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Annual Research Review

Review of research on language teaching, learning and policy published in 2008

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The format for the present review is similar to that of previous years, though the number of references to research published before 2008 has been somewhat increased in order to identify a few key studies which have influenced some of 2008's published output. In selecting the texts for discussion, I have sought to offer the reader what I consider to be an overview of key themes emerging from the 2008 research which are in one way or another related to the teaching and learning of additional languages, and policies pertaining thereto. In doing so, I have tried to draw on a fairly broad range of journals, languages, countries, sectors of education and research approaches. However, in the space available (which is generous) I find it possible to discuss only some 80–90 articles out of a field of well over 1000 that would be available, if I had the time and the energy to read them all. Accordingly, there is no sense in which I am claiming that those selected are the cream which has risen to the top. There must be many articles not included in the present review which are equal in quality to those I have been able to include.

I should also point out that when I use the term L2 or 'second language', I do so because the term is widely used in the field, including by several of the authors discussed in the present text. However, I do so reluctantly, because for increasing numbers of learners the term L2 or 'second language' is misleading, since the language in question might be their third or some other additional language, a point well-illustrated by Jessner's (2008b) excellent state-of-the-art article in a previous issue of the present journal.

What I say about each publication is not intended to be a balanced summary. Readers wishing to obtain a balanced summary should look up the abstracts which the authors themselves have written. By contrast, the discussion which I provide may well ignore key aspects of a particular study in order to focus on those which I consider made an important contribution to the overall output of 2008. An important principle guiding my selection each year has been to include some key articles written in French- or German-language journals, these being the two foreign languages in which I am fluent, but terrible weather conditions prevented me from getting to CILT in London where I normally access these journals.

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1. Complexity

There is a sense of change in the air, as complexity theory mounts a challenge to received ways of thinking about language, language competence, language acquisition, and language learning, teaching and research. It is timely that a special edition of *The Modern Language Journal* brought together papers on this topic by international experts. It is beyond the scope of the present review to do justice to what these experts have to say, so I shall limit myself to a few pointers from four of the contributions, with the rider that the reader wishing to learn more about this development might do well to read the special edition in full.

1.1 Complex adaptive systems

In his introduction, De Bot (2008) characterises complex adaptive systems as 'self-organising, dependent on initial conditions, sometimes chaotic, and they show emergent properties. Language is a dynamic system and language development is a dynamic process' (p. 160). Importantly, 'chaos' does not mean 'lacking in order' but rather 'unpredictability'. His introduction provides an informative background to complex adaptive systems theory as elaborated in the cognitive and social sciences, and he provides a fascinating account of how this body of theory came to be taken up by languages researchers. One aspect of this which chimes with my own experience is the notion of 'breakthrough', e.g. as elaborated by Lightbown and Spada (1999), who challenge the notion that L2 development is best seen as a steady and gradual process of unfolding and who, instead, view it, at times at least, as a sudden leap forward, as elements which had seemed disconnected suddenly seemed to click together.

1.2 Researching complexity

Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) set out the changes in research methodology to which they consider complexity gives rise, e.g. the need for a reconsideration of the notion of causality, the nature of hypotheses, the meaning of terms such as stability and variability, the changed nature of context and the notions of nested level and timescale. They discuss a number of possibilities for research within a complexity frame of reference. I was particularly struck by the importance they attach to the identification of collective variables, which they describe as 'those variables that characterise the interaction among multiple elements in a system, or among multiple systems over time' (p. 206). This insight is welcome and stands in contrast to a large body of SLA research which addresses one variable at a time. It follows from this that 'researchers are entertaining the possibility of using multiple blended methods' (p. 211). Having read many hundreds of research articles for my annual review over many years, I am not sure how many would fully meet the notion of complexity research which Larsen-Freeman and Cameron have sketched out. So, if this promising insight is to bear fruit, then much remains to be done.

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1.3 Dynamic, complex, but patterned

Ellis (2008) vividly illustrates the dynamic and complex nature of language but at the same time argues that this does not mean it is arbitrary or chaotic. On the contrary, it is patterned in many different ways. These patterns, he argues, are not pre-ordained by a deity, nor are they genetic, nor are they determined by school curricula or by language policy. Instead they are emergent, and he goes on to identify a number of L2 acquisition processes which reflect cycles of dynamic system development, thereby allowing patterns to emerge: usage leads to change; change affects perception; perception affects learning; learning affects usage. His insightful and stimulating paper analyses and exemplifies each of these in some detail.

1.4 Complexity and multilingualism

Multilingualism in the context of dynamic systems complexity is the theme of Jessner's (2008a) paper. For her, multilingualism cannot be interpreted as additive monolingualism. Instead, a multilingual system should be viewed as a different system with different rules, and multilingual proficiency is understood as the 'dynamic interaction among the various psycholinguistic systems (LS1, LS2, LS3, LSn) in which the individual languages (L1, L2, L3, Ln) are embedded' (p. 275), in which LS stands for 'Language System'. She argues convincingly that multilingual acquisition is non-linear and sets out a number of qualitative differences between, for example, second and third language acquisition, arguing that such differences arise from an increased level of metalinguistic awareness. The theme of multilingualism, with special emphasis on third and other additional languages, is further developed by the same author (Jessner 2008b), but this time on a broader canvas. While still featuring dynamic systems theory, the text incorporates a range of perspectives, e.g. historical, sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and educational (the latter in terms of both policy and the practice of teaching and learning). This is a text which can be recommended not only for researchers with an interest in multilingualism and dynamic systems theory but also for languages professionals more generally, given that nowadays many language-teaching classes contain numbers of students whose first language is neither the national language of the country nor the foreign language they are learning.

2. Acquisition

2.1 Pushed output

'Pushed output' was a central notion in Leeser's (2008) research involving intermediate-level learners of L2 Spanish at university who were undertaking a content-based course on Spanish American geography, in which the class teacher focused on teaching course content rather than on integrating taught grammar into the course. The notion of pushed output is acknowledged as being influenced by Swain (1995), who argued that if learners were pushed

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to be more precise in expressing meanings in their output, this might help them to engage in syntactic processing, thereby possibly stimulating development of their L2 system. In Leeser's study, two matched groups were compared: one receiving pushed output, who were asked to engage in a text reconstruction exercise, and the other not receiving pushed output and who were, instead, being asked multiple-choice questions. In the research there was a particular focus on past-tense forms, in order to gauge the effects of the two treatments on them. The purpose of the activity was not, in fact, mastery of past-tense forms but rather to see whether or not the students would notice these and would change their use of them in their subsequent writing. In the event, the pushed output group noticed more words overall but did not notice more past-tense forms. However, they comprehended more information from the text and showed more evidence of past-tense development in their writing.

2.2 Accessibility of psycholinguistics

The term 'psycholingustics' may be something of a mystery to many who are engaged at the practical end of language teaching. I am delighted, therefore, to have identified a well-written and authoritative account which goes some way towards bridging the gap between this domain and language-teaching. Significantly, the title of Field's (2008a) article includes the words 'psycholinguistics and TESOL'. Field, in fact, makes a good case for the view that psycholinguistics is relevant to TESOL in several ways. He states the main concerns of psycholinguistics as being: 'how individuals acquire language (whether an L1 or an L2); how individuals store language in their minds; how individuals use language (how they assemble it into productions, and how they understand it when produced by others)' (p. 363). Each of these three components is discussed in turn: Acquiring (with sections on 'acquiring expertise' and 'exemplar models'), Storing (with sections on 'variability', 'the bilingual lexicon'), and Using (with sections on 'speaking', 'listening', 'reading' and 'writing'). He claims that psycholinguistics can help us better understand how vocabulary is stored in L2 users' minds, and adds that 'a better understanding of language processing might influence the way in which the teaching of the four skills is handled' (p. 372). Who could argue with that?

