Processability Approaches to Language Acquisition

Keynote Speakers:

Gisela Håkansson (Lund, Sweden)
Satomi Kawaguchi (UWS, Australia)
Jörg-U. Keßler (Ludwigsburg, Germany)
Manfred Pienemann (Newcastle, UK & Paderborn, Germany)

PROGRAM and ABSTRACTS

The Scientific Committee
Camilla Bettoni (Verona, Italy); Bruno Di Biase (Western Sydney, Australia);
Gisela Håkansson (Lund, Sweden); Louise Jansen (ANU, Australia); Satomi Kawaguchi (Western Sydney, Australia);
Jörg-U. Keßler (Ludwigsburg, Germany); Anke Lenzing (Paderborn, Germany); Manfred Pienemann (Paderborn, Germany); Ruýing Qi (UWS); Yanyin Zhang (University of Canberra, Australia)

The Organising Committee
Bruno Di Biase, (UWS); Satomi Kawaguchi (UWS); Lucija Medojević (UWS);
Kenny Wang (UWS); Karoline Wirbatz (UWS); Yanyin Zhang (UCanberra)
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Learnability, processability and fundamental differences in first and second language acquisition

Manfred Pienemann
University of Paderborn and Newcastle University

One of the main differences between L1 acquisition and L2 acquisition is ultimate attainment. L1 acquisition appears to have a guaranteed native-speaker outcome, whereas the latter hardly ever does. This marked difference in ultimate attainment has generated a great deal of research on possible fundamental differences in the initial state and in the underlying acquisition processes. In this paper I will review a number of psycholinguistic studies that show differences and similarities in the processing and acquisition of first and second languages. I will discuss the repercussions these findings have for a PT-based theory of L1 and L2 acquisition.

The acquisition of interrogative structures by German L1 children viewed from a processability perspective

Karoline Wirbatz
University of Western Sydney

This presentation investigates the developmental path of German L1 children in regard to the acquisition of interrogative structures. The main focus is on the acquisition of constituent questions by German L1 children, but it also looks at the acquisition of Y/N-questions. Data from my longitudinal study with two German L1 children aged 2;1 years to 2.4 years is analysed and compared along with parts of data sets of six German L1 children taken from the CHILDES website.

The study is set within the theoretical framework of Processability Theory and it examines the various stages German L1 children go through in their syntactic-pragmatic development of question formation. The LFG framework is used to determine how the focusing of constituent questions is achieved in German. Further, it explores the differences and similarities in the acquisition of interrogative structures by German L1 children and their acquisition of declarative structures. Lastly, the findings of this study are also compared with those of previous studies concerned with question formation in German L1 acquisition (i.e. Felix 1980, Clahsen 1982, Tracy 1994 & 2008), as well as other languages (i.e. Mycock 2007, Bettoni & Ginelli to appear).

The presentation gives new insights into the developmental path of German L1 children in regard to the acquisition of interrogative structures. The findings of the study suggest that the developmental path of German L1 children in regard to question formation is similar to that of German L2 learners which, however, has not been mentioned or discussed in earlier studies concerned with German L1 acquisition (i.e. Felix 1980, Clahsen 1982, Tracy 1994 & 2008).
References:


Development of lexicon: a case study of a Japanese-English bilingual child

Yuki Itani-Adams
Australian National University

This paper investigates the development of lexicon, focusing on nouns and verbs, of two typologically different languages of a Japanese-English bilingual child. The paper also explores a possible relationship between the development and the language input the child received from the caregivers in each language. The existing literature (e.g., Gentner & Boroditsky, 2001) has shown that children universally acquire nouns earlier than verbs (i.e. noun-advantage). However, there is also evidence to indicate that children’s verb learning is language-specific, e.g., Japanese and Korean monolingual children acquire verbs at an earlier age than English children (Choi, 1998; Ogura, 2007). This difference is thought to reflect the typological differences of the languages, and/or the differences in the proportions of nouns and verbs in the languages children receive.

The data for this study consists of naturally spoken production of Japanese and English (from age 1;11 (1 year and 11 months) to 4;10) by a child exposed to the two languages from birth, and a caregiver in each language. The child’s interaction with the adult speaker of each language was audio/vide recorded at a regular interval.

The analysis of the child’s data indicated that the child showed noun-advantage in both languages. However, the verb usage pattern was different in the two languages. While the child’s English remained to be nouns dominant throughout the period of investigation, her Japanese verb usage progressively increased and became greater than that of nouns. These different patterns of development suggest that the lexicon of the two languages develop separately. They are part of the evidence supporting the Separate Development Hypothesis (De Houwer, 1990). The paper will further examine the caregivers’ languages focusing on the proportion of
nouns and verbs and explore their possible relationships to the child’s lexical development.

