
The Editorial Team is pleased to introduce the 8th volume of the *MSU Working Papers in Second Language Studies*. The MSU Working Papers is a peer-reviewed, open access publication covering a wide range of topics in second language (L2) studies. The MSU Working Papers accepts empirical research, book and software reviews, literature reviews, research proposals, and interviews with prominent researchers in the field of L2 research. The main purpose of the Working Papers is to provide a platform for researchers to publish high-quality works in progress and get familiar with academic publishing. During the peer review process, we provide constructive feedback from reviewers who are affiliated with the Second Language Studies (SLS) program, the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program, and the English Language Center (ELC) at Michigan State University to aid researchers with refining and improving the overall quality of their work. We must also acknowledge that this volume of the Working Papers would not be possible without the service of the reviewers and the contributions of the authors.

In this volume of the Working Papers, we feature two research papers, a literature review, a textbook review, and two interviews. Karolina Achirri, a second-year PhD student in the SLS program, conducted a case study investigating the relationship between perception on identity and pronunciation of a Chinese L2 learner of English. The next work comes from two students in the SLS program, Dustin Crowther and Kathy MinHye Kim, and a faculty member, Shawn Loewen. In their research paper, “The Implementation of ISLA in MALL Technology: An Investigation into the Potential Effectiveness of Duolingo”, they evaluated the effectiveness of Duolingo as a language learning tool by investigating its bases in instructed second language acquisition theory. The literature review in this volume comes from Paola Romero, a recent MA TESOL graduate at MSU, who explored the benefits of music in language learning, cognitive processes, and teaching practices. Chad Bousley, a recent German Studies graduate at MSU and currently a second-year student in the MA TESOL program, reviewed a German textbook, *Anders Gedacht*. This volume concludes with interviews with the two guest speakers from the 2017 SLS Spring Symposium at Michigan State University. Jongbong Lee, a third-year PhD student in the SLS program, interviewed Dr. Andrea Révész and Karolina Achirri interviewed Dr. Martha Bigelow.

We hope you enjoy reading the 2017 edition of the *MSU Working Papers in Second Language Studies*.

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Perceiving Identity through Accent Lenses: A Case Study of a Chinese English Speaker’s Perceptions of Her Pronunciation and Perceived Social Identity

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Abstract

Despite globalization making English a lingua franca, little is known how accent relates to learners’ identity. In this case study, I focus on a second language (L2) English user’s perspective. Specifically, I examine a Chinese speaker’s of English perceptions of the relationship between identity and pronunciation (accent). Drawing on Norton’s (2000) notion of identity, I applied a 6-point Likert scale questionnaire and conducted an in-depth semi-structured interview. My findings indicate that accent and identity are closely linked, but my participant was not willing to sacrifice intelligible speech to identify with the American society. For this participant, speaking comprehensibly was more important than developing a new L2 identity. I delineate possible pedagogical implication and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Accent, Identity, English as a lingua franca (ELF)

Introduction

Globalization has seen English increasingly becoming a lingua franca (ELF). To be intelligible, speakers with different first language (L1) backgrounds use a variety of communicative strategies to ensure a mutual understanding. As a result, ELF has become a very complex medium of intercultural communication and at the same time a rapidly growing field of study (e.g., Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011). While the body of work on ELF is still thriving, one area that has attracted some attention is related to accent and its relationship with identity (e.g., Sung, 2013; Walker, 2010). Yet, relatively little is known about how accent relates to identity from a regular second language (L2) English user’s perspective. This paper presents the results of a case study of a Chinese speaker’s of English perceptions of her identity and pronunciation (accent) in terms of second language acquisition (SLA) and second culture (C2) acquisition.

Conceptual Framework

The need to learn a new language can be a daunting psychological experience. Even if it
is not essential for survival, having to participate in a new culture and acquiring a new linguistic identity often results in what Hoffman terms as a “seismic mental shift” (1989, p.105), in a way language learners understand and construe the world around them. This finding is especially important in the case of learners who plan on remaining in the new culture, at least for a longer period of time (Marx, 2002). Because the conceptions pertinent to language learner identity are complex, three fundamental will first be briefly clarified: the paradigm shift in English, the question of defining learner identity, and finally the understanding of accent in second language acquisition.

