



2ND ANNUAL SECOND LANGUAGE STUDIES SPRING SYMPOSIUM: THE SCOPE OF SLA RESEARCH

Friday, April 3rd, 2009

PLENARY SPEAKERS:

Judith F. Kroll, Ph.D. - The Pennsylvania State University

“Cognitive Perspectives on Bilingualism”

Wells B-102 9:30 - 10:30 AM

John M. Norris, Ph.D. - The University of Hawaii

“Assessment and Evaluation: Alternatives for Inquiry into Language Learning and Teaching”

Wells B-104 4:00 - 5:00 PM

MSU SECOND LANGUAGE STUDIES PROGRAM PRESENTATIONS:

Jamie Thomas - “Does Tense-Marking Impede Comprehension? Relative Clause Acquisition in L2 Swahili”

Wells B-102 10:45 - 11:15 AM

Ben White - “Imagining Phrasal Verbs”

Wells B-102 11:15 - 11:45 AM

Hiep Chau & Mark Shea - “Cultural Differences in Teacher Beliefs about Grammar Instruction”

Wells B-102 11:45 - 12:15 PM

Sara Hillman - “Reconceptualizing Good Language Learners: A Focus on Access and Agency”

Wells B-104 1:30 - 2:00 PM

Kimi Nakatsukasa - “Impact of Proficiency Differences on Noticing during L2 Conversation”

Wells B-104 2:00 - 2:30 PM

Luke Plonsky - “Towards a Measure of Quality for Meta-Analyses of L2 Research”

Wells B-104 2:45 - 3:15 PM

Ching-Ni Hsieh - “Learner Variables and Rater Perceptions of Chinese L2 Oral Performance”

Wells B-104 3:15 - 3:45 PM

**2nd Annual Second Language Studies Spring Symposium:
The Scope of SLA Research**

PLENARY SPEAKERS:

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“Cognitive Perspectives on Bilingualism”

Wells B-102, 9:30 – 10:30 AM

Until recently, research on language and its cognitive interface focused almost exclusively on monolingual speakers of a single language and typically speakers of English as the native language. In the past decade, the recognition that more of the world’s speakers are bilingual than monolingual has led to a dramatic increase in research that assumes bilingualism as the norm rather than the exception. This new research investigates the way in which bilinguals negotiate the presence of two languages in a single mind and brain. A critical insight is that bilingualism provides a tool for examining aspects of the cognitive architecture that are otherwise obscured by the skill associated with native language performance. From this perspective, bilinguals are model subjects of study for cognitive scientists and cognitive neuroscientists who wish to identify constraints and plasticity in learning and the way in which competition is resolved across cognitive systems. In this talk, I overview this approach to language processing and consider the consequences that bilingualism holds for cognition more generally.

Judith Kroll is Distinguished Professor of Psychology, Linguistics, and Women's Studies and Co-Director of the Center for Language Science at Pennsylvania State University (<http://www.cls.psu.edu>). She completed her undergraduate work at New York University and her graduate work at Brandeis University. She previously held faculty positions at Mount Holyoke College, Rutgers University, and Swarthmore College. Together with Annette de Groot, she co-edited *Tutorials in Bilingualism: Psycholinguistic Perspectives* (1997, Erlbaum) and the *Handbook of Bilingualism: Psycholinguistic Approaches* (2005, Oxford). She served as a co-editor of *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* from its founding in 1997 until 2001 and its coordinating editor from 2001-2002. She serves on the editorial boards of *Journal of Memory and Language*, *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, *International Journal of Bilingualism*, and *Psychological Science*. The research that she and her students conduct concerns the acquisition, comprehension, and production of two languages during second language learning and in proficient bilingual performance. Their work, using behavioral and neurocognitive methods, is supported by grants from the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health. Together with Suparna Rajaram and Randi Martin, she was one of the founding organizers of *Women in Cognitive Science*, an organization developed to promote the advancement of women in the cognitive sciences and supported by the National Science Foundation (<http://www.womencogsci.org/>).

John M. Norris, Ph.D.