2.3 Age and L2 acquisition

The study by Dimroth (2008) is focused on two individual learners only but merits inclusion for its clarity, its caution and its interest in addressing the important age factor. In her case the two individuals were Russian, aged 8 and 14, who were beginning German in roughly similar conditions. The two were compared in respect of the order in which they acquired two core elements of German grammar involving negation and finiteness. The 14-year-old showed a development pattern roughly similar to that of adults, whereas the 8-year-old not only developed finite morphology more quickly but experienced a different development order, with finite lexical verbs acquired before the auxiliary construction. One possible difference lay in the younger learner tending to assimilate input patterns incrementally without adopting a

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process of analysis based on principles of organisation. Strong generalised claims are rightly not made through this study, but it did lend weight to the view that children differ from adolescent/adult learners not only in the rate of acquisition but also in the process itself.

2.4 Microgenesis

For Gutiérrez (2008), interaction is an essential enabling process which facilitates learning and development, with knowledge not being an object to be possessed but rather an understanding developed through collaboration. The students in this study were learning Spanish at intermediate level, and in their late teens or early 20s. They were asked to participate in two problem-solving tasks in two possible modes: computer- and paper-based. The study is based on 'microgenesis' which is described as 'the local, contextualised learning process . . . that can sometimes be traced visibly in the course of talk between expert and novice' (Mitchell & Myles 2004: 158). As such, the report shows how the students made use of strategies such as recourse to L1, repetition and reading aloud, in order to meet the demands of the tasks through processes of collaboration and co-construction. Particularly salient were discourse-markers, because they seemed to suggest that some aspect of change or adjustment was taking place. The study stops at the point of being able to signal changes that were observable, and does not go on to claim that these changes were fully internalised by all participants. Nonetheless, the documentation of change in the manner described has its own importance. The text does, however, sketch out a five-level process of transition, adapted from Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994: 470), which would lead from intermental functioning in a group (containing expert as well as novice) to intramental functioning within the learner.

2.5 'Noticing' critique

A recent 'find' during a visit to Asia has been the Chinese English Language Education Association (CELEA) journal. An article which caught my attention was a thoughtful critique by Wen (2008) of the well-known 'noticing' hypothesis (e.g. Schmidt & Frota 1986). The tone of the article is sceptical, though not directly antagonistic. The writer argues that thus far the hypothesis is not fully supported by high-quality research, and that much more needs to be done on factors such as frequency, saliency, instruction and individual differences as learners interact with L2 data.

2.6 Attentional resources: limited versus multiple

In their investigation of cognitive task complexity and written output, Kuiken and Vedder (2008) were interested in two competing models. One was the Limited Attentional Capacity (LAC) model of Skehan and Foster (e.g. 2001), which assumes that a learner's attentional capacity is limited, with the consequence that an increase in task complexity may mean that complexity and accuracy of output will compete with each other. The other was that

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of Robinson (e.g. 2001), whose Cognition Hypothesis or Multiple Attentional Resources model assumes that individuals may have more than one attentional resource pool and that increases in task complexity, rather than putting components in competition with each other, might in fact give rise to increases in complexity and accuracy of output. The students in Kuiken and Vedder's study were Dutch, learning FL Italian and French at university. Two levels of writing task were set (complex and non-complex), with three main criteria (syntactic complexity, lexical variation and accuracy). In the event, few significant differences in syntactical complexity and lexical variation were found between the complex and non-complex tasks. By contrast, however, the complex tasks generated more accuracy, lending in the researchers' view partial support to the Cognition Hypothesis.

3. Competence and proficiency

3.1 Symbolic competence

The fascinating paper by Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) has a strong link to the notion of 'complexity' as discussed above. This comes through the disturbance of many of those pillars of reality in our modern life which are easily taken for granted, meaning that in our minds the past–present–future and the real–imagined can in fact all be real and present, and so the conventional boundaries of time, reality and space become blurred. Strictly speaking, I believe this can occur in monolingual encounters but is more likely when a number of languages are potentially available for use in intercultural encounters. Central to their paper is the notion of 'symbolic competence', which they claim is what individuals need if they are to make the most of multilingual intercultural encounters. The writers do not see symbolic competence as a skill to be mastered, but rather as a mindset that can create 'relationships of possibility' (van Lier 2004: 105). For anyone wishing to gain a sense of interculturality in the era of complexity, this is an important text.

3.2 Listening research

A brief but thought-provoking overview of developments in L2 listening research is provided by Field (2008b), who argues that listening research has had to confront a number of obstacles, e.g. instruction that was at times unsuitable, received ideas that were not always soundly based, some confusion in terminology, and lack of connection with other research. The 1990s are depicted as being the era of 'context' as the key to effective listening, with the misleading implication that actual decoding of language was less important. More recently, by contrast, it is considered more appropriate to view top-down and bottom-up processes as being complementary rather than opposed, to view L2 listening as a form of expert behaviour and to look more closely at how listeners operate in their L1. The overview has useful sections on perceptual processes, on discourse and meaning construction, and on strategies. It is considered difficult to generalise about L2 listening strategy, since individuals differ, e.g. in risk-taking. There is also a useful section on pedagogy, featuring

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methodology, materials (influenced by new technology which enables self-study) and testing. With regard to testing, the notion of 'cognitive validity' is discussed, i.e. whether the languages processes aroused by test-taking resemble those which occur in more natural contexts.

3.3 L1 and L2 Listening

The theme of L2 listening in comparison with L1 listening is taken further by Field (2008c) in a study of intermediate learners of English. The subjects were in their late teens or early 20s with a range of L1s, and had recently come to England. They were compared to a somewhat younger group of L1 English students in Year 10 at secondary school in England. A key focus of the research was the identification of function and content words. Function words are usually of high frequency and may be very short, whereas content words are a main carrier of meaning. It was found that the L2 listeners identified function words less accurately than they did content words. This suggested that they were operating a lexical search strategy, looking for items of vocabulary which were heavy with meaning. By contrast, the L1 listeners were able to process not only content words but also function words, seeming to do so peripherally as a result of being familiar with them. Some implications for pedagogy are discussed, with a view to helping students from an intermediate level upwards to infer the meaning of words, including function words, which they do not fully understand.

3.4 Foreign language listening strategy instruction

The admirable study of listening strategy instruction by Graham and Macaro (2008) contains many of the features which to the present writer accompany the best quality of institution-based L2 research. They did not attempt to start with an inventory of strategies used by successful L2 listeners as identified by previous research and then seek to incorporate these into their own research study. Instead, they adopted a more open and context-sensitive approach which focused on the learning group in their actual context (lower-intermediate learners of French at secondary school in England). This enabled them to identity the students' real needs and difficulties, together with the strategies which they were already deploying. Another positive feature was their preference for strategies in clusters rather than as isolated individual items. A cluster might consist of some or all of 'prediction', 'directed attention', 'phonemic separation', 'inference', 'verification', in combination with the metacognitive strategies of 'monitoring' and 'evaluation'. As a consequence, the students were able to think not only of particular strategies but also of how these might interact with each other within a cluster, and to make their own judgments as to whether desired outcomes were met. The encouragement to think for themselves contributed to self-efficacy and positive attributions. Students who received strategy instruction of this sort not only achieved better outcomes than those who did not, but were also able to articulate what they had achieved. For anyone interested in strategy instruction, I believe that this text sets a standard.

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3.5 Advanced oral proficiency in Arabic

According to Samimy (2008) the numbers learning Arabic are increasing in the United States, yet Arabic is commonly perceived as a difficult language for learners with L1 English. Samimy's case study features one individual, a 39-year-old American man with no prior background related to Arabic yet who proved to be a highly successful learner. The case-study collected data from several respondents who had some association with the learner and drew on multiple sources of information. One strongly emerging feature of the individual was a commitment to developing an Arabic identity. The notion of 'identity' here is interesting, because the same learner had found French less accessible than Arabic as a language to be learnt. For him, French was too close to English, with many 'false friends' and cognates, and so a French identity eluded him, whereas his Arabic identity was more easily assumed. Also salient was his commitment to accessing the language wherever possible, e.g. putting news, poems, music, TV programmes and songs on to his iPod, reading the Qur'an, seeking out Arabic speakers with whom to interact (and engaging in 'consecutive imitation' of them where possible). These efforts helped him to engage in social networks of Arabic speakers and also won him the support of his Arabic professor who became an ally in his wish to progress, e.g. inviting him to do some teaching and also to become a co-author of a text-book. The study contains some useful up-to-date background information on successful FL learners but makes no attempt to generalise from the data. Instead, it paints an impressive picture of one individual's journey along the path of learning one particular language.

