) output theory, in the case of advanced students of German who were engaged on a collaborative task which required the development of a marketing strategy. A high proportion of the students' interactions took place in the TL, and both their spoken and written output were analysed. The analysis showed some evidence of 'noticing the gap' and 'controlling and internalising linguistic knowledge', both of which reflect Swain's theory.

Multimedia and phonological working memory capacity

The role of phonological working memory capacity (PWMC) in relation to L2 reading was investigated by Chun & Payne (2004) in respect of second-year UG students at university in the USA. Those with low PWMC looked up on average three times as many translations of words on screen as those with high PWMC. This suggested that appropriate multimedia software might help to compensate for limitations in working memory when reading an L2.

ICT corpus analysis

Belz (2004: 04–476) offers a fascinating account of a possible relationship between learner ICT corpus analyses and L2 acquisition research. A telecollaborative corpus allowed for the identification of each learner's use of *da*-compound forms by learners of German over a two-month period which in principle could be extended for much longer, and also for tracking the interaction between learners and experts in the language and possibly for gauging the influence of the latter on the former.

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Explicitness/implicitness

Working with advanced learners of Spanish in a computer environment, Rosa & Leow (2004) sought to evaluate the effect of varying degrees of explicitness-implicitness on students' ability to recognise and produce TL structures, both immediately after their teaching and then also over time. The variable treatment included the pre-task provision of explicit grammar; feedback concerned with the input process during the task; and variable degrees of explicitness/implicitness in the nature of the feedback. An advantage was found for explicitness, more in production than in recognition, and more with new words than those that were already known. The report suggests there may be benefit at various strategic points during a problem-solving task in working on activities that are designed to challenge students to notice particular language-forms.

The problem with constructivism

When an expected research finding is confirmed, this can often bring satisfaction to the researchers. However, equally satisfying but in a different way can be an expectation that is not confirmed, particularly if a possible reason for this can be found. This occurred in the study by Beatty & Nunan (2004: 04–165) of computer-mediated collaborative learning. Working with a special CD-ROM and other material, students were assigned to either a behavioural or a constructivist model of learning. The expectation had been that the constructivist model would prove superior by leading to more exploration of the particular topic and also to a greater amount of collaboration among students. In fact, the hypothesis was not supported. One of the possible reasons why the constructivist model was less successful than anticipated was that many learners do not possess sophisticated learning skills of the sort that can exploit a constructivist challenge, but instead need quite a lot of support and scaffolding, in order to avoid becoming muddled or distracted. This finding has clear implications for teachers in inducting their students into new modes of learning and helping them acquire usable collaborative strategies and develop productive learning relationships.

Wrong blend

Another instance of researchers encountering findings that were not anticipated is provided by Barr, Leakey & Ranchoux (2005). Working with first-year university students of French in Northern Ireland, they sought to ascertain whether a programme which blended CALL and on-line activity would show any advantages over a more traditional conversation class, in the development of conversation skills over a ten-week period. In addition to quantitative data arising from assessments, qualitative data were also obtained in order to seek possible explanations. The results must have been salutary for proponents of CALL, because the more traditional comparison group showed a considerably greater gain by the end of the allotted period. One of the possible reasons for this was that the experimental, blended-learning group needed to spend valuable time in learning to use the technology. Nonetheless from the qualitative student data opinion generally was in favour of the new technologies, though the class tutors were no doubt justified in believing that (at present at least) oral communication skills are better developed in a real context through direct interaction.

DVD sub-titling

The advent of DVD technology has many possible implications for the learning of additional languages, one of which lies in the varied use of sub-titles. Stewart & Pertusa (2004: 04–511) investigated two possibilities: conventional subtitling and close-captions in the target language, in the case of students at university level learning Spanish. It was surmised that the close-captioning in the target language would prove superior for retention, in that conventional subtitling would be focus the students' attention on reading the English subtitles rather than on understanding the auditory input. In the event, the results of a vocabulary recognition test were inconclusive. Nonetheless, the students found the process of working with the target language close-captioning to be very worthwhile and felt it helped considerably.

Multiple intelligences

One might assume that technology-mediated language learning has the capacity to cater for a wide range of differences among learners, given the variety of sources of information (visual, auditory) and stimuli it can offer and the wide-ranging combinations of skill it can facilitate. As such, in principle it should sit well with the notion of 'multiple intelligences' (MI); and indeed the role of on-line provision in supporting MI is the theme of a study by Green & Tanner (2005). They provide a brief but interesting discussion of on-line teaching for MI, bringing out possible differences between children and adult learners in the process, and they set out important implications for teacher education. Among their conclusions are that MI theory is a useful tool for evaluating on-line languages courses; that tasks which are not particularly favoured by educators may sometimes prove surprisingly agreeable to some participants; and that designing tasks around MI theory can help learners to engage and to learn better.

The mobile learner

In my own learning of Chinese, an ICT medium of which I make regular use is the mobile phone,

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particularly in txt-mode, and I was therefore delighted to read the report by Kiernan & Aizawa (2004: 04–281) on the use of the mobile by Japanese EFL students at elementary and lower intermediate levels at university. Students were grouped as: using a mobile for txt-messages; using email; speaking. Although the study is highly preliminary, it provides a useful initial account of some of the potential advantages and disadvantages of mobiles for TL-learning and -use. The writers suggest it may be particularly suitable for learners at a fairly elementary stage, but I have a strong feeling that its use will in time prove to be more wide-ranging than that.

Student use of the web

Another insight into students' perceptions of ICT comes from the study by Rosell-Aguilar (2004) who wished to find out how students of FL-Spanish at university in England made use of the web, e.g. what processes are involved, how long they search and how they perceive the web. Most students were found to be confident users, assembling information quickly and without apparent difficulty, and they tended to believe that their use of the web facilitated their learning of Spanish. Most of the students appeared to be self-taught and to have discovered much for themselves. The authors concluded that a future focus of research might be the language-learning strategies which students use when undertaking their web-searches. Another study featuring languages-learner use of the web is by Dubreil, Herron & Cole (2004: 04–487) who found that use of the internet enhanced learning of the target-language culture, though with some variation in that the students seemed to find it easier to focus on cultural products than on cultural processes.