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“Assessment and Evaluation: Alternatives for Inquiry into Language Learning and Teaching”

Wells B-104, 4:00 – 5:00 PM

Assessment and evaluation are familiar to language educators, though often viewed as primarily managerial processes undertaken in response to accountability demands and following prescribed institutional traditions of practice (e.g., student grading, course evaluation, program review, accreditation). However, these perceptions may delimit the ways in which assessment and evaluation can inform meaningful, relevant, situated, and accurate inquiry into language learning and teaching. In this presentation, I will explore the potential contributions of student learning assessment and program evaluation to the improvement of language education research. Building from the premise that a major focus in L2 research should be the optimization of language educational practice, I first highlight several challenges to the utility of contemporary L2 research, including concerns with ecological validity, theoretical intransigence, and a fundamental lack of accessibility and ‘actionability’ on the basis of research findings. By contrast, I propose that pragmatic traditions of assessment and evaluation offer vital heuristics via which such challenges are substantially resolved. Assessment, then, should provide trustworthy indications of students’ language abilities in ways that match closely the authentic, complex, and long-term nature of instructed L2 development. However, on its own, assessment only tells part of the story, though a key part to be sure. In order for assessment-based findings to inform our understandings about teaching and learning, inquiry must also provide frames of reference within which learning outcomes can be explained. Program evaluation offers such a framework, enabling systematic empirical observations of the diverse components that constitute the language teaching and learning experience, yet doing so in a way that situates explanations within locally contingent realities of actual language programs. Through the incorporation of rich student learning assessments in articulation with inquiry-focused program evaluation, language educators at diverse levels (program-internal as well as discipline-wide) stand to learn much about what works, and how, in actual language education practice. In illustration of their considerable transformative potential, I provide several recent examples of the ways in which assessment and evaluation are driving educationally relevant inquiry, drawing primarily from the task-based language teaching and college FL education literatures.

John Norris is an associate professor in the Department of Second Language Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. His research focuses on assessment, evaluation, and pedagogy in second and foreign language programs and in higher education. He has taught language and applied linguistics, and consulted on assessment and evaluation projects, in Belgium, Brazil, Germany, Japan, Spain, and around the U.S., and his publications have appeared in journals such as *Foreign Language Annals*, *Language Learning*, *Language Teaching Research*, *Language Testing*, *Language Learning & Technology*, *Modern Language Journal*, *TESOL Quarterly*, and *Die Unterrichtspraxis*. His most recent books explore the topics of validation (*Validity evaluation in language assessment*, published by Peter Lang) and research synthesis (*Synthesizing research on language learning and teaching*, co-edited with Lourdes Ortega, published by John Benjamins). Prior to joining the University of Hawai‘i, he served as assessment specialist at Northern Arizona University. Most recently, he was the principal investigator for a three-year project (funded by the U.S. Department of Education) that sought to enhance the capacities of college foreign language educators to engage in useful program evaluation practices.

**MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY SECOND LANGUAGE STUDIES PH.D.
PROGRAM PRESENTATIONS:**

Jamie Thomas

“Does Tense-Marking Impede Comprehension? Relative Clause Acquisition in L2 Swahili”

Wells B-102, 10:45 – 11:15 AM

Recent commentaries in relative clause (RC) acquisition have identified a need for closer investigations of the roles of morphology and other structural factors in the acquisition of relatives across a wider variety of languages (e.g., Eckman, 2007; Hawkins, 2007). This study takes advantage of the richly agglutinating verbal morphology of Swahili, a yet understudied east African Bantu language, to examine the roles of tense-marking, null subjects, and subjects vs. direct objects in two experiments on the acquisition of RCs. Research questions were:

1. Is there an asymmetry in the comprehension of subject vs. direct object relatives?
2. Which of the 3 Swahili RC types is best comprehended or preferred by learners?
3. Does the variable position of the relative marker present an additional challenge to learners?

Swahili maintains 3 different strategies for relativization of subjects or direct objects, each of which integrate a relative marker (REL) on either the overt complementizer *amba-*, or the verb. While the overt marking of tense is acceptable with relative marker on the complementizer, or in its infix position on the verb, overt tense-marking is incompatible with the relative marker as suffix to the verb. Additionally, null subjects are incompatible with the use of the complementizer.