3.6 Self-assessment of oral performance

In Taiwan, as in a number of other Asian locations, the education system is centralised and, according to Chen (2008), leads students to accept authoritative top-down evaluation. Chen's interest was to explore the possibilities of learner self-evaluation as a means of helping students to grasp the notion of assessment for learning rather than for top-down evaluation. The students were learning EFL at university, and the report traces the development of an initiative in learner self-assessment of oral performance. There is a useful section on factors affecting self-assessment, e.g. need for clear criteria, training, intervention and feedback. Another factor which proved essential was collaboration with peers and teachers, in order to share knowledge, to reduce uncertainties and to gain confidence. Initially, clear differences were found between the teacher-assessments of the students and the students' own self-assessments. However, these differences narrowed considerably in a second cycle of administration, leaving the researcher to conclude that 'learning to assess' and 'assessing to learn' are achievable by students and can bring benefit to their oral proficiency.

3.7 Self-assessment of pronunciation

Like Chen (2008, above), Dlaska and Krekeler (2008) were interested in self-assessment in oral production, but this time specifically in respect of students' L2 pronunciation. The subjects were advanced learners of German who were asked to assess their pronunciation

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of different sounds and to compare this with the pronunciation of these same sounds by a native speaker. The students were found to be able to recognise some 90% of their correct sounds, but could identify only less than half of their inaccurate sounds. Recommendations are made on what might be done in order to help learners improve their self-assessments. The authors reached the conclusion that 'self-assessments of L2 pronunciation ought to be used cautiously' (p. 515), but they recognised also that self-assessment can offer other benefits beyond the identification of aspects of pronunciation, e.g. enhanced awareness of performance and increased motivation in learners.

3.8 Buddy reading

The 'buddy reading' study by Mak, Coniam and Chan (2008) claim that 'creativity' is not a quality which is strongly developed in Hong Kong schools, but with the inspiration of a pioneering teacher a good opportunity was seized for developing creativity in learners through reading and writing. Two year-groups of students were involved: Year 9, at secondary school (aged 13) and Years 3 and 4 at primary. The older students were in groups of four, and each group 'buddy-tutored' a younger group of six. The older students consulted the younger ones about their reading interests, then prepared their own stories which they subsequently read aloud, did associated activities and also brought along some other books which their earlier enquiries had suggested would be of interest to the younger students. In order to perform their tasks well, the older group had received special training, e.g. in the concept of the project, in story-telling skills, and in teaching plans, and they undertook an in-class dry-run with their own peers. Although quite substantial time-commitment was involved, the benefits to the younger learners' creativity, motivation and interaction skills were considered to have made the initiative worthwhile.

3.9 Vocabulary acquisition through reading

The role of reading in the learning and retention of L2 vocabulary has been the object of several influential research studies, e.g. Paribahkt and Wesche (1997). Two possible strategies in this regard were the focus of Min's (2008) investigation in the case of teenage male EFL students at senior high school. One strategy, entitled 'reading and vocabulary enhancement' (RV), entailed reading selected texts featuring core vocabulary and then doing vocabulary enhancement activities related to the core vocabulary. The other strategy, entitled 'narrow reading' (NR) was based on reading the texts featuring core vocabulary, but then going on to read thematically related texts also featuring the core vocabulary. The findings were based on tests of immediate and delayed (three months) retention. Both strategies were found to show gains in the learning of core vocabulary, but with the RV group being significantly superior.

3.10 Repeated reading

Another approach aiming at the development of FL reading comprehension and fluency takes the form of repeated reading (RR). Initially developed for supporting students in their

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L1 reading, its possible application to the reading of English as FL was investigated by Gorusk and Taguchi (2008). The RR approach derives its impetus from automaticity theory, in that RR readers read a simplified text a number of times in order to automatise their word recognition while making increasing amounts of mental energy available for higher-order comprehension. The study was set in a Vietnamese university with EFL students, and the findings pointed towards 'a robust utility for RR to increase reading fluency and comprehension with EFL learners' (p. 266). However, it seemed that a more general capacity had not yet been internalised, in that RR students' fluency did not transfer to their first reading of new texts encountered afterwards. In such cases the students' words-per-minute reading rate did not show significant gains over that of a control group. However, the writers were able to identify possible explanations for this which suggested to them that the RR approach did have value.

3.11 Reading strategy instruction

The investigation of the effects of strategy instruction for young readers of FL French (aged 11–13) at secondary school in England by Macaro and Erler (2008) takes as one of its starting points an acknowledgement that in many cases students were not really given opportunities to engage in proper reading comprehension. Instead, reading was implicitly used by teachers 'as a tool for exposing learners to written vocabulary and phrases already presented orally' (p. 91), with students rarely being challenged to read beyond a few sentences. A reading strategy–training programme was implemented with the collaboration of a number of schools, in order to develop students' reading strategies. The programme had certain features in common with that of Graham and Macaro (2008) already described above. A longitudinal study lasting 14 months, it was concerned with COMBINATIONS (researchers' emphasis) of context-specific and task-specific reading strategies, as opposed to training these individually; a cognitive process was assumed involving strategies such as decoding, processing, and retrieving information, allied to metacognitive regulation of these by means such as planning, monitoring, evaluating, and taking decisions. Other exemplary features were that the strategy instruction only took ten minutes per week and therefore did not disrupt the ongoing curriculum; and that the initiative began by identifying strategies which students were already using, and then built on and expanded these. Compared with a control group, the intervention group receiving the strategy instruction made significant gains not only in bottom-up processes but also in some cases understanding idea-units that would normally be above their stage-level. There were also gains in positive attitude, a feature of interest in that many students in this same age-group in England were tending to show clear signs of de-motivation, so strategy instruction was helping to buck a negative trend.

3.12 Cross-cultural contrastive rhetoric in writing

One of the main challenges facing EFL learners at a higher level is the development of academic writing skills. The study by Xing, Wang and Spencer (2008) features Chinese

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L1 postgraduate students undertaking an e-training course in contrastive rhetoric between English and Chinese. Contrastive rhetoric focuses on how different languages articulate their discourse patterns. The study highlighted five areas in which western (UK/USA) discourse differs from that of Chinese, and the course was developed to help the students bridge the gap, so as to be able to produce appropriate academic discourse in English. The five differences were (with UK/USA first, then Chinese): deductive approach, stating main idea early, versus inductive approach, giving background first; sequence of introduction – body – conclusion versus sequence of start – sustain – turn – sum; linear versus circular argument structure; straightforward meaning versus metaphorical meaning; coherence of discourse form with clear discourse markers versus subtle coherence of meaning with less attention to coherence of form. I am pleased that, although the term 'western' is used, it is made clear that this refers to a UK/USA-based model, since Ph.D. theses and academic publications in French (to give but one example) often have a very different rhetorical style. As a result of the course, the Chinese subjects who took the course were able to move their rhetorical style closer to the UK/USA model, though they seemed reluctant to give up the use of metaphors. As the writers said: 'All rivers lead to the sea'.

3.13 Vocabulary learning

Vocabulary learning was well-served in 2008 by having two overviews. The first, by Schmitt (2008), sets out some interesting statistical assumptions, e.g. that 8,000–9,000 word families are needed for reading in English, and some 5,000–6,000 for oral discourse. As Schmitt says, this is a substantial amount, and we might add that many learners don't get there. His review covers both intentional and incidental vocabulary learning and he convincingly argues that these two processes should not be viewed as antagonistic but that they require each other. There is an informed discussion of the number of exposures needed to promote incidental learning from reading and also from listening (which, we might add, activates a number of different processes). His review concludes with an endorsement of seven principles of vocabulary learning by Hurst and Begler (1998) but he goes on to up-date these with further considerations of his own. These include as his first point that 'learners need large vocabularies to successfully use a L2, and so high vocabulary targets need to be set and pursued' (p. 353).