References:


From formulae to complex sentences: a longitudinal study of the acquisition of Japanese as a second language (JSL) by an intensive adult learner

Junko Iwasaki
Edith Cowan University

Processability Theory (PT) (Pienemann, 1998) explains learners’ L2 development in terms of the compatibility of grammatical information from different levels of constituents in their interlanguage, e.g., within a phrase, across phrases, and across clauses. Further, in the extension of PT (Pienemann, Di Biase & Kawaguchi, 2005; 2009) learners’ choice of a syntactic structure is accounted for by their readiness for the syntactic-pragmatic interface. For example Kawaguchi (2009) uses Lexical Mapping Hypothesis to explain how learners become able to produce causative structures in Japanese.

The aim of this paper was to determine whether or not the findings can further support the hierarchical stages of acquisition of morpho-syntactic structures in JSL claimed by a range of PT based studies (e.g., Di Biase & Kawaguchi, 2002; Kawaguchi, 2009). The acquisition of complex sentences (subordinate/main clauses) was also investigated.

The informant in this study was a 33 year old Australian male who was studying Japanese in an intensive mode in Australia. As a complete beginner, he participated in a 900 hour one-on-one Japanese language training over the period of one year. As part of the training, he was engaged in spontaneous conversation, communication games and story telling tasks with native speakers of Japanese on a fortnightly basis. Data were based on the informant’s utterances audio-recorded during 24 of those sessions.

The results of the study showed that there was a developmental sequence of acquisition of Japanese morpho-syntax, i.e., variant
verbal forms > the V-te V structures > benefactive/causative/passive structures > complex sentences with the assignment of appropriate particles in subordinate/main clauses. The emergence order of these structures paralleled the stages of acquisition of the procedural skills hypothesised in PT, suggesting that these findings lend further support to the validity of this theory. Further research is needed with respect to the Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG) based grammatical formalisation of the assignment of particles no (ga)/wa in subordinate/main clauses.

Reference:


Advanced L2 use in child ESL acquisition

Yumiko Yamaguchi
University of Western Sydney and Meiji University

The aim of this paper is to examine the advanced use of morphology and syntax in the acquisition of English as a second language (ESL) based on Processability Theory (PT) (Pienemann, 1998; Pienemann, Di Biase, and Kawaguchi, 2005). Although the development of English by second language (L2) and foreign language learners has been examined in previous PT-based research (e.g., Dao, 2007; Dyson, 2004, 2007, 2009; Pienemann, 1998; Sakai, 2008), few longitudinal studies have been conducted to analyze the higher stages in the acquisitional path of ESL. In particular, more studies are needed in order to examine the acquisition of English syntax in accordance with the extension of PT (Pienemann, Di Biase, and Kawaguchi, 2005), which characterizes the higher stages of syntactic development in L2 acquisition.

For data collection, a Japanese primary school child acquiring English in Australia was observed over the period of two years. Several tasks, such as semi-structured interviews, narratives and communication games, were utilized to elicit various linguistic structures. The child’s speech production in English was audio-recorded fortnightly in the first two months, monthly in the rest of the first year, and every three months in the second year. The use of English L2 in the later sessions is focused on in this paper. As the current PT (Bettoni and Di Biase, in press; Di Biase and Kawaguchi, in press; Pienemann, Di Biase, and Kawaguchi, 2005) has proposed separate processability hierarchies for English morphology and syntax, further divided into declaratives and interogatives, the higher stages in the acquisitional path of ESL found in this longitudinal study are compared with the developmental stages in the modified PT hierarchies. Results show that the ESL acquisition by the Japanese child was generally compatible with the current PT. Also, it is found that morphology develops faster than syntax in later
sessions. In particular, various interrogative structures are found to emerge after most of the morphological structures are acquired.

References:


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**Producing and comprehending grammar – same story?**

Gisela Håkansson, *Lund University*

Do learners always produce what they comprehend? Or do they comprehend structures they do not produce? The overwhelming majority of language acquisition research is founded on data on language production. The general assumption is that comprehension precedes production, or that they are at the same level – but the area is harshly underinvestigated. From the perspective of Universal Grammar, the idea of having different grammars for comprehension and production is not interesting, or appealing. Nevertheless, there are some empirical studies, and also results revealing asymmetries between production and comprehension of linguistic forms (Hendricks & Koster 2010). These asymmetries are often explained as methodological problems, for example by pragmatic and semantic factors as confounding variables in the comprehension tasks.

In my talk I will discuss the relationship between comprehension and production from the perspective of Processability Theory (Pienemann 1998, 2005). The implicational order of processing procedures provides a framework for precise hypotheses of specific morpho-syntactic structures. I will give a brief outline of Swedish grammar and present results from comprehension and production in three types of learners - L1 learners, L2 learners and children with Specific Language Impairment. The results indicate that there is a complex interaction between comprehension and production with changes during the course of language development.