(1) Subject *amba-* relative

mwanamke amba-ye a-na-mpenda mwanaume
woman amba-REL s/he-TNS-like man
'the woman who likes the man'

(2) Direct object *amba-* relative

mwanamke amba-ye mwanaume a-na-mpenda
woman amba-REL man s/he-TNS-like
'the woman who the man likes'

(3) Tensed subject relative (null subjects optional)

mwanamke a-na-ye-mpenda mwanaume
woman s/he-TNS-REL-like man
'the woman who likes the man'

(4) Suffixed subject relative (null subjects optional, no overt tense-marking)

mwanamke a-mpenda-ye mwanaume
woman s/he-like-REL man
'the woman who likes the man'

In experiment one, 20 English-speaking learners and 3 native speakers completed picture selection task on subject and direct object relatives (after O'Grady, Lee, & Choo, 2003), as well as an acceptability judgment task. Results showed learners comprehended better when subjects were relativized (91% of subject test items correct), as opposed to when direct objects were relativized (only 65%). Additionally, the number of subject relatives misunderstood as direct object relatives by learners was significantly lower than the number of reversals of direct object relatives, $\chi^2(1) = 9.00$, $p = .003$, $r = -.43$. Factor analysis of results from the acceptability judgment test showed tense-marking, rather than the optionality of null subjects, to be a strong factor in the acceptability of each of the 3 RC types in Swahili. This would indicate that learners of a pro-drop language, who do not encounter this parameter in their L1 are somewhat insensitive to its use in their L2.

In the second experiment, the role of tense-marking was further investigated through use of a 32-item grammaticality judgment test with a separate pool of 27 English-speaking learners, 7 of which were at the intermediate level, and 5 at the advanced level. Test items presented (1) a grammatically correct tense marker, (2) a superfluous tense marker in a grammatically incorrect position, or (3) a false tense marker in a grammatically correct position. Results indicate that the inclusion of the tense marker in the verb auxiliary is central to the learner's construction of the Swahili verb, as learners across levels preferred verbs wherein tense was overtly marked, even if the presence of the tense marker made for an ungrammatical relative clause. Overall, a Friedman's ANOVA revealed the 77.3% acceptance of relatives with the tense marker (amba- relatives and tensed relatives) to be significantly higher than the 42.6% acceptance of 'tenseless' or suffixed relatives, $\chi^2(1) = 24.00$, $p < .001$.

Outside of contributing linguistic factors, however, these results show compelling evidence for a relative clause type hierarchy, akin to the noun phrase accessibility hierarchy (Keenan & Comrie, 1979) wherein subject relatives are the most dominant relative type, followed by direct object relatives. The fact that what Comrie (2007) refers to as an 'NPAH effect' can be found in a language genetically unrelated to European or Asian languages is an exciting prospect for research in this area.

Ben White

“Imagining Phrasal Verbs”

Wells B-102, 11:15 – 11:45 AM

Cognitive linguistics, with its attention to conceptualization, symbolism, and metaphor, provides rich opportunities for application to second-language pedagogy (Achard & Niemeier, 2004). One promising area for application is the teaching of English phrasal verbs, the opacity and polysemy of which present a profound challenge for second-language learners. These learners often view verb+particle combinations as random. This is not surprising when traditional ESL textbooks present definition-matching exercises that privilege memorization over conceptual analysis. Given Bolinger’s (1971) description of phrasal verbs as “a floodgate of metaphor” (p. *xii*), conceptual analysis is precisely what is necessary to alter the pervasive student view that verbs and particles are combined in arbitrary and senseless ways. This paper proposes a novel method for phrasal-verb instruction and reports on its implementation within two ESL courses. The method builds on previous cognitive approaches to pedagogy that draw learners’ attention to metaphor in these lexical items (Kövecses & Szabó, 1996; Boers, 2000; Rudzka-Ostyn, 2003). To help learners make better sense of phrasal verbs, the proposed method spotlights interaction between verb and particle components.