Intercultural inter-subjectivity

One acknowledged expert who would gain Coleman's (above) approval for extending her research to embrace ICT is Claire Kramsch. In their paper, Ware & Kramsch (2005) rightly argue that a major challenge facing language teacher education lies in the domain of technology-mediated language learning. The claim that computers have promising potential for facilitating interaction among students who are otherwise separated geographically, linguistically and culturally. Their study however shows that the course of cross-cultural technology-mediated communication is not always smooth, and that problems can arise, in which case the role of the teacher becomes vital in helping students overcome their miscommunications and become more skilled in intercultural negotiation. Their insightful account sets out some implications of on-line teaching, e.g. it seems to require more and not less imagination than conventional approaches, in that it challenges students to imagine their tele-collaborative partner as different from oneself 'recognising the other in his or her historicity and subjectivity, and to see ourselves through the eyes of others' (Ware & Kramsch 2005: 202). For them, the notion of a tele-collaborative community implies a willingness to go beyond the propositional meanings of words (as in dictionaries) towards their more personal and cultural meanings. Well said.

Intercultural tele-collaboration

The theory-base explored by O'Dowd & Eberbach (2004) is that of intercultural learning, with reference to the role of tele-collaboration in network-based language-learning. The interculturality was of an Irish-German variety, and the study has a particular interest in the role of the teachers. The view is challenged that this role is that of a passive 'guide on the side' and that students will automatically benefit simply from being immersed in tele-collaboration. On the contrary, the writers claim that making a success of on-line intercultural activity does not come naturally to students, and that teachers need to provide relevant background information, define the parameters of the exchanges, monitor the on-line interaction and guide the students in the creation and analysis of posts. They also claim that on trans-national intercultural projects the teachers in each country need to be in regular touch with each other.

CMC, learner autonomy and intercultural understanding

As a language-learner myself (Chinese), I make extensive use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in order to sustain contact with my small community of NS Chinese friends, so I was delighted to read a first-class qualitative study of CMC by Fischer, Evans & Esch (2004). They report on what happened when secondary school students aged 14–18 in England, France, Belgium and Senegal were put in touch with each other via a CMC bulletin board. The 152 students were divided into 24 mixed groups. Both L1 and L2 were used and participants were encouraged to communicate freely, based in part on stimuli or tasks which were provided, e.g. creating a group poem. The researchers concluded that a CMC experience of this sort promoted certain kinds of learner autonomy (e.g. deciding which language to use at any given point; whom to address; length and frequency of response or comment) and also intercultural understanding. Although some problems remained, e.g. dominance of discussion by some and reticence by others, nonetheless the experience was considered to build well on secondary school students' existing computer literacy and readiness to communicate with other people of their age.

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E-mail and cultural stereotyping

E-mail is probably the most powerful source of human interaction since the telephone. Its role in relation to cultural stereotypes (forming, modifying, dismissing or reinforcing these) is elegantly discussed by Itakura (2004: 04–40) in a most impressive paper. Students were from Hong Kong, learning Japanese, in e-mail interaction with NS Japanese counterparts in Japan. The project showed that NS partners and classroom teaching were sufficient to override stereotypes which had been formed from the media or by hearsay from friends. Certain gains arose from the e-mail experience, such as students developing more sensitive and complex insights into culture, learning to negotiate the validity of previous assumptions and becoming more adept in dealing with interculturality. At the same time, however, there was a risk that they might see their new NS Japanese partners as being too authoritative and hence might form new stereotypes. Some useful implications for teaching are drawn from this.

Factors hindering intercultural success

In Ware's own (2005) study – see also Ware & Kramsch (2005) above – there is a further interrogation of the factors which hindered students from making a success of their interpersonal on-line interactions. Three main tensions were identified: different expectations and norms for tele-collaboration; social and institutional factors that shape tensions; and individual differences in motivation and use of time. Ware argues that foreign language educators who are interested in technology-enhanced learning need to be well-informed about potential tensions such as the above which can easily emerge in on-line exchanges, both in identifying such tensions and in having strategies which will help students resolve them.

Computer anxiety

The notion of 'computer anxiety' in relation to feedback is explored by Matsumura & Hann (2004) in respect of Japanese university students' EFL writing. The choice of mode of feedback (via the teacher or on-line) was found to vary according to the students' level of computer anxiety. Those with low anxiety tended to opt for the computer feedback, whereas those with higher anxiety tended to prefer feedback from the teacher. Not surprisingly, most improvement came from those students who received both modes. It was concluded that method of feedback should be made to suit the feedback style of the student. This is a fair point, but for me the report also implies a need for induction, training and support for those who are computer-anxious, in order to help them become less so.

Unmonitored on-line chatting

The effects of an unmonitored on-line chatting programme on students' motivation and written production were investigated by Coniam & Wong (2004: 04–359). The students were at Grades 7–10 at secondary school in Hong Kong, learning English and experiencing a maximum of 20 hours treatment over one month. Compared with a control group, the experimental students were found to obtain substantial motivational benefit, e.g. spending more time on task than required. Although there were no clear differences in measured attainment, a qualitative analysis showed the experimental group to use more complex sentences which took them beyond their interlanguage levels.

Rapport

Reasonable claims can be made for CALL technology that it increases flexibility of provision, reduces negative affect, helps cater for different learning skills, provides certain forms of social interaction and facilitates the creation of new types of community. Jiang & Ramsay (2005) were interested to learn if it could also support what they term 'rapport' between teachers and students. 'Rapport' was understood as including 'mutual attentiveness', 'positivity' and 'coordination' and could exist only in interaction. They consider it can enhance learning, help motivate learners and reduce their anxiety. Working with a group of students studying Chinese at university in Australia, they devised a computer-mediated approach in support of rapport which contained e-mail and also special sound-files which the students could access. Various rapport-building strategies were introduced. Their conclusion is that CALL does have potential for building up rapport beyond the sorts of face-to-face interactions which take place in classrooms. They provide an interesting discussion of issues (mostly cultural) which they consider might be further explored.