References:


Towards automaticity: On-line production of English L2 passives under conditions of different cognitive demands

Kenny Wang
Interpreting and Translation Research Group, University of Western Sydney

The extended PT (Pienemann, Di Biase, & Kawaguchi, 2005) hypothesise that since passives as a set of optional structures require speakers to map the a-structure onto the f-structure in a noncanonical fashion, only advanced L2 learners could produce passives. In an earlier PT-based study (Kawaguchi & Zhang, 2007; see also Di Biase & Kawaguchi, 2009), it was found that while all of the Japanese L2 learners who have acquired the inter-phrasal procedure in the study have been taught the passive construction, some of them could produce passives in the self-paced storytelling task, and only few of them could produce passives in the on-line speech elicitation task. Following Kawaguchi and Zhang (2007), the aim of this study was to determine whether advanced L2 learners who could produce passives on-line could further be differentiated using on-line tasks of low and high cognitive demands.

Seventy-five Mandarin speaking English L2 learners who had all acquired the inter-phrasal procedure participated in the study. They were administered two on-line tasks designed to elicit the passive voice. The tasks differed in the level of cognitive demands they exerted on the informants. The study found that L2 learners who had acquired the inter-phrasal procedure could be further differentiated into four categories. The four learner categories ranged from those who relied solely on canonical mapping even under the low demand condition, to those who could produce passives with relative ease and high level of accuracy under the high demand condition.

The results point to a developmental trend where learners for whom the inter-phrasal procedure had emerged exhibited a gradience of L2 automaticity. By manipulating the cognitive load of a task, one can discriminate those who have a higher degree of L2 automaticity from those who rely more on other compensatory strategies in processing passives.

References:


Structural priming and development of redundant structures

Fatih Bayram
Newcastle University, UK

This study focuses on how the choices made by language learners might change according to the linguistic environment they experience. The presentation includes: (1) a review of the evidence from previous experiments on structural priming in various forms of language; (2) a description of redundant structures and negotiation for meaning; and (3) a discussion of the consequences of structural priming on the interlanguage development of redundant structures when they are confronted with a choice between form and meaning. Studies on structural priming show that, when people speak or write, they tend to be influenced by some structures that either they have recently produced themselves or experienced others producing. In addition, they show that the repetition of verbs during interaction increases the effect of priming (the lexical-boost effect). However, there may be some factors that interfere with the effect of priming and learners’ syntactic decisions made during language production. This study aims to answer the question: Is the effect of structural priming restricted to communicatively important syntactic features or does it extend to redundant linguistic markers? Specifically, the current experiment was designed to investigate the priming effect of English redundant morphological structure 3sg-s (third person singular -s marking) on those language learners who were developmentally ready to process it. There were 9 participants, who carried out communicative tasks with a more advanced L2 English interlocutor - the researcher - who provided the priming of developmentally advanced 3sg-s form throughout the treatment tasks. The results indicated that the participants who evidenced high levels of structural priming for 3sg-s were unlikely to advance to a higher stage in the developmental hierarchy of ESL. It is therefore concluded that the communicative value of a structural form, specifically when it is a redundant form, may obstruct the facilitative effect of structural priming on the language development of learners.

The effects of bilingualism on first-language recovery in equilingual speakers

Salinee Antarasena
Ramkhamhaeng University

This study seeks to answer: (1) what if we became deaf after acquiring first language proficiency, and became equilingual speaker? How vocabulary recalls and translation equivalents could be transferable across both languages? and (2) when the auditory perception has been restored, whether or not the first language proficiency could be recovered? A group of post-lingually deafened adults (native speakers of Thai) after 12-month implant were tested; all of whom became equilingual speakers of both Thai and Thai Sign Language (TSL) and used both languages on a regular basis prior to their cochlear implantation. Instruction of the tasks was introduced to all participants through printed explanation in Thai and sign language from native signer. Results suggested satisfactory scores in all oral-auditory tasks including vocabulary recall, translation equivalents and in phrasing. Subtle difference was noted, however, in a task of sample sentences which indicated that the participants spent considerably longer time in arranging word order. This indicated that when the auditory perception is restored, bilingualism (in this case, Thai and TSL) indeed had no negative effect on the first-language recovery with respect to their oral-auditory processing, but produced syntactic effects in their sentence production. Conclusion also discusses other possible factors including age at onset of deafness and duration of deafness.
Morphosyntactic development of English and Serbian in five-year-old bilingual first language acquirers under the effect of three months of schooling in Australia

Lucija Medojević
University of Western Sydney

This study investigates the development of two languages in five-year-old bilingual first language acquirers under the effect of first three months of schooling in Australia. The study focuses on bilingual first language acquirers who receive linguistic input from two typologically different languages, i.e. Serbian, the home language, and English, the mainstream language of the school and other social environments. Children of immigrants in Australia grow up in a ‘situation-bond’ language exposure (Vihman and McLaughlin, 1982, Qi, Di Biase and Campbell, 2006), but their two languages develop separately (De Houwer, 2005; Meisel, 1989) and in language-dependent manner (Itani-Adams, 2007), often developing at different rates (Qi, 2004). At the beginning of their schooling they are plunged into a new linguistic and social situation within an exclusively English-speaking environment, that dramatically impact on the child’s social network and his/her linguistic development.