Paradigm Shift in English and The Role of English in China

Kachru’s (1985) demographic model of English speakers depicts three concentric circles that illustrate the spread of English. The inner circle (1) includes countries where English is spoken as the primary language (the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand). The outer circle (2) is comprised of countries (often British colonies) where English is considered a second language (such as Ghana, Singapore, India, Pakistan, Malawi, Malaysia, and Nigeria, to name a few). The expanding circle (3) shows countries in which English is used as a foreign language (and it recently gained cultural and commercial significance), such as China, Sweden, Saudi Arabia, Greece, and Japan. China is one of the countries where English is seen as a medium of international communication. For the Chinese, English has become an indispensable instrument to communicate with non-native speakers, whose presence in China intensified after the Open Door Policy was implemented in 1978. English in China is neither an official language nor a second language. However, English has received a notable status in Mainland China, as a result of economic, political, technological, educational and cultural needs. Thus, various areas of China, including education, business, science, and technology, represent the use of English in a similar way to the countries placed in the outer circle of Kachru’s model (Aydemir, 2013).

Additionally, Kachru’s idea has contributed to the pedagogical standard where the ‘native speaker’ is perceived as a norm provider, and the ‘non-native speaker’ as norm receiver. However, this distinction was made blurry in recent years by huge demographic movements to English-speaking countries (Kumagai, 2013). This forced researchers to reconsider the hierarchical contrast between ‘natives’ and ‘non-natives’ and led to the creation of a new paradigm of English called World Englishes. This standard aims at moving away from ranking ‘natives’ in front of ‘non-natives’ and embraces the different varieties of English as the resources for the speakers (e.g. Cook, 1999; Deckert, 2010; Halliday, 2009; Jenkins, 2009; Park, 2012). It also argues against any form of marginalization and emphasises the importance of a pluricentric approach rather than a monolithic one (native-based) to language learning (Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins claims that learners must be exposed to varieties of English in order to nurture confidence in their own English varieties and as a result debunk a common belief that native speakers hold larger linguistic capital. According to Jenkins, raising awareness of English varieties is strongly linked to the relationship between language and identity.

Accent & Identity

Under the World Englishes paradigm, accent has evolved as one of the factors of English varieties. In sociolinguistics context, accents not only define people but also play an important part in showing their membership to a specific speech community (Aydemir, 2013). Thus, accent serves as a token of social identity. According to Becker (1995), accent identifies one’s regional
origin and national or ethnic identity, regardless of the language they speak.

The SLA research field seems to outline two main stances (amongst many) on accent. The first perspective derives from the split between accented and non-accented varieties of a language (Kumagai, 2013). Following Kumagai’s way of categorizing, the variance between people ‘with an accent’ and those ‘without’ it seems to be specified by the society, supports the social power differences fostered by the existence of accents. Therefore, this position is often referred to as a socially bound perspective on accent (Kumagai, 2013). As for the second viewpoint, it is strongly grounded in the idea that all language users have their own accents. This perspective is linked with the notion of World Englishes, previously discussed, which divides speakers into natively accented individuals and nonnatively accented individuals (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Contrary to the first notion, this perspective is more neutral in terms of social power. Since both beliefs coexist in literature, no unified standpoint can be presented. A researcher’s perspective on accents seems to depict his/her social and pedagogical attitude towards accents. In this study, I take on the idea that accent shows speaker’s linguistic background as my fundamental premise. Having said that, I follow the definition of accent, aligned with the second notion presented above, namely as the way a speaker sounds, which reflects their linguistic background (Kumagai, 2013).

Before I move to exploring the notion of identity, I feel it is important to mention the main differences between Chinese and English phonologies, given that this study focuses on a Chinese speaker of English. Standard Chinese (SC) and American Standard English (ASE) are different on the segmental level as well as on the prosodic level. This is because these languages (SC & ASE) stem from two dissimilar language families, namely Sino-Tibetan and Indo-European (Swan & Smith, 2001). While SC consists of 22 phonemes (17 consonants and 5 vowels), SAE contains 24 consonant phonemes and 11 vowel phonemes (International Phonetic Association, 1999). Thus, at the segmental level, Chinese speakers have problems with vowels in terms of hearing and producing them, but also with interpreting differences between sounds (Nathan, 2008). In addition, considering the prosodic level, SC is a tonal language, which means it uses changes in pitch to distinguish between words (Lin, 2007), while SAE uses pitch for word stress and intonation purposes. This in turn creates difficulties for Chinese speakers in these two areas making their speech sound monotonous in English and creating troubles in word linking (making it sound choppy). Studies have proven that some phonological features are more important than others for English speakers when rating accent (e.g., Derwing, & Burgess, 2010; Derwing & Munro, 2009; Kang, 2010; Munro). While Americans rely on segmental features (Derwing & Munro, 2009), word stress (Kang, 2010) and intonation (Munro, Derwing, & Burgess, 2010), it is often pointed out that intonation might not always be categorized as accent but rather misinterpreted as rude (Moyer, 2013).