Social interaction and cognitive development

A further instance of the vital role of social interaction in mediating cognitive development is provided by Jeon-Ellis, Debski & Wigglesworth (2005). Working with students of French at university in Australia, they made use of PrOCALL (Project-oriented computer-assisted language learning). Of particular interest was the collaborative dialogue in which the students engaged, at times with each other and at times involving the screen also. However, a key factor to take into account was the relationships which the students had with each other. These influenced the range of learning opportunities which they had and also each individual's contribution. In the case of

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social exclusion, there were fewer language-related episodes, but if collaboration was smooth, then the ensuing naturalistic interaction at the computer helped them reconstruct the utterances of others and apply them in a different context. At times, the interactions switched to English as L1 but the reasons for this were not entirely clear, though at times this may have happened because of technological problems.

6. Components of proficiency

This section begins with a discussion of two studies, each dealing with a topic which is central to the notion of languages proficiency: in the first case 'communicative competence' reflecting a German perspective, written in German; and in the second case 'aptitude' situated in a particular national context. There follow two studies on vocabulary and a number of others which discuss the four language-modes (listening, speaking, reading and writing), singly or in combination. Finally a number of studies are discussed which focus on different aspects of metalinguistic awareness, a topic which currently attracts much research interest.

Communicative competence

Schmenk (2005) offers a well-informed and thought-provoking discussion of 'communicative competence' in todays' world. There is a useful account of two of the main theorists who have been considered as contributing substantially to the concept: Hymes and Habermas, whom she describes as 'false friends' in respect of their views. Communicative competence is discussed from a number of perspectives, e.g. as a myth, as an instance of *Zeitgeist* and as a theoretical construct, very different to what it was some thirty years ago, and which Schmenk believes deserves serious re-consideration to suit today's world in the age of computers, raising issues of 'computer awareness' (a possible further development, she suggests, of 'language awareness') and 'media literacy'.

Aptitude

Aptitude tests have been around for a very long time, but in recent years they do not appear to have been high on the agenda either of SLA research or of policy development. The question then arises as to what a modern language aptitude test might look like and what it might help predict. The study by Kiss & Nikolov (2005: 05–425) is based on an aptitude test which they developed for 12-year-old Hungarian students. Their paper provides a useful overview of the background to language aptitude testing and sets out the basis on which their own new instrument was constructed. After administering the test, they found it accounted for some 22 per cent of the variation in English language performance, with motivation at 8 per cent coming next, and both of these well ahead of other possible variables. There were some interesting correlates of language aptitude: for example, girls did better than boys and there were school differences, suggesting perhaps that different schools might attract pupils with differing levels of aptitude. I like this study, because it is not just about aptitude in the abstract; it is about aptitude in a particular social and educational setting.

Acoustic variability and vocabulary learning

To what extent does acoustic variability affect L2 vocabulary learning? In the study by Barcroft & Sommers (2005) a number of experiments were designed to ascertain the effects on L2 vocabulary learning of one speaker (no variability), or three speakers (moderate variability), or six speakers (high variability). It was found that successful vocabulary learning was most strongly associated with the high-variability treatment. There is a very useful discussion, both of possible theoretical explanations which might lie behind this finding and of possible more practical implications for materials design and pedagogy.

Vocabulary and proficiency

To what extent and in what ways is L2 vocabulary knowledge related to L2 proficiency? Professional commonsense tells us that there must be a relationship of some sort. A merit of the study by Zareva, Schwanenfluegel & Nikolova (2005: 05–458) is that it considers this issue in some depth. The study focused on three macro-level dimensions: quantity (breadth of vocabulary), quality (connectivity among lexical items in the language-user's mental lexicon) and learners' metacognitive awareness. It was concluded that as the L2 learner's proficiency developed, so did two of these lexical dimensions (quantity and quality). In particular, vocabulary size, knowledge of words from different frequency bands, numbers of associations, and within-group commonality were more developed in advanced- than in intermediate-level students. However, evidence was lacking of lexical development in the third dimension of metacognitive awareness.

Modes of listening input

Three different modes of listening input are featured in the research by Sueyoshi & Hardison (2005), in the case of two levels of L2 English learners (low-intermediate and advanced). The first mode consisted of audio-visual input including face and gestures; the second was the same but without gestures; and the third was audio only. The advanced students gained their highest scores in the 'face' condition, while the low-intermediate did best in the 'face + gestures' condition, and this group reported they found the speaker's gestures and lip movements helped their comprehension. The findings are interesting, but

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the writers properly acknowledge that much more research is needed in this area before robust generalisations can be made. They claim that linguistic and cultural factors, plus the listener's prior knowledge, all potentially influence the visible components of a speech event and require further investigation.

Bottom-up dependency in listening

An account of the differences and the relationship between top-down and bottom-up listening is offered by Field (2004: 04–328), based on three experiments. His discussion includes the notion of 'bottom-up dependency' and also the conditions and the extent to which one is considered to over-ride the other.

Listening anxiety

When we think of 'language anxiety' there may be an understandable tendency to do so in relation to speaking, since it is well-known that speaking a second or foreign language can put even efficient learners under stress. However, language anxiety is by no means restricted to speaking, as is well illustrated in Elkahafi's (2005) investigation of 'listening anxiety' among post-secondary learners of Arabic. It was established that, although FL learning anxiety and FL listening anxiety showed some overlap, there were distinguishable differences also, suggesting that FL listening anxiety does exist as something different from FL learning anxiety. Significant negative correlations were found between FL listening and FL learning anxiety, students' listening scores and final overall grades. Female students were found to be more anxious than males. It was also found that 3rd-year students were less anxious on both dimensions (learning/listening anxiety) than first-year students, suggesting that as proficiency rises, so perhaps does anxiety decline.

Creativity in oral narration

There are many factors which might lie behind differences in L2-learners' ability to perform oral narrative tasks. One such is 'creativity', the object of a study by Álbert & Kormos (2004). They found that creativity did seem to account for 10–15% of the variation in students' performance. Their study suggests that creativity is multifaceted and that this enables students to create in different ways with their oral narrations, according to the particular facets which they show. Thus, 'creative' (in one sense) students produced larger amounts of fluent talk, while 'creative' in another sense (this time, 'originality') students tended to speak less but to produce more complex utterances.

Accent and pronunciation

In the big debates about languages-teaching (e.g. audio-lingual versus cognitive code-learning versus communicative), the topic of accent and pronunciation has not always been prominent. It is, however, fore-grounded from a research perspective in a study by Derwing & Munro (2005). They consider what lies behind concepts such as intelligibility, comprehensibility, accentedness and primary (or, nuclear) stress, and they elaborate on some current problems and misconceptions in teaching (e.g. teachers' lack of knowledge of phonetics). Although they see potential in the application of technology-enhanced teaching of pronunciation and accent, they offer a word of caution by claiming that at present what is available tends to be of the 'one size fits all' variety.