The aim is to investigate the extent of development in each of the two languages of bilingual children before commencing school and after three months of schooling in mainstream environment. Their development in each language is compared to L1 acquisition of their monolingual peers. In addition, I look at the relationship between the grammatical development in Serbian and in English, particularly in relation to grammatical relations as expressed by the case system in Serbian and word order in English respectively.

The study of development in two languages requires a reliable, tried and tested measurement instrument which is cross-linguistically and psychologically plausible. For this purpose Processability Theory (Pienemann, 1998) and its recent extension (Pienemann, Di Biase & Kawaguchi, 2005) is adopted as the measuring instrument to investigate the development of both Serbian and English. This allows comparison against a common benchmark.

References:


Challenging the scope-precision dilemma in language testing: The common European framework & linguistic profiling

Anke Lenzing and Anja Plesser
Paderborn University

In language testing, there are two fundamentally different approaches when it comes to assessing learner language, namely rating scales and linguistic profiling tools (cf. Brindley 1998). At first glance, these two assessment types exclude each other as each of them requires compromise on either scope or precision (Pienemann & Kessler 2007). In our view, rating scales and diagnostic tools should rather be seen as complementary than as opposing instruments of the two kinds of linguistic measurement. Why not implement a diagnostic tool of profile analysis in such a framework as the CEFR? By combining both approaches, two basic goals could be achieved (Pienemann & Mackey 1992: 135):

1. A comprehensive [global] assessment of a wide [scope] of components of language in use
2. An [precise] overview of the learner’s grammatical development at a particular point in time which, moreover, predicts which grammatical structures will be learnable next.

In order to do so, the relationship and potential comparability of these two tools has to be clarified in the first place.
In our contribution, we will present the results of a pilot study conducted in 2009 with L2 learners of English. In the study, we investigated whether there is a correlation of diagnosing learner progress using the CEFR and the PT stages. We collected both oral and written data. As for the oral corpus, the CEFR levels were determined by trained CEFR raters whereas in terms of PT stages the learners were diagnosed with Rapid Profile. As for the written corpus, the learners took the computer-based DIALANG test for the

CEFR rating and in terms of PT stages had to solve specific writing tasks designed for this purpose.

References:

Nature or nurture? Marking the past tense by advanced Chinese speakers of L2 English

Eileen Bower, Bo Liu and Yanyin Zhang
University of Canberra

It has been observed in the SLA literature that highly proficient Chinese NSs of L2 English have trouble applying the past tense marker –ed in the past tense context (e.g., Beck 1997, Lardiere 1998a, 1998b, 2002, Hawkins and Liszka 2003). A recent study by Zhang et al. (under review) that examined the current status of plural –s, past tense –ed and 3rd sg –s in the L2 English of 6 Chinese learners also found this to be true. Trying to locate the source of the ‘deficiency,’ SLA scholars have proposed a variety of possibilities ranging from cross-linguistic influence (L1 Chinese temporal morphology and syllable structures), to UG-based L2 knowledge representation and the degree of contact with L2 English. The results, however, are inclusive. Given its low position on the PT processing hierarchy, the trouble to supply the past marker –ed by proficient Chinese NSs seems less likely to be processing-induced, esp. when little trouble was found for the plural –s (Zhang et al, under review). The present study will venture into another possible source of the problem: the English language training Chinese learners have received while pursuing their first degree in China. We hypothesize that the informants who were English major and who received rigorous L2 training at prestigious Chinese universities do not have the ‘deficiency’ as documented in the literature.

The speech data will be collected through oral interviews with Chinese NSs who are lecturers at the University of Canberra in Australia. Although their current English proficiency is very high by virtue of their current occupation, it is yet to see the extent of past tense –ed suppliance in their L2 English speech. Our findings will make a contribution to 1) the current theoretical discussion on the issue (nature or nurture), 2) L2 pedagogy, and 3) the idea of ‘generative entrenchment’ in the pedagogical sense.

References:
Acquiring L2 English morphology in multiple sociolinguistic settings

Ima Widyastuti and Yanyin Zhang
University of Canberra

This study addresses the issue of the role of cognitive and social/contextual factors on SLA. The linguistic forms in the study were three English grammatical morphemes (plural –s, past tense –ed, and 3rd –s). The informants were three members of a family (parents and their 5-year-old daughter) from Indonesia who lived, worked and/or studied in Australia for one year. The parents had learned English through their schooling in Indonesia, and the father had opportunities to use English in his work in Indonesia. In Australia, the father studied full-time at university and worked part-time, the mother worked full-time, and the daughter went to school. The family presented us with multiple contexts in which SLA took place: learning L2 in a ‘dominant L2 setting’ where the target language English is the ‘native of language of the majority of the population and used in all domains in everyday life’ (Siegel 2003, p.179); learning L2 in an ‘external L2 setting’ (by the parents) where the L2 is not the medium of communication in the society and is learned formally in the classroom (Siegel 2003, p.179); child and adult naturalistic and immersion SLA in the dominant L2 setting (the mother and the daughter).