In a classroom study, 35 learners from seven countries were introduced to the *zone of activity*. This is an image schema based on Lindner’s (1981) region of interactive focus, a conceptual space for “shared experience, existence, action, function, conscious interaction and awareness” (p. 171). Students were presented sketches of phrasal verbs to illustrate how a particle – in combination with the literal or figurative sense of the verb component – locates action or activity in a physical or metaphoric place. Outside the classroom, students searched for phrasal verbs in newspaper articles and collected extracts from these sources. Inside the classroom, students attempted to build *conceptual motivation* (Kövecses & Szabó, 1996) for some of the collected phrasal verbs by making sketches that included zones of activity and by sharing their drawings in small groups.

To examine potential changes in how students tackled comprehension of phrasal verbs, pre-instruction and post-instruction reading tasks were administered and analyzed. The tasks consisted of 16 written dialogues, each dialogue containing one target item. Eight targeted phrasal verbs were recycled from the pre- to the post-task. Students were asked to write explanations for “what the underlined phrasal verb means in each specific context.” None of the task’s phrasal verbs were collected by students or considered in class during the instruction phase.

A significant increase in the total number of accurate explanations for the repeated phrasal verbs ($z = -2.45$, $p < .05$, $r = -.61$) was noted. For instances on the post-task where participants produced explanations different from incorrect explanations on the pre-task, four trends were identified: incorporation of the particle into the second explanation; a less literal, more figurative explanation; a more detailed explanation; an explanation that better fit the dialogue context. Responses on a questionnaire reveal that most students found the instruction engaging and useful.

This paper will detail the method of instruction, discuss results of the study, and suggest adaptations for the teaching of languages other than English.

Hiep Chau & Mark Shea

“Cultural Differences in Teacher Beliefs about Grammar Instruction”

Wells B-102, 11:45 AM – 12:15 PM

Although ample research has been done on the controversial role of grammar instruction and error correction in second language (L2) learning, few studies look at what L2 teaching practitioners across cultures perceive about this issue. Such a comparison could suggest areas for adjustment in current teacher training and language education practices. This study surveyed 233 L2 teachers teaching in Vietnam (n=106) and the United States (n=127). Online and paper-based questionnaires were used to explore their beliefs regarding grammar instruction and error correction. An exploratory factor analysis of their responses to the questionnaire identified seven underlying factors (importance of grammar instruction, priority of communication, positive attitude to grammar instruction, relative importance of error correction, importance of grammatical accuracy, positive attitude to error correction, and relative importance of grammar in comprehension and communication). These factors were then used to investigate differences in beliefs among teachers working in Vietnam and the United States.

Research findings indicated that teachers from the two countries shared a common belief about the importance of grammar instruction and error correction, but significantly varied in their perceptions about two factors: priority of communication and importance of grammatical accuracy. Teachers in the USA tended to emphasize speaking and communication skills more than their Vietnamese counterparts, while the latter were more concerned about grammatical accuracy than the former.

There is a strong tradition of grammar education in Vietnam, and, certainly, educators can agree that grammatical accuracy is vital for successful language learning. However, given the recent national EFL curriculum reform that focuses on the communicative approach, the above results suggest that teacher training programs in Vietnam may want to consider ways to encourage more balance in language teachers' thinking about grammatical accuracy and communicative abilities in the classroom. In this way, future practitioners should take an important role in developing a complementary tradition of communicative skill to accompany that of grammatical accuracy.

Sara Hillman-Kassem

“Reconceptualizing Good Language Learners: A Focus on Access and Agency”

Wells B-104, 1:30 – 2:00 PM

In the 1970's, the field of second and foreign language learning was highly focused on discovering the secret formula to being a successful language learner (e.g. Cohen, 1977; Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975). These researchers hypothesized that *good* language learners were somehow different than *poor* learners in terms of their individual characteristics, learning strategies, or linguistic outputs. They sought particular strategies, techniques and activities that could be correlated with success in language learning. Research methodology on good language learners tended to be quantitative and experimental, favoring tests and surveys in controlled settings, as opposed to gathering longitudinal qualitative data in naturalistic settings. These researchers' references to *context* or the learning environment of second language (L2) learners were largely motivated by cognitive approaches that investigated how context altered the internal activity in individual language learners rather than an anthropological interest in the positions of L2 learners in social contexts and how learners accept or resist these positions in the specific social, historical and cultural contexts in which they are situated (Davis, 1995; Norton & Toohey, 2001).