Word recognition speed and higher-order L2 reading comprehension

Reading is a highly complex process which operates at different speeds at different levels for different purposes, and there is still much to learn abut the inter-relationships between the different processes that are involved when reading takes place. Some fascinating insight into one such possible relationship is offered by Fukkink, Hulstijn & Simis (2005:05–65) who explore the relationship between speed of L2 word recognition and higher-order L2 reading comprehension. They were particularly interested in the effects of training in the retrieval of word-meaning forms in the case of intermediate-level learners of L2 English in Holland, with some assistance from computer-software. It was concluded that the training can indeed help students improve their lexical access skills. However, there were no positive results which might suggest transfer of such gains to higher-order reading comprehension. They offer three possible explanations: that the gains in lexical access were too small to make a difference; that lexical access would need to accelerate for most or all words for the higher-order effect to be achieved; that the role of lexical access in L2 reading is too small to make a significant impact on higher-order L2 reading, in view of the highly complex nature of the process overall, and this latter is the possible explanation which at present they favour.

Reading comprehension and lexical gain

Pulido's (2004: 04–373) study is concerned with students' level of comprehension of L2 reading and whether this influences the intake, gain and retention of new vocabulary which has been 'incidentally' encountered as they read. In addition, the study focuses on the role of 'topic familiarity' in this area. The students were a group of 92 learners of Spanish at three different university levels, all of them NS English. The findings are too complex to be summarised adequately here but they suggest that passage comprehension is important for lexical gain (meaning recognition and production) and retention,

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but that topic familiarity can yield differential patterns of relationship.

L1–L2 reading skills transferability

The transferability of reading skills to L2 and the particular role of L2 working memory were the focus of Walter's (2004: 04–376) study, based on two groups of French learners of English. Both groups were proficient in reading French as L1, but one group was more advanced than the other in English (upper-intermediate as opposed to lower-intermediate). Neither group showed any real problems in processing individual sentences in their English texts, but the difference between them was that the more advanced group had been able to build well-structured mental representations of the texts. They were thus able to draw on their ability in L1 reading, and this seemed in some way to be related to their L2 working memory. In other words, the less advanced group were not lacking in any structuring ability but rather in 'the attainment of some level of L2 ability which creates a precondition for the structure-building skill to operate' (Walter 2004: 334).

Extensive reading: conditions for success

Extensive reading is a highly attractive concept, one that is difficult to oppose, and is an important component in language courses which seek to develop a rounded proficiency. Yet, its implementation has not always gone well. Green (2005: 307), for example, writes of a particular extensive reading scheme: 'Perhaps nowhere in the world do the glowing aims of the scheme stand in starker contrast to the grim realities of its implementation than in Hong Kong'. Green points to marked divergences between the scheme's stated intentions and procedures and what actually took place on the ground (characterised by considerable diversity from one school to another). Green argues that for extensive reading to be successful, it must be integrated into the language curriculum as a whole. He questions the value of reading schemes which are bought in, and favours instead those which are developed to take account of local opportunities and constraints, in which teachers collaborate and share good practice. He also argues that an interactive mode is an important condition for the success of such schemes, since it facilitates negotiation of meaning and provides contexts in which learners can encounter and debate ideas.

Explicit knowledge

'Language awareness', 'metalinguistic awareness', 'knowledge about language' are terms much in use nowadays which reflect an upsurge of interest across the world in the knowledge base which lies behind the nature and use of language. A welcome addition to the literature is an authoritative account by Ellis (2004) of L2 explicit knowledge, its definition and its measurement. The discussion contains a comparison of implicit and explicit knowledge in which different theoretical viewpoints about the relationship between these two concepts are evaluated. Then the key characteristics of explicit knowledge are analysed (e.g. it is conscious, it is declarative and declarative rules are often imprecise and inaccurate) and implications of these are addressed. There is a highly useful summary of key studies which deal with explicit knowledge and finally there is a discussion of how L2 explicit knowledge might be measured in language aptitude tests, grammaticality judgement tasks, tests of metalanguage, verbal reports. Guidelines are suggested for measuring metalinguistic knowledge. For those interested in this topic, this is essential reading.

Metalinguistic knowledge and TL proficiency

Elder & Mainwaring (2004: 04–490) offer a fascinating account of the possible relationship between metalinguistic knowledge and target-language proficiency in the case of Australian university learners of Chinese. They found that if students possessed knowledge of the Chinese grammatical system, this helped predict their course performance overall, though some types of grammatical knowledge were more useful than others in this regard. They also found that the nature of the particular assessment task and the previous language-study experience of the learners influenced the knowledge-proficiency relationship.

Metalanguage and levels of proficiency

Fortune (2005) investigates the extent to which advanced learners of English as L2 draw on more or on less metalanguage than do learners at intermediate level. Use was made of a form-focused collaborative writing task. The transcripts suggested that learners did not need to rely solely on metalanguage (because they were also able to draw on their implicit knowledge of language in order to reach agreement about which forms to use), but that nonetheless the presence of a metalanguage in the mind of a learner can help focus attention and also decide what form to use. The advanced learners were found to make much more use of metalanguage than did their intermediate counterparts from an earlier study, being 2.5 times more likely to use technical metalinguistic terms and four times more likely to formulate a rule.

Metalanguage and cross-linguistic interaction in multilinguals

Prima facie it would appear highly likely that multilinguals would be in a favoured position to develop metalinguistic knowledge, having two or

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more different systems on which to draw. The study by Jessner (2005) is concerned with 17 university students in the South Tyrol, all of them German-Italian bilinguals learning English as L3. The research took the form of an introspective study in which the informants reflected on their problem-solving behaviour. Metalanguage was found to be used in all three languages, with German the most favoured for purposes such as style, grammar and alternative phrasing. If a student was not able to produce a target-language item with the help of their favoured language supporter (probably German or Italian), then the metalanguage of one of the other two other language systems might be drawn on instead. The writer of this fascinating study considers that the use of metalanguage has the potential to afford new insights into cross-linguistic interaction in multilingual individuals.