The extensive use of ELF has brought about concerns regarding how speakers express their identities through English. Norton (1997) positioned identity in the foreground of language learning research by reframing it via a poststructuralist lens. She defines it as “how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (p. 408). For this case study, identity is mainly framed as understanding of who we are and where we stand in relation to other people (Edwards, 2009).

Learning a second language often results in negotiating, constructing or reconstructing
identity (Kinginger, 2004) because language learning incorporates both a formal set of rules and the culture. This means that a second language learner acquires a second identity, which not only involves the formation of self, but also the perceptions of oneself within their community and the entire society (Aydemir, 2013). Ryan (1997) points out that identity should be seen as a result of negotiation within the social surroundings and Hall (1990) adds that it is a construction continuously in progress and hence never complete.

Norton (1995) claims that SLA theorists have had abiding difficulties in forming a concept of the connection between the language learner and the social world due to the fact that a comprehensive theory of social identity has not been established. Most theories of SLA focus either on individual or social variable but hardly ever integrate the two. Yet, if language is the key way of depicting social identity, then one’s language affects the way a person sees oneself in relation to the environment (Miller, 2000).

In terms of SLA, two essential elements of identity construction seem to emerge (i.e., interaction with others and desire for recognition). Firstly, identity is often seen as formed and shaped through action or performance (Richards, 2006; Wardhaugh, 2010). According to this concept, through showing whom we are and acting on it in various interactions, our identities are constructed. However, this notion pictures identity construction as an extremely complex process, as multiple identities are likely to emerge from interaction (Deckert & Vickers, 2011). Naturally, the link between constructing identity and interacting brings about the individual’s desire for recognition during such interaction. West (1992) views the fundamentals of identity construction as the desire for recognition (visibility), association (affiliation), and protection (security, safety, and surety). While Norton (1997) supports this representation, she adds the claim that desire cannot be separated from the distribution of resources in society, which may result in power and privilege and, in turn, influence identity construction.

Finally, one important note has to be made regarding participation versus acquisition in language learning (Marx, 2002). Marx (2002) emphasises that past scholars understood learning as gaining ‘knowledge’ as a commodity, and hence static and resistant to any modifications. In an attempt of exposing this notion’s simplistic take, Marx turns to Sfard’s (1998) metaphor, which defines acquisition as “gaining possession of some knowledge” and participation as “becoming a member of a given community” (p. 6). Diverse types of participating in a specific community of practice include both absorbing such community and being absorbed by it (Lave & Wenger, 1991). According to Lave and Wenger (1998), while a person is learning how to act as a licit member of a new community, he or she is simultaneously taking part in this community; so participation is an integral part of language and culture learning. Also, it is worth mentioning that Wenger portrays identity construction not only by what we are but also by what we are not (e.g., being or not being a native speaker).

Literature review: Accent and Identity studies

While growing interest in research of the ELF speakers’ identity has been noticeable in the recent years (e.g., Baker, 2011; Virkkula and Nikula, 2010), few studies have been conducted to investigate such speakers’ identity relationship with their accent (but see, Jenkins, 2007; Li, 2009). In his study, Jenkins (2007) looked at non-native English teacher’s identity. Interviews with 17 teachers of different nationalities were carried out to find out that these teachers had mixed feelings in terms of belonging to an international ELF community, with particularly
opposing attitudes towards constructing L1 identity in English. They desired a native-speaker identity shown through a native-like accent, but at the same time they were strongly attached to their mother tongue. In detail, they wanted “a native-like English identity as signalled by a native-like accent” (p. 231), because they recognized a native-like English accent as a crucial contribution to their competence and hence professional success. Jenkins also interestingly noted that a majority of non-native EFL teachers may be affected by the existing standard native-speaker of English ideology.

The second study previously mentioned as an exception (Li, 2009), examined the notions of identity and intelligibility amongst bilingual speakers of English and Chinese in Hong Kong. 107 questionnaires and 1 focus group revealed that about 80% of the participants had a preference towards speaking English with a native-like accent, while the rest were willing to maintain their local accent when speaking English. Those who wanted to express Chinese identity and speak English at the same time found themselves in a quandary. Yet, this study neglected to look at the choice of using a native-like accent and focused mainly on identity conceptualized with relation to the local accent.