This study expands on concepts of good language learners (Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978) and current trends towards sociocultural approaches in SLA theory (Norton & Toohey, 2001) by presenting an emic perspective of the language learning experiences of 15 highly proficient second language (L2) learners of Arabic. Through an analysis of questionnaire data and responses from follow-up interviews, I draw on poststructural perspectives (Norton Pierce, 1995, Siegal, 1996) and a community of practice framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to examine which social practices posed the biggest challenges for the participants in terms of their ability to access the Arabic speaking community of practice. In addition, I examine how the participants exercise human agency in creating, using or resisting these social practices in order to gain access to members of the Arabic speaking community.

The findings reveal four main social practices which posed the biggest challenges for the participants in terms of their ability to access the Arabic speaking community of practice. These included: (a) attitudes towards “correct” Arabic, (b) learners' social identities as non-Arabs and the assumption that they will not be able to speak Arabic, (c) how native Arabic speakers position themselves and how this affects their willingness to interact with foreigners in colloquial Arabic, and (d) learners' gender identities and how these identities constrained both male and females from certain kinds of interactions with Arabic speakers.

Kimi Nakatsukasa

“Impact of Proficiency Differences on Noticing during L2 Conversation”

Wells B-104, 2:00 – 2:30 PM

The current study investigates the interaction between first language (L1) speakers and second language (L2) speakers, and their noticing during interaction. Since the Interaction Hypothesis was proposed a decade ago, a number of studies have shown the facilitative role of interaction on L2 learning (see, Gass and Mackey, 2007 for a review). To date, however, the studies favored low and intermediate L2 speakers, and not many studies have included advanced L2 speakers (e.g., Watanabe & Swain, 2007). Furthermore, previous studies have focused on L2 speakers’ morphology, syntax, vocabulary, and phonology (e.g., Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2000), and Interactionist research studies have not thoroughly investigated other linguistic features such as pragmatics. In order to better reflect the L2 speakers’ noticing during the interaction, it is necessary to broaden the participants’ proficiency levels and to include wider linguistic features.

The present study investigates how proficiency differences impact L2 speakers’ noticing during conversation in L2.

Ten English L1 speakers, five advanced, and five intermediate English L2 speakers participated in the study. Each native speaker was matched with one of the non-native speakers, and they were asked to talk about ten topics of their favorite things in pairs for 15 to 20 minutes. Their conversation was videotaped. After the conversation, all the participants participated in a stimulated recall session individually. Their conversation video was shown to them and they were asked to comment on anything that they noticed about their and their interlocutors’ language during the conversation.

Both L1 speakers’ and L2 speakers’ stimulated recall comments were analyzed using content analysis, and compared. The tentative analysis of their stimulated recall comments reveals the following three points: First of all, both L1 and L2 speakers noticed lexical problems and verbalized them during the conversation because they interfered comprehension. However, they did not verbalize their and interlocutors’ non-target like language use of English (e.g., syntactic and phonological), even though they noticed such mistakes. In particular, advanced speakers commented on such non-target like use of English more frequently than intermediate speakers. Intermediate speakers, on the other hand, commended on conversation contents more frequently than advanced speakers did. Secondly, both L1 and L2 speakers commented on pragmatics (e.g., maintaining the flow of conversation; politeness of responses; topic relevance). Thirdly, L1 and intermediate L2 speakers’ comments included

their attempts to use gestures in order to facilitate comprehension and explanation, especially when using a vocabulary which the interlocutor may not know, or when using a vocabulary which is specific to a certain culture. Aside from these, intermediate L2 speakers positively commented that they noticed their mistakes during the stimulated recall more often than they did during the conversation, and this helped them see their language problems and it was useful for English learning.