7. Younger learners

This section addresses not only additional languages but also first languages, especially where these are not the dominant, high-status language of a particular country. Two studies focus on the key issue of continuity from primary into secondary; a number deal with strategies (whether applied by teachers or by younger learners themselves), including the use of diaries or portfolios; others focus on attempts to teach important subject matter through the medium of the target language; and finally some studies illustrate what young children can at times bring spontaneously into their own learning, whether through play or through the invention of their own metalanguage.

Continuity: a problem

It is well-known (cf. Burstall et al. 1974) that a major problem with languages at primary school lies in the achievement of successful continuity into secondary school education. Despite the major prominence which this problem has received in many countries, it has repeatedly shown itself as very difficult to overcome. This is highlighted in a small-scale study in England by Bolster, Balandier-Brown & Rea-Dickens (2004) who found that the primary-school foreign language experience had led to student enjoyment, openness to other cultures and some build-up of fluency and confidence. The teachers at secondary school were in principle in favour of languages at primary, but a major problem of continuity remained where there was a lack of liaison between the two sectors. The secondary school teachers had to accommodate students from a wide range of primary schools which varied in the foreign languages provision which they had made. One possible way forward, according to the researchers, might lie in adapting the Council of Europe Language Portfolio, since this might help the process of communication between the two sectors.

Continuity: a planned and generalised solution

Continuity is not an issue which can be resolved by an individual teacher or even a single school; it can only be resolved by collaborative planning across schools, both within and between sectors (primary/secondary). It is encouraging therefore to read of an impressive state initiative in New South Wales, Australia, in the report by Chesterton, Stengler-Peters, Moran & Piccioli (2004: 04–262) which specified a number of hours for languages learning, set up systems of collaboration across the schools and implemented approved action plans devised by schools in partnership. The evaluation identified a number of key factors for supporting the effectiveness and the sustainability of the pathways which had been created. These were: initial and continuing cooperation across schools; collaborative establishment and acceptance of a coherent 5-year curriculum (which straddles the transition period); continuing access to funding for qualified and skilled teachers; and in-school support and commitment. Bravo!

Portfolio for intercultural learning

If the educative benefits of early languages-learning at primary (elementary) school are to be realised, then not only should target-language proficiency be addressed but also certain types of educative awareness, such as language awareness and intercultural awareness. The paper by Rantz & Horan (2005) shows how primary school teachers in the Republic of Ireland, within the national initiative on modern languages at primary school, were helped in promoting intercultural awareness by drawing on the European Languages Portfolio. They conclude that a tool such as this, appropriately exploited in class by the teacher, can help young children develop a level of awareness that many might not have expected in children at such a young age.

Learner diaries

The use of learner diaries was investigated by Simard (2004a) in respect of francophone students learning ESL at Grade 6 in Canada. Two groups were involved: a regular group (RG) receiving 1 hour's teaching per week, and an enriched group (EG) receiving 1 hour 40 minutes per week. The EG were more in favour of the diaries, and the use of these seemed to help in developing their acquisition of ESL.

Investigating young learners' strategies

Much of the research on languages at primary school has understandably been focused on the relationship between different models of provision (e.g. immersion, subject-teaching, embedding, language awareness) and the outcomes these achieve. Less

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attention has been paid to the processes which lie in between the provisions and the outcomes, and in particular, as Gu, Hu & Zhang (2004) point out in their excellent paper, very little attention has been paid to the question of how researchers or teachers can gain insight into the strategies used by young learners. The authors claim that techniques such as questionnaires which may work for adults are unlikely to be appropriate for 5-year-olds for example. They provide a useful overview of such research as has been undertaken on children's L2-learning strategies and set out further ideas of their own, particularly in relation to think-aloud protocols geared to specific tasks. This is a useful paper for those interested in researching the strategies that young learners employ.

Class-wide peer tutoring

The concept of class-wide per-tutoring (CWPT) is the focus of a study by Xu, Gelfer & Perkins (2005), in which they report on its effects on the social interactions of children at Grade 2 in elementary (primary) school classrooms. CWPT was originally devised to support children from lower socio-economic, culturally diverse backgrounds, often with an older student as peer tutor, but in the present study the peer-tutoring was undertaken by children in the same class. Some of the children were English-language learners, and others (in the other class) were native English speakers. Among the positive behaviours which were identified were: positive interaction, associative and/or cooperative play, positive linguistic interaction, peer initiates interaction, child responds positively, child initiates interaction, peer responds positively. The effect of CWPT was that it significantly increased the number and the quality of social behaviours for both groups, and showed also a decrease in parallel-play (i.e. play with no sign of social interaction).

Phonological awareness-training at kindergarten

The effects of phonological awareness training (PAT) on the development of oral proficiency were explored by Giambo & McKinney (2004) in the case of children at kindergarten. The children were in two groups: those receiving PAT and those receiving support for reading. Among the components of phonological awareness training were: elision, blending phonemes-word; segmenting words, sound matching and memory for digits. It was found that the phonological awareness group achieved greater gains than the reading group in oral English proficiency but not in receptive vocabulary (where the reading training presumably helped the reading group). The writers suggest that this is a limited provisional finding only and that further longitudinal research would be needed before robust general conclusions could be supported.

Computer-mediated peer-tutoring

Much of the research on computer-mediated language learning draws on late adolescents or adults, e.g. in higher education, so it is encouraging to read the study by Morris (2005) which is based on students at Grade 5 in an elementary L2-Spanish immersion class. All students were from English-speaking families. The students were put in pairs and asked to do a computer-mediated jigsaw task. Of interest was the nature of the interaction and feedback which would take place in this setting. It was concluded that computer-mediated communication (CMC) provided opportunities for working and 'chatting' (synchronous, text-bound) about language, and for providing and making use of feedback. The children corrected many of their peer's errors and subsequently repairs were produced. Negotiations proved more effective than recasts in generating immediate repair. There is an interesting discussion of how CMC compares with real face-to-face interlocutors in respect of interaction and corrective feedback. Although the present results seem promising, the writers advise caution in making strong claims about the effectiveness of new technologies and their impact on L2 learning.