This takes me neatly to the brief overview paper by Milton et al. (2008) in a Special Issue of *Language Learning Journal* on vocabulary learning. This contains a section discussing vocabulary issues in the context of the national curriculum in England, which they claim only makes mention of vocabulary when it reaches a discussion of Level 8. Attention is drawn also to influential documentation for FL teachers in England which claims that teaching and learning vocabulary is largely a waste of time. How different it is in China! There, I have found that each level of the national curriculum for EFL has an explicit vocabulary-size attached to it. It seems likely to me that in countries where there is little societal exposure to a particular FL, and where as a consequence much depends on what is provided by schools, a clear idea of vocabulary learning would be useful for monitoring progress and encouraging motivation.

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All of the articles in the Special Issue mentioned above merit attention but space allows me to mention only two briefly. Häcker (2008) analysed FL German textbooks used at school in England and found that over the past ten years the amount of vocabulary for beginners had declined. She draws attention to an inspectorate report (Dobson 1998) which had found that after a promising start in Year 7, few students by Years 10 or 11 showed evidence of the use of language outside controlled situations. Häcker argues that a move away from teaching 'situations' is essential and that instead a core vocabulary should be taught as one component in a new FL pedagogy for schools in England.

A somewhat different and more positive picture is painted by Richards, Malvern and Graham (2008), who studied vocabulary development in year 12 in 20 secondary schools in the south of England. They focused particularly on receptive vocabulary and also output in writing over a period of time. Significant progress was shown by students in both receptive and productive vocabulary, despite the finding that students themselves perceived their vocabulary knowledge as having declined. There is, however, no need to assume that this picture is totally at odds with that of Häcker (2008, above), since the Richards, Malvern and Graham study featured students who were at a more advanced level and were on an upward curve in confronting an important national examination syllabus.

4. Learning and teaching

4.1 Form-focused instruction

The value of form-focused instruction (FFI) is widely acknowledged, yet the term can mean different things. The article by Spada and Lightbown (2008) discusses two different forms of FFI. The 'isolated' approach consists of teaching aspects of language form as separate entities, isolated from communicative activity. The 'integrated' approach, by contrast, arises within classroom activity that is essentially meaning-focused. Within the 'integrated' approach the 'focus on form' component may arise from incidental learning or from a brief episode of explicitness without detracting from the essentially meaning-focused nature of the particular activity. The writers do not see the two approaches as being in opposition; on the contrary, they may complement each other for the overall benefit of the learner. The 'isolated' approach, for example, may be useful in helping students focus on elements of form that are not easily perceived during meaning-focused communication, whereas the 'integrated' approach allows the aspect of language form to be directly related to a particular purpose within an act of communication and, if necessary, to be corrected on the spot. For readers wishing to understand the different potentialities of FFI, this informative text is recommended.

The interesting focus-on-form study by Grim (2008) is set in the context of 'content enriched instruction' (CEI) with second and third semester college students. CEI is not intended to be the same as 'content-based instruction' (CBI), which Grim claims has seldom been used in beginning language programs at college level. In CEI, content tends to be cultural and the learning of content is only one of several objectives rather than the sole or dominant objective of instruction, so that the aim is essentially to integrate aspects of culture within a language class. Three instructional treatments were implemented within the

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focus-on-form in CEI investigation: 'planned focus on form' in which the instructor identifies in advance the target form and decides on how and when it will be introduced, 'incidental focus on form' which is occasioned if a problem of form occurs, and 'focus on meaning', without focus on form. The experiment was able to last only 50 minutes, a limitation which the researcher acknowledges. Nonetheless, although it was not possible to identify long-term effects, the short-term benefit lay with 'planned focus on form' in respect of students' coming to terms with key vocabulary and grammar.

4.2 Error correction in writing

It is widely acknowledged that error correction can help learners reduce their errors on given assignments during the learning and revision process. At issue, however, is whether or not this benefit lasts. The study by Truscott and Hsu (2008) featured two groups of EFL students, one receiving corrective feedback on a writing task and using this feedback in a subsequent revision task; the other receiving no corrective feedback. In the revision task, the group receiving corrective feedback outperformed the other group. However, one week later, in a new task, the two groups were almost identical with each other. The authors conclude that 'successful error reduction during revision is not a predictor of learning' (p. 292). Moreover, improvements made during revision are not evidence of the effectiveness of correction for improving learners' writing ability. However, the writers are careful to argue that this does not constitute comprehensive evidence against error correction, and accept that it may offer benefits in motivation and other areas.

The effects of written corrective feedback (CF) on subsequent writing were also studied by Ellis, Sheen, Murakami and Takashima (2008). Indeed, they saw their study as being in part a response to the challenge set by Truscott in an earlier paper (Truscott 1996) and aimed to identify any evidence for the effectiveness of CF in EFL teaching. Their study entailed two CF groups and one control (which received no CF). One of the CF groups received 'focused' CF in which errors only in the target grammar point (involving use of the definite and indefinite article) were corrected; the 'unfocused' CF group received correction of all errors, not only those for the target grammar point. It was found that both forms of CF were superior to the control, not only in an immediate post-test but also in a delayed test which required a new piece of narrative writing. The writers found that there was a general gain in accuracy in both of the CF experimental groups, which was not the case in the control group. They conclude that the evidence of their study runs counter to Truscott's (1999) view that CF assists re-drafting but not real acquisition. However, they are careful not to adopt a diametrically opposed position, because they agreed that previous research on this topic had not been conclusive, and they accepted that their study featured only one aspect of grammar, with the implication that further research is needed before an authoritative judgment can be made.

A different perspective on the role of error correction in EFL students' writing is offered by Shin (2008) in respect of a small number of South Korean students of advanced proficiency. The perspective is that of the students themselves, reflecting on their proficiency and on how they thought it had come about. The students were strongly in favour of corrective feedback

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supplied by their teachers. An incentive of which they were well aware at their advanced level was to produce good papers, a consequence of which was the need to pay attention to the forms in which their meanings would be expressed. This led them to make hypotheses about meaning, and they considered that grammar correction 'represents one of the most crucial forms of feedback for the verification of hypotheses' (p. 364). A merit of this study is that it does not discuss error correction in the abstract but identifies a number of preferences which they students expressed, e.g. 'I prefer more directive comments on language forms and more facilitative comments on writing style' (p. 363). This study convincingly portrays the thoughtful insights of one particular group of advanced proficiency learners.

4.3 Integration of skills at an early stage

One of the most recurrent questions I have been asked in talks on ELL (the Early Learning of an additional Language) given in many different countries in recent years has been when to introduce reading and writing. For many years the orthodoxy was to begin with listening and speaking, and to introduce reading and writing later, once an initial oral–aural competence had been developed. Current views, however, are moving towards activating all four language skills from an early point, in the expectation that a stronger underlying general competence will be developed which will eventually allow all four skills to be used in various combinations. The study by Kim (2008) features just two young ESL learners, at lower elementary school level, and therefore caution is needed in generalising from it. Nonetheless, it yields interesting insight into the comparative effectiveness of two different approaches: one based on integrated (oral + written) and the other on oral-only instruction. It was found that the integrated approach was associated with the greater gains in oral production. The writer provides an excellent discussion of early literacy development and its role in promoting not only reading and writing but also oral–aural development, and opens up an equally interesting reflection on the role of personality in ELL development, given that the two young subjects were so different from each other.