L2 English morphology data was elicited through structured interviews in which the contexts for the three morphemes were embedded in a series of topics and tasks. Using the analytical and assessment method in Processability Theory (Pienemann 1998), we found that the father had acquired all three morphemes, whereas the mother had acquired the plural –s, and the daughter only the lexical plural –s. This outcome complies with the acquisition sequence of L2 English stipulated in Processability Theory regardless of the sociolinguistic settings surrounding our informants. EFL learning (parents) and L2 use in the EFL setting (father) were beneficial to SLA, and social and contextual factors in naturalistic and immersion settings had more impact on L2 use than acquisition, as attested by the informants’ L2 comprehension and communication skills in comparison to their L2 morphology (esp. the mother and the daughter). The discussion will address both the cognitive, the sociolinguistic and the pedagogical issues of SLA.

References:

Second language acquisition of German word order in the context of the Unmarked Alignment and Topic Hypotheses

Louise Jansen
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This paper will discuss the second language acquisition of German word order in the context of the Unmarked Alignment and Topic Hypotheses (Pienemann, Di Biase and Kawaguchi, 2005) and further theoretical work (Bettoni and Di Biase, forthcoming) in relation to the acquisition of English and Italian constituent questions. It will present cross-sectional spontaneous oral production data from 18 native speakers of English on their acquisition of canonical word order and the so-called verb-second rule in German declaratives and questions, analyzed with respect to emergence of TOPIC and FOCUS as well as unmarked versus marked alignment of the SUBJECT in relation to the (finite) VERB. When compared, the analyses show (1) that differentiation between SUBJECT and FOCUS/TOPIC has emerged in all but one learner and (2) that marked alignment as instantiated by the verb-second rule emerges in questions before it does in declaratives. The paper will conclude with a discussion of how the latter finding can be explained.

The question is how Daoism can save the world: Exploring ESL indirect questions

Bronwen Dyson
University of Sydney

Accounts of subordinate clause development in Processability Theory raise some fascinating issues which are addressed in this paper by investigating an ESL learner’s research questions. In PT, subordinate clauses have been viewed as a manifestation of stage 6: with the operation of the subordinate clause procedure, the phrase structure is hypothesized to include a (COMP)ROOT=-. In the case of ESL, this procedure allows Cancel Inversion in indirect questions, resulting in statement word order in non-main clauses (Pienemann, 1998, 2005). While empirical evidence suggests that Cancel Inversion is an advanced phenomenon, it also indicates that stage 4 ESL learners can acquire subordinate clauses, apparently due to the availability of the minimal Complementizer Phrase from stage 3 (Dyson, 2009). If this possibility were not taken into account, learners’ stages would be over-estimated, as may have occurred in Mansouri and Duffy (2005), where ‘beginner’ ESL students reached Cancel Inversion in speaking and writing. To clarify the development of indirect questions (and their relationship to subordinate clauses and direct questions), the paper reports on a semester-long study of an ESL PhD student’s (L1 Cantonese) research questions. The results show that, in her spoken and written questions regarding the influence of Daoism on environmental ethics, she initially relied on early subordination, then acquired Do/Aux2nd, later overgeneralised it to indirect contexts and finally moved onto Cancel Inversion. The paper concludes that, to confirm the emergence of Cancel Inversion, evidence is needed of Do/Aux2nd, its overgeneralisation and (ideally) self-correction. It also observes that the synergy between subordination and questions points towards the gradual enrichment of the Complementizer Phrase in stage 3 to 6 syntactic procedures.
References


The acquisition of the English plural morpheme *<s>* in EFL learners: a lexical or a developmental morphophonemic feature?

**Loan Dao**

*Australian National University*

This paper is a work-in-progress report on the investigation of whether the emergence of the English plural morpheme *<s>* in formal Vietnamese learners of EFL is a result of the developmental morphophonemic interface in the learners’ L2. The investigation follows the research findings of (1) Dao’s (2007) cross-sectional study on the acquisition order of the *<s>* morpheme under PT framework (according to which, Vietnamese learners of EFL acquire the phrasal plural *<s>* before the lexical plural *<s>* and the inter-phrasal *<s>*), and of (2) Hansen’s (2004) longitudinal study on the production of English codas by two Vietnamese learners of English.