Form-focused instruction and corrective feedback

Working with French-immersion students at grade 5 (aged 10–11), Lyster (2004a: 04–289) sought to ascertain the effect of form-focused instruction (FFI) and corrective feedback on the students' ability to achieve correct grammatical gender. FFI was combined with three further treatments: the use of recasts, or prompts, or no feedback, and a comparison was drawn with non-FFI classes. The findings show a clear advantage for FFI in achieving correctness in gender, with the use of prompts proving more effective than the use of recasts or no feedback. It is claimed that this combination helps such learners to acquire rule-based representations of the target form and to proceduralise their knowledge. I admire this study very much, particularly because it deals with a real classroom teaching issue in a systematic, evidence-based manner.

Rising above the immersion plateau

A problem commonly associated with learners on immersion programmes has been that, while they may well develop an impressive fluency and confidence in their use of the immersion language, the same success is not necessarily obtained in their continuing mastery of grammatical form, with the consequence that a 'plateau' in their interlanguage

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development may be reached. Taking account of five quasi-experimental studies of 49 French immersion classrooms in Canada, in the case of learners aged 7–14, Lyster (2004b: 06–251) identifies particular strategies which seem to keep students' interlanguage development on the move rather than allowing it to 'plateau'. These include provision of opportunities for 'noticing', language awareness and controlled practice with feedback. Lyster also claims that, although 'negotiation for meaning' is an important skill to acquire, its overuse can have a negative effect, since the impetus to comprehend the basic meaning of a message might conceivably deflect students away from the attention to form which stimulates the further development of their interlanguage.

Different age-groups and CLIL

Finland is an acknowledged world leader in several aspects of education, not least in thinking and development concerned with CLIL (content and language-integrated learning). The paper by Jäppinen (2005) deals specifically with children aged 7–15 learning mathematics and science through the medium of L2 English, French or Swedish, in comparison with another group which received their education through L1 Finnish. The students were in three age-groups: 7–9, 10–12 and 13–15. Generally, the findings seemed supportive of L2 CLIL, though age group 1 (the youngest) had some difficulties with more abstract scientific topics. In the second age-group, cognitive development in the L2 was at times faster than in the L1, while in the third age-group (the oldest) both groups – the CLIL and the comparison – seemed comparable (the authors surmise that this was possibly because less CLIL was taking place within this age-group). Central to these positive outcomes is the firm intention to ensure that CLIL students also receive a large number of L1 lessons during their schooling. This is a top-class study, essential reading (I would say) for anyone interested in CLIL.

Mother tongue and primary maths in Botswana

The arguments for teaching at least in part in the mother tongue in the case of children from minority or low-privilege language groups are well-known. However, this does not mean that the acceptance or success of mother-tongue teaching can be taken for granted. This is well-illustrated by Mooko (2004), writing about the use of Setswana to teach primary school mathematics in Botswana. A number of problems are identified, including the difficulty of expressing certain mathematical ideas in Setswana, the questionable quality of translations between the two languages, and the existence of several other languages in addition to Setswana, which could give rise to issues of equity, since for many pupils Setswana is not their first language. Thus, a good idea, to be successfully implemented, may require a great deal of time, effort and structured support. A problem, but one worth solving – time perhaps for Mama Ramotswa.

Children as autonomous learners

When we think of autonomy, we may possibly envisage it as something which increases with age, experience and reflection, implying perhaps that adolescents and adults are more autonomous than children. This may well be so, but a merit of the article by Cekaite & Aronsson (2005) is that it shows us how positive and involved in their own learning young children can also be. The children were aged 7–10 on an immersion course in a Swedish school, most of them having arrived from other countries and possessing other L1s (mainly Arabic). It was found that the children were well able to engage in collaborative language play. The discourse was characterised by pupil-initiated jokes, poetic embellishments (e.g. alliterations, sound repetitions, rhythmic patterns), spontaneous play and what the writers term 'cross-utterance poetics'. It seemed that the children were spontaneously practising meta-language without realising they were doing so. There was considerable spontaneous attention paid to language form through collaborative repetitions and variations which seemed to create awareness (implicit or explicit) of the phonology and morphology of correct and incorrect language choices. There was some evidence suggestive of Swain's (2000) 'pushed output'. This is a fascinating exploration of the ways in which young children handle the relationship between self-initiated practice and attention to detail.

Lexical repetition in children's play

Another study focusing on children's play was presented by Rydland & Aukrust (2005: 04–443) who were particularly interested in lexical repetition, in the case of children aged 4–5 in Norway, with Turkish as L1 and Norwegian as L2. Among the issues investigated were the sorts of verbal repetition strategies relating to verbal participation frequency, relationships between children's use of various repetition forms and their academic language skills, their use of repetition in cognitively complex discourse occurring during play, and their use of repetition versus non-repetition strategies in such play. The findings included: a positive link between self-repetition and participation in play; complex other-repetition (unlike self-repetition) was linked to academic language skills; more use of repetitions strategies within exploratory talk than outside it; the use of non-repetition strategies in explanatory talk seemed associated with long-term development of

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definitional skills. The discussion brings out several interesting implications of these findings.

Use of metalanguage

Many studies of metalanguage seek to elicit responses in respect of pre-determined metalinguistic categories. A merit of the study by Robinson (2005) is that it adopts a different and more student-sensitive ethnographic approach. Her subjects were 12-year old L1-English-speaking students at a city comprehensive school in England. She found that all students, including the weakest, were able to use metalanguage, though some did not use the conventional terminology but instead drew on their own more colloquial terms. The area in which their metalinguistic knowledge was most lacking was in figurative writing, possibly because this may have been furthest from the students' everyday use. Studies such as this are important because they offer real insight into what is 'there' and 'not there' and how whatever is there might be understood, used and further developed.

Gender and metalinguistic awareness

Simard (2004b) sought to ascertain whether there was any relationship between the gender of children and their level of metalinguistic awareness. She found that there was a significant gender difference, with the girls (in Class 6) being significantly more able than the boys to verbalise their metalinguistic awareness. The difference was not evident in a standardised text but revealed itself in their capacity to reflect metalinguistically.