4.4 Literature

The role of literature in foreign language classes has a long tradition, particularly in university foreign language departments where it has often had a higher status than the teaching of the language itself. However, in recent years the supremacy of literature has been threatened by a number of factors including the advent of the internet, which makes available an endless supply of authentic texts covering a multiplicity of cultures and curricular areas and which can be exploited for foreign language teaching purposes; and including also the move in some universities towards combined degrees offering a foreign language as only part of the degree programme, taking over from specialist degrees in one or more foreign languages. The state-of-the-art article by Paran (2008) on the role of literature in the teaching and learning of foreign languages therefore comes at a good time. Issue is taken with the utilitarian view that foreign language teaching should simply be about the development of competence in

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the language, since (as the author states) this entails 'taking the learner as a person out of the equation' (p. 469). The article brings together a wealth of empirical and other information on aspects such as 'interaction in the literature and language classroom', 'role of the teacher', 'role of the task', and 'role of the reader'. It also has valuable sections on contemporary issues such as 'non-native literature' and 'children's literature'.

4.5 Visual enhancement

The paper by Lee and Huang (2008) is concerned with Visual Input Enhancement (VIE) as a means of helping learners perceive key features of input. Their study consisted of a meta-analysis of those studies on the topic which met their quality criteria for inclusion. They describe VIE as entailing typographical cues such as underlining, boldfacing, italicisation and capitalisation, or other possibilities such as colour-coding or a variety of font sizes. An assumption underlying VIE is that it will help students notice particular targeted features and, as a consequence, may contribute to acquisition. The paper offers an excellent overview of research and of key issues arising from it. The results of the meta-analysis do not appear to be encouraging for proponents of VIE, in that 'learners exposed to enhanced texts outperformed learners who read unenhanced texts by a very small-sized effect' (pp. 322–333). The 'unenhanced' group, however, had received another intervention entitled 'input flood', so the comparison was not really between VIE and a conventional approach. An important point to take from the study, however, was that it found divergences in research methods adopted even among the primary studies in their review, with the implication that this potentially important area would benefit from higher-quality research.

4.6 Consciousness-raising in L1

The qualitative study by Scott and De La Fuente (2008) begins by drawing attention to long-standing anti-L1 attitudes in L2 pedagogy and by indicating that in recent times this has increasingly been challenged. Working with intermediate-level college students of French and Spanish, they sought to find out if, and in what ways and to what extent, students made use of their L1 and their target L2 when working in pairs on consciousness-raising, form-focused grammar tasks. One group was allowed to use their L1 while the other group was to use their L2. The researchers found that, even when supposed to use their L2, students tended to use their L1, e.g. for translating text, recalling grammar rules, reviewing the task and planning what to say in the L2. The researchers surmised that 'exclusive use of the L2 during consciousness-raising, form-focused tasks may have a negative impact on the allocation of cognitive resources for the task . . . (and) . . . might inhibit collaborative interaction, hinder the use of metatalk and impede "natural" learning strategies' (p. 109). They make it clear, however, that they favour nearly exclusive use of the L2 during L2 communicative activity, but see a role for L1 reflection in the area identified by their research.

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4.7 Syntactic priming

'Syntactic priming' is defined by McDonough and Mackey (2008) as 'a speaker's tendency to produce a syntactic structure encountered in the recent discourse, as opposed to an alternate structure' (p. 32). Working with Thai university students of intermediate-level English, and with more advanced students who acted as interlocutors, they wished to find out if syntactic priming might be associated with question development in ESL. In most cases, the findings did indeed show a positive association, and syntactic priming was shown to help students move to a higher level of question development. However, in six of the nineteen cases this did not prove to be so. On looking into this in greater detail, the researchers found that the benefits of syntactic priming emerged best when participants applied the syntactic structure to a wide range of question words, as opposed to simply repeating the interlocutor's questions. This led the researchers to suggest that interaction-based L2 learning may have a number of sources, one of which might be syntactic priming.

4.8 (Un)successful FL learners

Being or feeling unsuccessful as a FL learner at school is an experience shared by many. The investigation by Rysiewicz (2008) is concerned with 13-year-old students at Grade 7 in seven Polish lower secondary schools who had been learning English for three years. Not all of the students saw themselves as being unsuccessful, but some undoubtedly did. The study highlights the inappropriate context at school in which they were supposed to learn, consisting of traditional text-based instruction, de-contextualised grammar practice, a heavy diet of written exercises and rote learning of vocabulary. Some interesting insight is revealed into the psychological background to success or failure which did not seem to depend on mechanical memory. Indeed, it is claimed that the memory component of FL aptitude does not figure strongly in successful FL learning when the classroom methods as described above are adopted. On the other hand, inductive language learning ability is claimed to be more essential. An implication of this is that for learners who are not achieving success, there should be a de-emphasis on rote-learning, encouragement to develop analytical abilities, a pedagogy which emphasises guided discovery, contextualisation and meaning-based rule-learning. In addition, a relationship is claimed between successful FL learning and an individual's range of L1 vocabulary, and hence, in an overall language education strategy at school, students' L1 needs would be taken into account, including needs for the enrichment of their L1 vocabulary.

4.9 Disabilities

The term 'disabilities' covers a wide range of potential meaning in L2 learning, and many areas are in need of research. Two areas of disability feature in the research by Abrams (2008), in the case of two students learning German at university. One had dysgraphia, and an alternative curriculum and assessment process were developed, to enable the same

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elements to be learned and assessed as applied to the other students in the group, but with the means of learning and assessment being adapted to respond to the needs of the individual. The other had familial spastic quadriplegia, an inherited disorder which affects all four limbs, with the consequence that the student could not speak, had limited mobility in both hands and was in a wheelchair. The alternative curriculum in this case eliminated the spoken component and embraced listening, reading and writing. The report shows how important it was in both cases to allow the alternative curriculum time in which to evolve through a transitional phase before reaching a state in which it was attuned to the needs both of the individual student and the institutions. A telling point is made that one of the institutional problems which made the situation initially worse was that students had to demonstrate serial failure first, before they could receive the sorts of assistance which the report describes. Better, it was argued, to institutionalise a new purpose for assessment as being diagnosis in support of learning.

Thonn (2008) argues that a disability particularly affecting older FL learners is hearing impairment. The study contains useful sections on the mechanics of sounds and hearing, and how hearing changes with age; on temporary threshold shifts; on masking; on pitch and rhythm as unchanging elements; on hearing and understanding; and on supplementing the hearing circuitry. This informative study concludes with a set of simple but practical suggestions for what languages teachers might do when faced with the important task of enabling hearing-impaired students to make the most of their language learning experience.

5. Affectivity and identity

5.1 Motivation

Of the large body of motivational research published in recent years, by far the largest proportion has been based on questionnaires, followed at some distance by interviews. Surprisingly little has been based on classroom observation, yet it is mainly in the classroom that motivation stands or falls. One reason for the lack of classroom-based research on motivation has been the lack of top-class instrumentation for catching motivation 'on the wing', as it happens in class. This lack has been addressed by Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) in their study based on teaching in 20 South Korean junior high schools (students aged 12–14). A four-part framework for motivational L2 teaching practice is set out, consisting of: creating the basic motivational conditions; generating initial motivation; maintaining and protecting motivation; and encouraging positive retrospective evaluation. Each part of the framework is exemplified by several indicators. Three instruments were used: a classroom observational scheme; a student questionnaire; and a post-lesson evaluation scale. The most novel of these instruments is the classroom observational scheme, designed to identify indicators of motivation as they occur in class. The scheme draws on the well-known COLT system (Spada & Fröhlich 1995) and was adapted to suit motivational concepts. It is too detailed to reproduce here but includes concepts such as: attention; participation; signposting; arousing curiosity or attention; tangible reward; intellectual challenge and several others. When the instruments

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were used in combination with each other, significant correlations were found between the teacher and student measures. This suggested to the researchers that teachers' motivational practices really do count. They surmise that from this basis it might be possible to develop explicit, research-based classroom motivational strategies which could be incorporated into teacher education courses. This impressive study suggests a potentially valuable direction for future L2 motivational research.