While Dao (2007) and Charters, Dao & Jansen (forthcoming), attribute the found reverse acquisition order of the English plural morpheme *<s>* in Vietnamese learners of EFL to the probable nature of the links between conceptual structure, lexical structure and form in their L1 and in their target language, and to the possible influence or transfer of the way quantity and entity concepts are related in the cognitive organisation of their L1, a position that is in principle compatible with PT in the context of its Developmentally Moderated Transfer Hypothesis (Pienemann, Di Biase & Kawaguchi, 2005); Hansen (2004) suggests that the emergence sequence of English syllable codas, especially the bi-morphemic plural *<s>* in her Vietnamese participants, is not only constrained by phonological developmental effects and grammatical conditioning, but also by L1 transfer effects. This work-in-progress analyses the speech production data of 36 adolescent, formal Vietnamese learners of EFL, using PRAAT phonetic analysis software, to establish if Hansen’s (2004) suggestions are supported.
References:


Applying Processability Theory to programme evaluation and development – L2 English at Flachsland immersion school (Hamburg, Germany)

Jörg-U. Keßler
Ludwigsburg University of Education

In this presentation I will explore the power of PT (Pienemann 1998, 2005; Pienemann & Keßler in press) in general as well as linguistic profiling using Rapid Profile (e.g. Keßler & Keatinge 2008) in particular for the evaluation of a rather innovative school project in Hamburg, Germany. In 2008 the Flachsland Immersion School opened its doors as an open school following a Montessori tradition with progressive education that is not pressed into a formal framework of isolated lessons but rather aims at a holistic approach to learning. According to the school’s rationale 50 percent of all instruction (or rather learning) is provided in English which is an L2 to all the learners in that school.

An evaluation of the L2 English skills (listening and speaking) towards the end of the first year of instruction revealed that the learners were very communicative and rather self-confident, however, almost all the conversation in our interviews to elicit spontaneous oral speech data was answered by the learners in German. As the listening test revealed quite some understanding of the target language it became clear that the learners did not lack sufficient input in the target language but that the school had not provided enough learning opportunities for the learners to actually produce the target language spontaneously (Elsner & Keßler in press).

When confronted with the rather poor results of the assessment of spontaneous oral speech production the school administration as well as the teachers were eager to change the teaching programme in order to cater for more negotiation of meaning without neglecting the open and progressive framework of the school.
I will report about the study and the educational programme development instigated by our PT-based findings. Additionally, new results of a follow-up study that will be conducted at the end of June 2010 will also be presented. This second round of data collection will actually reveal whether the new teaching programme based on PT-based assessment and a developmentally moderated syllabus (Keßler 2007) including developmentally moderated focus on form (Di Biase 2008) has lead to a significant increase of spontaneous oral speech production by the learners.

In addition to the data collected at Flachsland Immersion School, Hamburg the study is completed by a discussion of the outcome of learners in two control groups, namely another Immersion School near Stuttgart and an L2 English learner of a similar age who acquired English in a natural setting.

References:


The relationship between proficiency testing and competency-based assessment of English as a Second Language - The roles of lexicon, morphology and syntax in language learning

Kristine Shead
University of Western Sydney

The task of developing a valid and reliable language test is problematic because of the complexity and conflicting demands involved. For competency-based assessment (CBA), in the vocational field of education, it is relatively easy to determine if a skill is acquired or not. A person can, for instance, either use the correct tool to perform a particular function or not. In acquiring a second language (L2), however, skills are developed over time so the assessment of those skills must take into account that there will be stages in the progression towards competency. Little has been known about the exact cognitive processes involved and what skills will be presented in stages as the learner becomes more competent.

The determination of the criteria used to inform the descriptors in a language test is an area that will be investigated in this study. It will address the weaknesses in current proficiency language testing showing that performance standards have been subjectively assigned.

The objective of this research is to investigate what L2 research can contribute to the establishment of reliable criteria for a competency-based language assessment test that provides meaningful information about the level of a testee’s manipulation of the language. It will argue for criterion-referenced competency testing based on Lexical richness, an established measure of language acquisition (Laufer & Nation 1995) and Processability Theory (PT; Pienemann 1998) and its extension, the Unmarked Alignment Hypothesis (Pienemann, Di Biase, & Kawaguchi 2005) and the Lexical Mapping Hypothesis (Pienemann et al. 2005; Kawaguchi & Di Biase 2005).
Malay tertiary learners’ ESL development: Preliminary findings

Krishnavenee Fabbo
Australian National University

This paper discusses the preliminary findings of the development of English syntax and morphology of Malay tertiary learners who (a) have had 11 years of formal education and (b) have reached differing levels of L2 attainment. This study is informed by the Processability Theory’s (PT) variation and development framework. It will investigate the differences and similarities in L2 competence and knowledge of one low (LEP) and high (HEP) proficient adult ESL learners respectively enrolled in their first year of Diploma in Engineering at a public university in Malaysia. In addition, the study extends PT’s emergence criteria with measures of accuracy, fluency, and richness of lexicon to better understand the acquisition of L2 morphosyntax of inter-groups of learners. Subjects were administered a battery of timed and untimed language tasks and an interview to elicit targeted L2 grammatical morphemes and word order. Findings thus far reveal the HEP subject’s L2 morphosyntax development is at the inter-phrasal stage/marked alignment stage, unlike the LEP whose L2 syntax is much developed than the morphology. The LEP subject’s interlanguage evidence lower degree of L2 accuracy and lexical richness, but a comparable degree of fluency in the L2 compared to the HEP subject. Interestingly, the LEP subject resorts to code-switching and mixing to get the message across easily, thus are influencing his seemingly fluent and smooth speech.