8. Macro issues of policy, planning and provision

Languages issues do not become more 'macro' than the policy, planning and provision of ELT in China, and this section begins with a discussion of a small number of articles selected from the substantial number published recently on this topic. This is followed by a discussion of minority-language maintenance and revitalisation in New Zealand, especially in relation to the Māori language, and then a brief mention of policy-issues in one African and one European state. Then a paper on languages statistics in respect of one particular country (German) is used in order to provide a brief reflection on the importance of having national statistics available but also of the need to interrogate these closely. Finally, two important 'provision' factors are touched upon: the provision of a sufficient amount of time in order to make a success of learning a modern language at university, and the provision of Teaching assistants whose job it is to work alongside the everyday classroom teacher, and the opportunties and the challenges which can ensue.

Minority languages and ELT in China

It doesn't take an expert to understand that learning EFL is rapidly expanding in China. It is at this point, however, that stereotyping might conceivably set in, if we think this means much the same thing for all Chinese. According to a fascinating account by Yang (2005), it doesn't. China has over 100 million citizens from ethnic minorities, speaking some 55 different ethnic languages. Yang claims that many of them live in the less populated arid west of China, and among them ELT tends to be hardly developed. Among the factors hindering ELT are: lack of funding, low perceived value of English, and Chinese minority-language bilingual education. If a person's L1 is not Chinese, then it can take much time to learn Chinese, leaving less time for English as L3 which is rarely taught as a compulsory subject in these areas. In addition, there may be a 'language distance' effect, in that English is so different from their L1 and from Chinese, that it may offer a daunting prospect. Hu (2005a, b) similarly claims there are major differences in China according to geography in relation to the development of ELT. In the advanced regions, many of them in the east, regular contact with the outside world has introduced a range of modern cultural artefacts in English, e.g. newspapers, magazines, TV programmes, literary texts; whereas this occurs much less frequently in the more disadvantaged areas (mainly in the west). He also draws attention to the traditional culture of learning which favours the accumulation of knowledge over the use of knowledge for immediate practical purposes. There are several other interesting studies which focus on languages policy issues in China. These include Li & Li (2005: 06–223) who discusses intercultural communicative language teaching, offering a re-think of the so-called communicative approach to ELT in China; Feng (2005: 06–438) who discusses different conceptions of bilingualism and bilingual education in China; and Chen & Hird (2005: 06–435) who take a close look at group work in China in the EFL classroom.

Minority languages maintenance and revitalisation in New Zealand

Also dealing with minority-population bilingual education, but this time in New Zealand, are May (2005) and May & Hill (2005: 06–348). May presents an informative account of bilingual education in New Zealand, mainly in respect of Māori-English but also incorporating the Pasifika languages where very little development of bilingual education seems to have taken place, despite national assurances from as early as 1993 that this would happen. May's (2005) account is set in the context of language planning and language education planning and deals with issues such as 'identity' and 'minority rights'. Also in the same journal, May & Hill (2005) provide an in-depth

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account of bilingual Māori-English education in New Zealand. Drawing on policy and evaluation documents, they claim that considerable success has been achieved in the past 25 years but that much remains to be achieved, if this form of education really is to contribute strongly to the maintenance and revitalisation of the Māori culture, including the language. Among the issues identified as being for development are pedagogy, and staffing and resources. A major component of the challenge will be the achievement of high levels of biliteracy and academic achievement. Voices had been raised against the teaching of English in full Māori-immersion programmes, but May & Hill side with Cummins (2000) who claims that academic skills will not transfer automatically from the minority language to English unless opportunities are provided to write extensively in English as well as in the minority language.

Other languages policy issues in Africa and Europe

Two other of the several interesting languages policy studies worthy of mention are by Wedin (2005: 06–438) which discusses the Swahili-only policy in an area of Tanzania in which the policy seemed to favour only a minority of the children; and by Savickienè & Kalèdatè (2005: 06–227) who discuss the implications for languages and educational policy of the profound sociolinguistic changes which have taken place in the Baltic states (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) over the past fifteen years or so.

Transparency and coverage of national statistics

Meißner & Lang (2005) provide a useful statistical account of the numbers studying foreign languages in the 12th form of German grammar schools in 2000/1. They claim that Federal statistics do not distinguish between 'intensive' and 'normal' courses, so their study breaks new ground in describing the different populations taking particular courses. Their study helps to make clear the extent to which the various Länder of Germany can be considered as meeting quantitative European standards. I have included mention of this report because to my mind it raises an important set of issues which so far as I can judge receive relatively little comment in languages research publication, namely the extent to which particular states make provision for languages, in what forms, for whom and at what levels; and the reliability, comprehensiveness, transparency and therefore public accountability of the national statistics on these matters which they provide. In my experience in the UK and indeed in Europe as a whole, it is encouraging that significant statistics on languages are put into the public domain, but I find it is important to study them carefully, in order to identity what they are saying and to make a judgement as to what, if anything, is being kept in the background, if not concealed.

Attainment ceiling unless time is increased

It is a vexed question as to what can be done in anglophone countries to give students a realistic chance of achieving a worthwhile level of proficiency in an additional language. Clearly, one possibility is to address provision factors such as the amount of time made available and the numbers of competent, trained teachers who are in place. In his survey of a number of USA universities, Rifkin (2005: 05–58) found that typical programmes did not offer students sufficient time in which to develop advanced levels of proficiency in one or more of the modalities. He claims that a minimum of 600 hours is needed but that university provision is generally much less than that. His own particular interest is Russian, and he claims that without some form of immersion which would increase the time available and the intensity of the experience, then in most foreign languages classrooms there will be a ceiling in the attainments of students.

Provision constraints on teacher collaboration in class

In many countries major policy developments at national level are making possibilities available which challenge the conventional role of teacher as monarch in their classroom. One such possibility is the emerging role of the Teaching Assistant, as introduced for example in England where by 1997 there were 90000 such TAs in mainstream schools. A TA might be attached to an individual student, a class or a year-group, and their role is geared to support of learning in general rather than in one specific subject. Chambers & Pearson (2004) focus on the ways in which TAs might interact with modern foreign languages teachers. It was surmised that the advent of a TA might not necessarily always be considered as a blessing, because some MFL class teachers might feel rather threatened by the presence of a TA in their class, and in return some TAs might feel embarrassed by their relative lack of knowledge of the language in question. However, the combination of TA and MFL class teacher was considered to have real potential for sharing ideas, combining skills and reducing the overall workload. Chambers & Pearson found that all three parties (TA, MFL teachers and students) viewed the lessons positively. No TA in fact found their relative lack of competence in the language to be a barrier, and indeed they were able to exploit this by being able to act as 'pseudo-learners' rather than as 'pseudo-teachers', thereby modelling 'learning' for the students. One area of concern which emerged, however, was a lack of key provision factors, such as time and opportunity for joint planning, and similarly

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for joint assessment and evaluation. Accordingly, such good practice as existed seemed to have evolved over time in rather piecemeal rather than planned fashion.