An interesting feature of the motivational study by Kormos and Csizér (2008) is that it embraces three different groups in Hungary: students at secondary school (aged 16–17), those at university (studying a range of subjects), and adult language learners (attending a company course or at a language school). The motivation of all three groups for learning English was found to be high. This was noteworthy, in that the researchers claimed that it contrasted with the not-so-high level of competence in the language among the Hungarian population at large, a characteristic explained in part at least by the limited amount of time given to FL learning at school. Influenced by Dörnyei (2005), among the key concepts explored in the study were 'international posture' (students' attitudes to English as international language), the 'ideal L2 self' (students' views of themselves as successful L2 learners) and the 'ought-to-self' (their perceptions of responsibilities which they perceive as arising from their immediate context). The first two of these concepts were clearly in evidence, but the third less so. It was concluded that teachers might consider how best to enhance learners' self-image e.g. by encouraging them to talk more freely about how they see themselves as language learners in the future, and that teachers might help students to understand the important role that English plays in the modern world.

Hong Kong's main language is Cantonese but it is also a meeting point for many other languages, particularly English, in view of the colonial past, and Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua), in view of Hong Kong's current status. 'Many languages, many motivations' features in the title of a study of motivations in Hong Kong by Humphreys and Spratt (2008). Their investigation focused on tertiary students' motivation for English, Putonghua and a chosen third language (French, German or Japanese). Quite different motivations were found towards the various languages, with English and the chosen third language (particularly Japanese) being more popular than Putonghua, though instrumental motivation for English and Putonghua was understandably higher than for the third language. It was concluded that motivation should not be viewed as a unitary concept at classroom level but that the motivational dimensions of each particular language need to be taken into account. Some interesting implications of this are developed, particularly for Putonghua.

Although the notion of 'integrative motivation' has been around for many years and there are some signs of a wish among researchers to reconceptualise or possibly even get beyond it, nonetheless it remains an important concept, as evidenced in the solid study by Hernandez (2008). Working with students of L2 Spanish in their fourth semester at university, the researcher concluded that integrative motivation showed four clear benefits: it was strongly linked to students' L2 speaking proficiency as measured through a simulated oral proficiency interview based on the ACTFL (2006) framework; it encouraged students in their desire to take further courses in Spanish; it influenced their thinking as to whether to take Spanish as a major; and it showed a positive relation with examination grades. Some useful recommendations are made for promoting integrative motivation, as well as

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instrumental motivation, in class, drawing on the ACTFL (1999) National Standards for Foreign Language Learning.

5.2 Anxiety

There were a number of studies investigating different aspects of language anxiety (LA). Sheen (2008) was interested in the effects of anxiety on accuracy in students' (aged 21–55) use of English articles when provided with corrective feedback, and also in the extent to which modified output could occur, following recasts. LA was understood as being potentially aroused by situations such as when students take tests, have to speak before the whole class, or are called on by the teacher. There were four groups of learners: those with high anxiety with/without recasts, and those with low anxiety with/without recasts. It was found that low anxiety learners benefited most from recasts and were able to produce higher levels of modified output and repair, whereas there were no significant differences between the high-anxiety-with-recast group and the two low anxiety groups.

Liu and Jackson (2008) claim that many Chinese learners in their first-year undergraduate non-English major group did not like to speak or use English in class, and that their unwillingness to communicate and LA were related to their self-assessed proficiency in English. As a consequence, fear of negative evaluation was associated with apprehension about speaking and test-anxiety. An implication of the study was that it might be desirable for teachers to discuss with students the importance of speaking in class and of sharing anxieties in order to overcome them, while at the same time encouraging students not to underestimate the proficiency which they actually possessed, or negative self-belief might become self-fulfilling.

The impressive study by Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham (2008) investigates communicative anxiety (CA) and foreign language anxiety (FLA) among adult multilinguals, in respect of their being influenced by emotional intelligence (EI). EI was understood not as part of cognitive ability or skills but as involving emotion-related self-perceptions, and to entail capacities such as emotion regulation, stress management and assertiveness. The study is depicted on a broad canvas of socio-biographical variables which include age, gender, educational level, number of languages known, age of acquisition, context of acquisition, frequency of use, socialisation, network of interlocutors and self-perceived proficiency, and in five different situations of use (speaking with friends, colleagues, strangers, on the phone, and in public). The multilingual respondents were grouped according to three levels of EI: low, average and high. It was found that higher levels of EI were associated with significantly lower levels of CA/FLA; that learners beginning at a younger age showed lower levels of FLA; and that high levels of FLA were associated with instruction that was purely classroom-based. Lower levels of CA/FLA were found to be linked to knowledge of more languages, higher frequency of use, stronger socialisation in a language, larger network of interlocutors and higher level of self-perceived proficiency. In my view, a merit of this highly complex study is that it goes beyond the provision of factual information, interesting though that is, and provides fascinating self-reports which convey the feeling that real human beings have been given a voice, a process which was described as being opposed to 'the monolithical

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prototypical faceless learner, whose identity is gross group averages' (Dewaele 2005: 367).

5.3 Attitudes

Sweden is so well-known for the widespread successful learning of English that there is a danger its success with other languages might be under-acknowledged. The study by Henry and Apelgren (2008) is welcome in that it features the learning of a third language at school, in respect of the attitudes of learners' (aged 10–12 in Grades 4–6) before and after the introduction of a second foreign language. It was interesting to learn that the Grade 6 learners attached a higher value to the L3 skills than they did to English as L2. The researchers surmised that this might have been linked to a feeling that English is commonly used in everyday life and may lack novelty value; possibly also because the students might have begun to notice a gap between the English they were encountering in their course-books and the English they felt they needed in their everyday lives. The students, however, held highly positive conceptions of themselves as future FL speakers, and there was little evidence that the use of English was leading them to think that Swedish and English would be sufficient for their future lives.

5.4 Contesting 'heritage' and 'language'

The massive amount of social mobility that has been taking place now for over half a century has gradually set the context for the emergence of a valuable new research domain: the 'complementary school', in which children from particular linguistic communities receive some 2–3 hours instruction in their 'heritage' language, usually at weekends, from adults belonging to the heritage community. The study by Blackledge and Creese (2008) makes an important contribution to this domain. They found that in the case of children (aged 10) attending two Bengali complementary schools the relationship between 'heritage' and 'language' was not straightforward. If the intention of the complementary school was to transmit the heritage language as a given product down to the next generation and thereby help the children to absorb a Bengali culture, this is not how the children saw it. The children were found to be using their language abilities in flexible ways and to be creating their own complex patterns of identity, almost, as it were, subverting the school's attempts to impose a pure or idealised form of the heritage culture. A lesson to draw from this was that languages and their associated cultures should not be viewed as discrete, bounded, impermeable systems existing in hermetically sealed units.

5.5 Classroom identity and code-switching

Although the teaching context for Ellwood's (2008) study was not in complementary education but with students in their 20s with nine years of English study behind them, it too identified the

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language learning classroom as a forum for identity construction involving some subversion of what the teacher may have had in mind. This could involve moving for a brief time into their L1 (which might be Chinese, French, German, Italian or Japanese) and expressing a critique of the teacher, the methods used, or the task. However, this apparent resistance was not viewed negatively, but rather as a means whereby the students could exploit the opportunities provided by an EFL classroom in order to engage in processes leading to the exploration, construction and enactment of new layers of a multilayered self.

Also concerned with code-switching is the thought-provoking study by Iannaci (2008), which lies within a framework of critical theory, critical multiculturalism and critical pedagogy, the last of which is depicted as producing knowledge within asymmetrical relations of power between teacher and pupils. The learners concerned were in kindergarten or early elementary education and were classified as 'CLD' (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse), with several different L1s spoken at home, reflecting the changing nature of Canada in the present era of globalisation. Code-switching was used by the young students to construct their own forms of classroom socialisation, enabling them to go beyond their essentially monolingual English education environment and the possibly well-intentioned but misinformed perceptions of some of their teachers, so as 'to negotiate liminality and their identities, to resist assimilation, and ultimately to develop their bilingualism . . ..' (p. 107). Readers interested in the relationship of critical theory to languages issues at school would be likely to find interest in this text.