Overall, the analysis revealed that the L2 speakers not only noticed aforementioned linguistic features but also the pragmatics. Thus, the present study suggests that the more Interactionist research studies need to investigate pragmatics. For a pedagogical implication, the comments from L2 speakers' suggest that the stimulated recall can be used as a tool to understand the issues with their L2.

Luke Plonsky

“Towards a Measure of Quality for Meta-Analyses of L2 Research”

Wells B-104, 2:45 – 3:15 PM

Meta-analysis is a quantitative research synthesis that enables a more objective approach than traditional, qualitative literature reviews. Following widespread use in education, psychology, and medicine, the popularity of meta-analysis has grown considerably in second language acquisition (SLA) research, especially in the nearly ten years since the publication of Norris and Ortega (2000). However, there are currently no standards in place for stakeholders in the SLA community to assess the quality of this highly valued means of synthesis.

This paper comprises a first step towards measuring quality and achieving a greater level of consistency in future meta-analyses in SLA. To that end, the presentation first lays out the major stages and their related decision points involved in conducting a meta-analysis. Based on these stages as well as measures of meta-analytic quality from other fields, I introduce and pilot an instrument that provides guidelines for reporting on meta-analyses of second language research. The paper concludes with suggestions for implementing the measure as well as a brief discussion of the quality-related challenges facing meta-analysts in SLA.

Ching-Ni Hsieh

“Learner Variables and Rater Perceptions of Chinese L2 Oral Performance”

Wells B-104, 3:15 – 3:45 PM

This study investigates two major research questions: 1) What is the relationship between two learner variables—age of onset learning (AOL) and language use—and Chinese second language (L2) oral proficiency? and 2) What are native Chinese raters’ perceptions of Chinese L2 learners’ oral performance with respect to specific linguistic features?

Thirty late adult Chinese L2 learners, enrolled in a year-long Chinese L2 program at a large university in southern China, participated in this study. They were 12 Japanese, 10 English, and 8 Korean native speakers, with a mean AOL of 27. The learners’ oral performances were evaluated by an in-house Computerized Oral Proficiency Assessment (COPA), whose test format models the Chinese Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics. Four tasks were selected from each learner’s COPA test and were rated on a five-point analytic rating scale by four native speakers of Chinese. The rating scale included four categories—lexical range, grammatical complexity, fluency, and tonal production. The composite scores of the analytic ratings were used to determine the learners’ oral proficiency. The fourth rating category—tonal production—was developed by the researcher and used to judge the learners’ tonal accuracy, a major difficult area in Chinese second language acquisition. The raters were experienced Chinese language teachers with academic background in language education or Chinese linguistics. Rater training was conducted before the rating to calibrate the raters to the rating scale. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the raters after the rating to explore raters’ perceptions of the learners’ overall oral performance and specific linguistic features they noticed while rating.

Results show a significant correlation between the learners’ oral proficiency and tonal production, indicating that when the learners’ oral proficiency became higher, their acquired better pronunciation in Chinese tones. No significant correlation was found between the two learner variables and the learners’ oral proficiency. Additionally, two speakers obtained near perfect scores on the tonal production rating and were perceived to have native-like pronunciation in Chinese. This result provides evidence to refute the Critical Period Hypothesis’ statement regarding the age constraint on the ultimate attainment of L2 pronunciation among late adult L2 learners. The raters commented that the majority of the speakers had fairly accurate pronunciation in Chinese tones although considerable segmental errors were noticed. They speculated that the main reason for the speakers to achieve high tonal accuracy was due to the massive L2 input the learners received during their long-term immersion in China. The raters also noticed that the Japanese speakers had the most

distinctive and recognizable accent. The English speakers were commented to have more problems in Chinese tones while the Korean speakers were perceived to have less distinctive accent although their overall oral proficiency and tonal production were rated the lowest.

Pedagogical implications include the importance of creating authentic language learning environment and encouraging Chinese L2 learners to participate in long-term study abroad programs.