9. Research issues

At an earlier point in the present review, I discussed a small number of articles which commented on the presence (or absence) of fruitful connections between CMLL and SLA research. The present section features three articles which do not directly address CMLL but which discuss a different sort of desirable connection: that between SLA research and the teaching and/or use of additional languages in classroom or in non-school settings.

Pica (2005: 05–596) claims with justification that the fields of SLA research and foreign languages teaching 'have come together in fruitful and informative ways' (Pica 2005: 348) and that reservations about the relevance and applicability of SLA theory have diminished. This pays due tribute to those researchers involved in classroom research, among whose repertoire of necessary skills must be included the skills of interacting with busy and often stressed teachers in ways that are perceived as mutually beneficial. For Pica, 'information gap' has emerged as an activity which teachers choose to implement in their classrooms for their own teaching purposes but from which researchers also can benefit for their different research purposes, e.g. in addressing questions about the acquisition and internalisation of L2 form and meaning.

Writing in the same journal, Spada (2005) also reflects on her own classroom research programme and similar programmes in Canadian school settings, mainly featuring cognitive-interactionist research on instructed additional-language learning. She also considers other research methodological paradigms that have been attempted and finds that a shift has occurred to some extent away from positivist and towards social and interpretivist perspectives. Other important considerations are addressed, such as the time it can take to set up a major research project (e.g. negotiations with school boards and teachers) in order to obtain consent for access (and indeed 'consent strategies' nowadays have to be a major consideration, especially in funded large-scale research), and a range of ethical considerations which nowadays must involve explaining to all stakeholders (e.g. headteachers, teachers, students, parents) what the research is about, how confidentiality will be maintained, and giving assurances abut the right to withdraw if this is desired. These considerations may be part of the cost of classroom research, but Spada claims the benefits can be gratifying.

A third contribution to the discussion of research approaches is made by Valdés (2005: 05–564), this time with heritage languages in the foreground. Valdés argues against the misleading nature of the 'S' in SLA, claiming it assumes a monolingual outlook and separable L1 (first language) and L2 competences. In Valdés view I see a reflection of the Council of Europe's claim that the aim of languages teaching should be the development of 'une compétence plurilingue' (one integrated plurilingual competence) rather than separate, co-existing competences, each exclusively related to a particular language. For Valdés, a reconceptualised view would embrace a variety of educational and social contexts, including acquisition of second dialects, acquisition of standard language, and acquisition or development of specialised languages skills. She's right.

10. Final comment

Taking account of my observations on 2004/5, have any significant new developments or trends emerged? I think for most of the fields I have covered the answer is 'nothing startling', though this is not a criticism, for much of the research reviewed is undoubtedly of high quality. In any case, given the chequered history of languages teaching in many countries, startling breakthroughs probably deserve to be treated with some suspicion. Two trends nonetheless deserve some comment.

First, I believe I detect a qualitative as well as a quantitative improvement in computer-mediated languages-learning research. In preparation for my review, I derived great enjoyment and some intellectual stimulation from reading several top-class research articles in this area. It is true that some of the most eminent persons researching in this field have gone through something like a self-confessed public agonising over the perceived status and quality of CMLL-related research as compared with what might be termed conventional mainstream SLA research; and it is probably also true that CMLL-related research has thus far not generated findings which would confirm a substantial, evidence-based impact of CMLL on the development of desirable outcomes such as languages proficiency, metalinguistic awareness or intercultural competence. If I were researching in this field, however, I wouldn't agonise too much. Progress is being made, and the more I read of their work, the more I come to believe that their findings do not necessarily always need to be validated by reference to non-CMLL conventional mainstream SLA research. In the early days of Australian wine-making, they gave their wines French or German names, to make them respectable, but they don't need to do that now. CMLL constitutes its own field of language-use as well as of language-learning, and CMLL researchers should with increasing confidence seek to develop this field in its own right, as well of course as participate on a more equal basis with other SLA or intercultural researchers in research on the substantial middle ground in which computer-mediated languages-learning and -use co-exist with other

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forms. Over time, I believe in fact it will become increasingly difficult for mainstream SLA or inter-cultural researchers to develop convincing general theories without any or very much explicit reference to computer-mediated activity (as undoubtedly happens quite often at present), so perhaps the boot is gradually shifting to the other foot.

Second, I have to confess that as a languages-person whose main additional languages are French and German, with Scots, Scottish Gaelic, Italian and Chinese following some distance behind, I have at times been unable to avoid the temptation of experiencing mixed feelings when contemplating the large body of TESOL research which inevitably and properly occupies a strong position in the abstracts and in my own reviews. I find myself muttering under my breath: 'These TESOL people have got it so easy. They don't really understand what the problems are in teaching or learning an additional language which is not English.' This of course is because of the impact of English as dominant international language which provides exposure and creates motivation on a scale with which other additional languages can hardly compare. To their credit, however, several eminent scholars whose first language is English have for some time been asking serious questions about the apparently irresistible rise of their language. So nothing new thus far. What I think I see coming through, however, is a similar questioning by eminent scholars and others whose first language is not English. Such voices have of course been heard too for some time, but what I think is relative new is the rapid emergence of China (and perhaps to a lesser extent Japan) as a major player on the world's languages scene. This at one and the same time gives a powerful impetus across the world to the learning of Chinese as a foreign, second or community language but it also raises important questions about how the learning of English fits into cultures such as that of China and Japan which – however globalising and modernising they may be – remain markedly different from those of western countries. 'Yes, we want to learn English, but for our own purposes, and we have reservations about your types of motivation which reify western values' is one message encountered by the present review, though it is fair to state also that there are counter-tendencies to this, with signs of western values being gradually accepted. This apparent ambivalence has been there for several years but my point is that it seems to exist now on a much larger scale. To my mind, this gives our particular linguistic and cultural coin an interesting new spin for researchers to worry about, as is their lot in life.

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