6. Policy and evaluation

6.1 Early and late immersion compared

A recent visit to Ireland presented two contrasting pictures of the Irish language: much de-motivation and low performance when taught as a school subject, but higher motivation and impressive achievement when used as the medium of instruction in all-Irish schools (with students whose L1 is generally English). The study by Ó Muircheartaigh and Hickey (2008) features two models of Irish as medium of instruction: early immersion (EI), beginning in primary school, and late immersion (LI), beginning in secondary school. The academic outcomes in terms of examination performance showed that by the age of 15–16 there were no significant differences between the EI and the LI students in mathematics or Irish. The researchers considered, however, that one reason for the 'no difference' was that the Irish examination was not sufficiently discriminating. They additionally applied a C-test which they considered to be a more challenging test of Irish proficiency than was the National Junior Certificate examination. On the C-test the EIs performed significantly better, both towards the end of the first year of secondary school and also 3.5 years later. Clearly, for students receiving a mainly English-language education at primary school and then transferring into an all-Irish secondary school, this represents a big step, and the researchers offer some useful ideas on what might be done in order to help such students bridge the gap in the initial year of their secondary education.

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6.2 Balancing communication and grammar

The study by Mochizuki and Ortega (2008) is set in Japan, a country with a strong tradition of grammar-based, non-communicative teaching, yet at a time when Ministry guidelines were recommending a more communicative approach but tending to encounter some teacher resistance because of large class-size and other factors. Working with students aged 15–16 in Year 1 of High School at a beginner level of proficiency and with little familiarity with EFL speaking, the researchers sought to ascertain the respective merits of three approaches to preparation for a story-telling task: with no planning; with unguided planning; and with guided planning (including written grammar notes). A key focus was the use of relative clauses. It was found that the results 'clearly indicate that the guided planning condition provided better productive use of relativisation than the unguided-planning or the no-planning condition' (p. 31). Guided planning seemed to have focused the students' attention on the target form during both planning and performance.

6.3 Teaching English through English

TETE (Teaching English Through English) is a policy recommended by Korean authorities for elementary school EFL. It prioritises the use of English for teaching and learning the language, reflecting an intention to move nationally beyond a past approach in Korean pedagogy which strongly featured grammar, translation and much use of Korean L1. There has, however, been relatively little empirical research to track the implementation and outcomes of TETE, so the study by Kans (2008) is welcome, focusing on how one Korean elementary school teacher of students in Grade 5 conducted her lessons. Not surprisingly, it was found that in the fourteen lessons observed the teacher did not fully subscribe to TETE. Significantly, her choice of when, how and to what extent to use English and/or Korean was mainly influenced not so much by her own level of proficiency in English as by her professional judgment as to what would be in her students' best interests. The report concludes that 'serious discussions about the modification of TETE in elementary EFL classrooms needs to be initiated' (p. 224), especially in view of provision factors such as large class-size and mixed-ability classes. This is an important study, though it suggests to me that further research will be needed in order to find successful ways of maximising the young learners' exposure to and interaction with the target language.

6.4 Parents

Surprisingly little L2 research seems to have been published on parents, which makes the investigation by Dagenais and Moore (2008) welcome, all the more so as the parents in this study all came from a significant language minority: Chinese-speaking parents in Canada who had put their children into French-as-L3 immersion at school, the first two languages being Chinese (whether Cantonese or Mandarin) and English. Many parents had in fact

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been in Canada for several years and were at the point of wishing their children to grow up as full citizens of a global world and of a modern Canada, while at the same time not failing to inherit a Chinese identity. The research focused on: family affiliations, e.g. in Canada and abroad (possibly Mainland China, or Hong Kong or Taiwan); strategies for integration into the English-French bilingual communities of Canada; and views of plurilingualism as marketable capital in the local, national and international marketplace. A priority for the parents was their children's development of multiple literacy, embracing the ideographic Chinese scripts (traditional or simplified) and the alphabetical scripts of English and French. They saw this as central to their children's educational success and to their integration into three different communities. Benefits seemed to arise in that the local Chinese community was showing itself to be open to the wider ethnic, cultural and linguistic environment and to be ready to contribute to and benefit from this.

6.5 No child left behind

Finally, I draw attention to a special issue of *Language Policy* which is dedicated to a discussion of reforms in the USA. As is well-known, language policy there has been highly controversial in recent years, and the special issue is particularly concerned with the effects of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB, enacted as law in 2002) on the learning of English by young students whose L1 is not English. The editorial by Menken (2008) depicts NCLB as 'the most invasive federal education policy in US history' (p. 191). Writing specifically about California, Gándara and Baca (2008) claim that 'English language learners are provided inadequate and incomprehensible academic instruction' (p. 208) and that social justice is infringed when students are required to be tested in a language with which they are not fully familiar; while Harper, de Jong and Platt (2008) claim that as a result of the excluding and marginalising nature of NCLB the curriculum becomes homogenised, the distinctive linguistic, social and cultural characteristics of learners are largely ignored and teachers are not trained to do their job properly. In principle, it is good that language education policies should be taken seriously enough to merit the detailed attention of politicians, but in practice this is good only if the policies they put in place are inclusive, well-informed and sustainable.

7. Technology

7.1 Mobiles and L2 learning/use

A new acronym arrives in the form of MALL, or Mobile Assisted Language Learning. The editorial by Shield and Kukulska-Hulme (2008) and the overview article by Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008) set the scene for MALL as an emerging phenomenon which can encompass not only mobile phones but also ultra-portable laptops, handhelds, digital voice-recorders, MP3 and MP4 players, digital cameras and video-recorders. A claimed advantage of MALL is that it can be used by learners at the exact moment when they perceive a need, so learning and real communication can coincide and reinforce each other. It is also claimed that mobiles

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go well with emergent lifestyles, which themselves, in our globalised society, tend to be more mobile and interconnected than in the past. It is claimed that one current disadvantage is the cost of using mobiles, which may disenfranchise some learners; hence, there is a need to do something in this area. The writers argue, however, that MALL is evolving rapidly. It used to be focused on the teacher-led delivery of formally designed content and activities, but this is being replaced by a concept of MALL which attaches greater importance to informal rather than formal learning, to personal need and circumstances, to collaboration, to mobility of travel and to the notion of 'anywhere, anytime', though much remains to be done in this regard before the potential has been exploited.

In addition to the above overview papers, there is an excellent empirical study involving mobile phones by Chen, Hsieh and Kinshuk (2008), set in Taiwan. The paper is beautifully presented and one can in places see what appears on the mobile screen, which helps this reader a lot. The study considered the possible effects of short-term memory and content representation type on mobile language learning. In practical terms, there could be a brief and simply stated learning point on screen. This might appear on its own, or it might be accompanied by a written annotation to explain or exemplify the point verbally, or there might be a pictorial annotation to enhance the point visually; or the learning point might be accompanied by both modes of annotation on screen at the one time. It was found that learners with lower verbal ability and higher visual ability found it easier to learn content with pictorial annotation than content with no annotation, with the implication that pictorial annotation can provide learners with help in learning and communication. It was found also that learners with higher verbal and visual ability learn better with written and/or pictorial annotation than with no annotation. However, learners with low verbal and low visual ability performed significantly worse with combined annotation than with no annotation, and it was concluded that for them a simple uncluttered presentation on screen was more suitable, on the grounds that too many written or pictorial annotations will tend to increase the cognitive load, leading, in the case of these learners, to possible irritation and lack of concentration.

7.2 CALL overview

For readers who are interested in gaining a well-informed understanding of what CALL has thus far yielded as evidence in published research, I recommend an excellent overview article by Felix (2008). It sets out some of the problems associated with 'effectiveness' research in this area, e.g. misleading titles, poor descriptions of research design, failure to investigate previous research, poor choice of variables to be investigated, and overambitious reporting of results. There is a useful discussion of design models relevant to CALL research, e.g. within-subject design, experimental design, situated study design and case-study design. The conclusions about the effectiveness of CALL as evidenced in reputable research are cautiously positive, with the clearest benefits appearing to be in spelling, reading and writing in L1, but with some benefit to L2 also. Student perceptions of CALL are reported as being generally positive, provided that the technologies in question are stable and well-supported. The tentative

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conclusion is that CALL has the potential to engage students, to create opportunities and to appeal to different learning styles.