An analysis of Chinese junior high school students’ oral performance in English using Processability Theory

Ran Li
Australian National University

As a second language acquisition theory which tries to explain how L2 learners process linguistic knowledge for oral development, Processability Theory proposes an implicational developmental hierarchy in which every stage is the prerequisite for the immediately following stage. PT has been tested on a range of languages and different settings. The validity of processability theory has never been tested on a range of Chinese-speaking learners of English who acquire English as a second language exclusively via formal instruction. The poster will present the current results from a cross-sectional study designed to test whether PT’s developmental hierarchy for L2 English is valid for Chinese learners in tutored context. Given that the study is undertaken in the context of my MA sub-thesis, it focuses on syntax only. Because interrogative structures are allocated in each stage of PT’s syntax hierarchy, they are representative of learner’s syntax development and therefore are the focus of the current study. Subjects participating in this research are students from grade one to grade three attending a junior high school in Huhhot, China. Spontaneous oral data is elicited from a range of communicative tasks (e.g. role play; spot the differences; & story completion) and a semi-structured conversation). The transcribed data is analyzed applying the emergence criterion and implicational scaled. In addition to the main research purpose, the study will also test (or examine?) whether structures contained in the textbooks and prescribed as teaching points have emerged in students’ spontaneous oral production and suggestions for syllabus construction will be provided.
The exploration of the differences and relationships of the learners’ acquisition of oral and written English through the measurement of hierarchy of processing procedures

Hao Tang
Guangdong Institute of Science and Technology

According to Processability Theory (PT), L2 learners can not understand and produce those linguistic forms which are beyond the current stage of the language processor (Pienemann, 2007). So, based on the understanding of the architecture of the language processor and how the L2 is acquired under it, teachers can not only better predict the learners’ L2 developmental stages, explain the acquiring variations among learners, but also indicate some constructive and objective guidelines for L2 teaching. To date, many empirical studies based on PT have been conducted for learners’ L2 learning and also have successfully corroborated some hypotheses predicted by PT, and other measurements such as Hunt’s (1965) syntactic maturity, Shafe and Tannen’s (1987) lexical density, etc. have also been used to assess the L2 acquisition (cited in Zhu, 2008), but only a small number of empirical studies have been carried out to investigate the differences and relationships between the learners' oral and written English acquiring processes. Therefore, this study will adopt the hierarchy of processing procedures applied to English (Pienemann, 1998) as the measurement to explore the two aspects (oral and written English) of the English language acquisition.

Informants (in EFL environment) in the study are divided into two distinctive groups: three lower-intermediate English proficiency college students and another three intermediate English proficiency students. Similar types of communicative tasks used to elicit the oral and written data are conducted among informants respectively and all the informants’ speeches are transcribed. Then both the elicited oral and written data will be analyzed morphologically and syntactically to locate the informants’ oral and written current developmental stages. The purpose of the small-scale study is to explore to what extent the learners’ oral English acquisition is different from that of their written English; are there any positive or negative relationships between the two aspects of language skills. With the help of the analysis, the writer will finally propose several pedagogical suggestions in terms of the learners’ current acquiring stages and present probable explanations for the causes of the variation in oral and written English acquisition to help teachers bridge the gap between the two aspects of language skills.
Processability approach to Arabic L2 teaching and syllabus design

Ghassan Al Shatter
Australian National University

This study aims to identify the relationship between the developmental hierarchy in the acquisition of Arabic as a second language (Arabic L2) and formal classroom instruction. Special attention is given to the subset of Processability Theory (PT) known as Teachability Theory, and its implications for teaching methods of L2 in general and Arabic L2 in particular. Participants were nine students studying Arabic as a second language at the Australian National University. Interviews were conducted over a period of two teaching semesters during the year 2005. Both implicational and distributional analyses were conducted. The results of these analyses showed that teachers and curriculum developers should consider the PT's predicted developmental stages for Arabic L2 structures when developing teaching materials and syllabus.

The effect of the involvement load hypothesis on improving Iranian EFL learners' incidental vocabulary learning in listening comprehension classes

Nafiseh Asadzadeh Maleki
Islamic Azad University

Because of the importance of vocabulary learning in EFL classes, this study intended to prove that word learning and retention in a second language is contingent upon a task's Involvement Load Hypothesis, i.e. the amount of need, search, and evaluation, as proposed by Hulstijn and Laufer (2001). This hypothesis claims that tasks inducing higher involvement load produce better vocabulary retention effects. This study is aimed to apply the hypothesis to substantiating incidental vocabulary acquisition in EFL listening comprehension. To fulfill this study, eighty pre-intermediate EFL learners were assigned to one of the four groups: a control group that received no treatment and three experimental groups that complete one of three vocabulary learning tasks that varied in the amount of the involvement; group 1, listening comprehension questions with marginal glosses irrelevant to the questions, group 2, listening comprehension questions with marginal glosses relevant to the questions, group 3, listening comprehension questions with marginal glosses relevant to the questions followed by sentence writing with the same words. According to the immediate and delayed vocabulary retention tests' results, it turned out that there was a significant difference in retention effects among the three tasks, which proved the validity of the Involvement Load Hypothesis, confirming that tasks with higher involvement load lead to better retention effects.
Is there any effect of ELES on the subsequent EFL learning?

Shigeo Uematsu
Kyoto Sangyo University

This study investigates the effect of the starting age and the amount of English Learning at the Elementary School (ELES) on the subsequent English skill development and the attitudinal change at the junior high school funded by Japanese government grant (kakenhi). About 700 students consisting of 230 students from grades one (seven), two (eight), and three (nine) from a public junior high school participated in this study. This junior high school locates in the city, where once a week ELES was implemented from 2005 in grade five (35 hours) and six (35 hours) and in 2006 from grade one (20 hours up to grade four). In 2009 academic year, the grade seven students received 90 hours of ELES, the grade eight students received 70 hours, and the grade nine students also received only 70 hours. Since all the tests and questionnaires should be conducted at the completion of each grade, this study is focusing on data obtained from 2009 academic year. Research questions (RQ) addressed in this study are: RQ 1: Does earlier implementation of ELES (Grade 7: from grade four) help students in terms of their English listening, speaking, reading, vocabulary, and grammar skills developments in junior high school stage? RQ 2: Does earlier implementation of ELES effect on junior high school students’ English-related attitudinal variables? The preliminary analyses of the linguistic variables revealed that 2009 grade 7 students were slightly outperformed by 2008 grade 7 students.

The best of both worlds? A comparative analysis of online synchronous and asynchronous corrective feedback in Japanese/English eTandem

Satomi Kawaguchi
University of Western Sydney
Jack Bower
Kanda University of International Studies

Advances in communications technology have created increased opportunities for foreign language learners to access authentic communication as well as to focus on form in their L2. In particular, text-based Synchronous Computer Mediated Communication (SCMC) has unique potential for fostering ‘noticing’ of gaps in L2 interlanguage (Lai & Zhao, 2006). While a good deal of research has examined learner interactions via text-based SCMC, strategies for using logs of text-based SCMC interactions for L2 learning remains an unexplored area, in spite of researchers having pointed out the great potential of logs as a language learning tool (Schwienhorst, 2003; Sotillo, 2005). This presentation will examine the use of logs as a means of providing corrective feedback from native speakers to non-native speakers in eTandem. More specifically the presenters will provide a comparative analysis of corrective feedback given by participants in eTandem interactions between university students in Japan and Australia who were learning each other’s languages. Corrective feedback provided to eTandem partners during interaction via text-based SCMC is compared to corrective feedback provided to eTandem partners post-chat utilizing logs of chat interaction. Results show that implicit corrective feedback on NNS’s errors occurred in text-based SCMC interaction but not frequently. On the other hand, negotiation of meaning (Long 1996) occurred most often to overcome communication problems during chat exchange rather than in direct relation to errors. This is a crucial element for L2 development since the learner finds himself/herself in the sort of context that allows for recognition of developmental gaps. Further, explicit corrective feedback utilizing conversation logs and
exchanged by email achieved high rates of correction both in English and Japanese sessions. The strategy of sending post-chat corrective feedback is shown to be an effective eTandem language learning strategy providing learners with opportunities to focus on form in their L2.
University of Western Sydney
Parramatta Campus South

The South campus is located on the corner of Victoria Road and James Ruse Drive. Entrance to Parramatta South is via Victoria Road. To plan your trip to UWS please visit the following link
http://www.uws.edu.au/campuses_structure/cas/campuses/parramatta

Sydney Bus 521, 523, 524 and 525: Parramatta Station < > UWS Campus:

Building EB
Room EB.3.33
k.wang@uws.edu.au
Welcome Drinks
Heritage Bar
CROWNE PLAZA HOTEL
19th September 2010, 4:30 – 6:30 pm
30 Phillip Street,
Parramatta NSW 2150

You are invited to join our Welcome Drinks at Heritage Bar on Sunday, 19th September 2010. It will be a great opportunity to meet presenters and participants. Light refreshments will be provided. Please register for this event by sending a confirmation email to Lucija l.medojevic@uws.edu.au.

Conference Dinner
Sabatini’s Italian & Seafood Restaurant
20th September 2010, 7 pm
41 Phillip Street,
Parramatta, NSW 2150

You are invited to join our Conference dinner at the Sabatini’s Restaurant on Monday, 20th September 2010. The cost is $52 per person (drinks not included). Registration is essential. Please send a confirmation email to Lucija l.medojevic@uws.edu.au.

Drinks are ordered and charged for separately. You can bring your own wine or champagne with corkage fee of $3.50 per person.

Please register by Wednesday, 8th September 2010.