7.3 Expert-to-novice on-line interaction

'Focus on form' and 'collaborative scaffolding' were features of the study by Lee (2008), which focuses on expert-to-novice on-line interaction using synchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC). A five-level framework of collaborative scaffolding was established, drawing on Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994): learner is not aware of errors and has no knowledge with which to correct them; learner notices error but is not able to correct it; learner notices error and corrects with expert's help; learner notices error and corrects with minimal help; learner notices error and corrects without expert's help – in other words has become fully self-regulated. Thirty university students were grouped into fifteen pairs. In each case one student was a native speaker of English and a novice in learning Spanish, and the other student already possessed advanced proficiency in Spanish. Each pair attempted a series of tasks (jigsaw; spot the differences; open-ended question). CMC was found to provide useful feedback negotiation between the pairs and to help the novices focus on errors. In this, the visually displayed text on screen helped by highlighting both the error and the feedback and by stimulating the novices to use their cognitive skills and metalinguistic awareness. The pairs tended to make pragmatic use of both L1 and L2, with L1 serving to reduce the cognitive burden and to keep a flow of interaction going. It was not entirely plain sailing for the experts, in that some students found that the experts intervened too often, and the students sometimes wanted a more open discussion or help with vocabulary, rather than a strict focus on form. Nonetheless, a positive feature of the experts' role was that it lay in between that of student and teacher, and this at times this helped them become more approachable in the eyes of the students.

7.4 Putting students in touch 'sans frontières'

Potentially, one of the greatest benefits of computer-assisted technology is that it can put people in touch with each other in ways that otherwise would not be possible. An excellent example of this is found in the study of Schuetze (2008). Students of German in Canada were put in touch with students of English in Germany and were given a number of tasks to perform together. If the material associated with a task was in English, the interaction would be in English, and if the task material was in German, the interaction would be in German. WebCT was used, carrying the advantage that the instructors could monitor the dialogues without the monitoring intervening in the dialogue itself. This pushed the students to monitor their own interactions. A list of processing criteria was drawn up in order to enable the dialogues to be analysed and to make a judgment as to whether these seemed to be heading towards the model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) developed by Byram (1997). In the event, four processing criteria were found to stand out, revealing the greatest gains made by the students. These were: asking wh-questions; sharing personal

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experiences; giving examples; finding additional material that was not provided in the course. Dialogues strongly exhibiting these criteria suggested that students were on the way towards ICC, with another benefit of the on-screen presentation of dialogues being that it seemed to sensitise students to the dynamics of dialogue and the concept of constructivism.

The study by Jauregi and Bañados (2008), like that of Schuetze (2008, above), focused on two groups of students who were put in touch with each other. One group was in Utrecht (Holland) learning Spanish and the other was training as teachers of Spanish in Concepción (Chile). Thus, for both, the focus language was Spanish. The main aim of the transnational project was to enrich and internationalise the students' curriculum, and a focus of the associated research was to document and analyse the linguistic and intercultural learning which took place. A feature of the study was the use of video-webcam communication which enabled the students to see each other during their synchronous interactions (while at other times, asynchronous interactions were also enabled). Four tasks were developed, taking account of task conditions, as set out for example by Rod Ellis (2005), and including: learners have to be exposed to rich and varied input; and must have opportunities to produce comprehensible pushed output. The four tasks were: breaking stereotypes; interview peer-review; student life in Concepción and Utrecht; and literary debate. Among the conclusions of this detailed and excellent study were that the use of video-web technology encouraged collaboration, created a pleasant environment, led to reflection (by both groups) on the Spanish language in Chile, helped form bridges across two different cultures and stimulated the students to reflect on the similarities and differences between them. An important negative lesson to learn was the importance of robust technology, because the synchronous communication at times broke down as a result of sound-vision connection problems, lack of webcams and microphones, and firewall problems. This, however, did not detract seriously from students' motivation or learning.

7.5 Autonomy in distance learning

The paper by Murphy (2008) is concerned with how to meet the challenge of helping adult FL learners (of French, German or Spanish) succeed in becoming more autonomous. The context described is favourable, being that of the Open University in the UK, with its excellent technology, tutoring systems and resources, though a problem can arise from the 'open entry' facility, given the range of individual needs, intentions and abilities which students will show, carrying the implication that a 'one size fits all' approach will not work. Writing from the perspective of an academic member of staff, Murphy acknowledges the need for more studies in this area from student perspectives. Among the prerequisites for achieving a sufficient level of autonomy in students would be a quality of critical reflection allied to metacognitive strategies such as goal-setting, planning, implementing, self-assessment and self-evaluation. It was argued that there is an important need to assess not only students' FL development but also their qualities of reflection and strategy-knowledge and strategy-use. Among the key issues discussed were the need to strike a balance between time spent in covering course content and developing language, and time spent in collaboration, reflection and self-evaluation. Readers wishing to access a detailed, thoughtful and well-informed account of how course designers

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and tutors might confront the challenge of moving their approach towards more autonomous learning will benefit from this informative paper.

8. Final thoughts

To my mind, 2008 was one of the most interesting years in my series of annual reviews going back to the early 1990s. Maybe it did not quite have the 'game-changing' status of 1994, which witnessed major advances in both motivational research and socio-cultural theory research, but it did bring along a sense of excitement. Probably the main advance was in 'complexity theory' as applied to our area of concern. Of course, 'complexity' was well-known before 2008, but in 2008 it gained a new momentum and began to attract widespread interest. Different readers will see different things in the 'complexity' product, but for me what was particularly refreshing was the argument (well made by Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008) that there are limits to looking at one variable at a time (yet that is precisely what much of the research which I have reviewed over these years has sought to do). In their different ways, the outstanding papers by Kramsch and Whiteside (2008, on symbolic competence), by Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008, on motivation) and by Graham and Macaro (2008) and by Macaro and Erler (2008, on strategy-training) all invite us to try to understand how things occur in complex combinations rather than separately – in the first case, different spaces and timescales coinciding within the mind at any given moment; in the second case, trying to catch motivation 'on the wing' as it occurs in the pulsating reality of an actual classroom; and in the third case, viewing strategies as existing in clusters rather than in isolation. At the same time, as a good product of the Scottish Enlightenment, I continue to see value in more conventional empirical research, provided it is well done. I believe my review has also pointed to several excellent examples of this, e.g. the impeccable study by Rod Ellis and colleagues (2008) on written corrective feedback, and the unstoppable advance of a series of excellent empirical researchers from several Asian countries who challenge us to think globally rather than from a western perspective.

9. Auld Lang Syne

This is the final annual review which I shall be writing in the present series. It has been a great pleasure to have had the opportunity to perform this task over such a long time. Two thoughts persuaded me that it was time to call a halt.

The first was that writing an annual review of this sort is time-consuming, and I wanted to find more time for writing other sorts of text, including (I hope) a state-of-the-art article for some future issue of the present journal on my favourite research topic: the early learning of additional languages. The second was that I am no longer persuaded that an annual review of the present sort is in fact needed, given the transformation which the present journal has undergone, for its undoubted betterment. Compared with the former abstracting format, each issue nowadays contains a range of different sorts of article and report, each brimming with up-to-date material of high interest.

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I should like to conclude by offering my thanks to three groups: to the publisher and editors of the journal who over the years have shown infinite patience and goodwill in the face of my liberal interpretation of deadlines, and whose editing has been impeccable; to the readers (almost all of them unknown to me) from many different countries who have been kind enough to email me their thoughts and questions, always friendly and interesting; and to the very large number of researchers whose publications I have dared to mention and from which I have benefited greatly. Thank you.

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Note from the Editor

The Editor and Board of *Language Teaching* would like to take this opportunity to thank Richard Johnstone for his popular and informative Annual Reviews, which have been a much-anticipated and much-cited feature of this journal over the past 18 years. From Volume 44 (2011), *Language Teaching* will be publishing an innovative research review strand in which invited researchers and special interest groups will propose future research agendas based on current thought and practice in their specific fields.

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