Another project, by Gluszek and Dovidio (2010), explored over 200 natively-accented and non-natively-accented English speakers’ sense of belonging to the United States and their communication challenges. Quantitative analysis showed that non-native-like accent is strongly linked to a weaker sense of belonging to the society. This study reflected on two different perspectives when it comes to accent and speaker’s identity linkage, namely accent with negative implications of discrimination and accent as a positive feature. Both types were reported to have made a difference in the construal of speakers’ identity.

While Jenkins (2007) represented identity construction with positive views on accents, I am now turning to identity building with negative views of accents, where Derwing’s (2003) study depicted how L2 speakers see their accents and establish identities when they are not granted access to the preferred accent. This study focused on ESL learners in Canada and uncovered that some participants felt socially discriminated due to their non-native-like accents, but many of them also did not demonstrate any interest in keeping their own accents to preserve their identities. Most of the participants in this study claimed that their identities were tied strongly enough to their first language hence obtaining a native accent would not threaten them. The results of Derwing’s investigation showed that once L2 learners’ identity is firmly established with their L1, they do not see the need to accentuate their identity through their L2.

Unlike Derwing’s study, Hooper (1994) revealed that many speakers kept their regional accents with a specific goal to maintain their social bonds. This study zoomed in on regional English accents in Great Britain and even though proved that regional accents affected negatively speakers’ social, academic and economic status quo, they helped them retain unanimity with their communities. These results make an interesting contrast with those in the previously mentioned study, by indicating that participants consciously chose to speak with their local accent even if it meant looking socially degraded. So, they chose to preserve their already constructed identities instead of acquiring new identities via speaking with another ‘standard’ accent.

One more study, Marx (2002), is worth mentioning as a great delineation of longitudinal shift of identity and accent perceptions. This was an autobiographical study of Marx’s
experiences of German (L2) learning as an English (L1) speaking Canadian. She focused mainly on her own perceptions of L2 accent and her identity as a learner. This project showed as many as 6 stages of her journey in terms of accent and identity while her stay in Germany. Two significant shifts of her accent and identity were reported: mutual relationship between her perceptions of accent and identity and the shift from loss of identity to gain of identity in the process of developing that mutual relationship. In this regard, Marx’s study portrays fluidity and dynamics of the nature of identity building and its correspondence to accent perceptions.

The present study

Focus of the study & Research questions

The present study is a case study of a Chinese English speaker’s perceptions of her pronunciation and perceived cultural identity. The focus is to investigate the relation between a speaker’s identity perceptions as a foreign language speaker and her English accent. The study looks at the participant’s experiences as a language learner who started learning L2 English back in her home country (China) and later moved to the L2 environment (the USA) to pursue higher education, and becoming a legitimate participant in this culture (the C2).

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are a Chinese English learner’s background and experiences of learning English?
2. What are the participant’s self-perceptions of English learning experiences regarding accent and identity?
3. What are the complexities and ambivalences in the participant’s identities in relation to L2 English accent?

Participant’s profile

There is one participant in this study, who chose a name of Jasmine for this study. Jasmine’s L1 is Mandarin Chinese. She began learning English in third grade, when she was 9 years old. This is a widespread practice in China where after the Open Door Policy every child is required to study English in primary school. As many other Chinese students, Jasmine did not have a choice in picking other foreign languages. English was a sole language offered. She continued learning English throughout middle and high school and finally college. Her decision to major in English was not exactly hers. Since students in China are faced with a stressful experience of sitting gaokao (national college entrance examination), her parents wanted to spare her the trauma and placed her in a foreign language high school instead. Gaokao’s score determines which tier college can one enter. The stakes are as high as the pressure imposed on students and their families in China. Part and parcel of attending a foreign languages high school is having the right to be excluded from gaokao and enter the university via taking less demanding tests, but with the price to pay: one must major in English. That is how Jasmine ended up completing English Literature and Language and earning her Bachelor’s degree. Jasmine’s journey with English did not end in China as she decided to pursue her master’s degree and later her doctoral studies in the United States, with an impressive TOEFL score of 113. This is also seen as a premeditated move amongst a lot of Chinese families who see sending their children abroad for education as their only advantage at an extremely competitive job market in China. Given her educational trajectory, Jasmine makes a solid representative of the 90s generation from China. I have chosen her for this study for two reasons. Firstly, her
English pronunciation is non-native. Secondly, having spent years in China myself, I assumed she might have experienced an identity shift considering coming to the US. Whether accent and identity relate to one another in Jasmine’s case was the focal point of my investigation. I wanted to know how she perceives the two and if she notices any link between them, that is if it is of critical importance to her. Jasmine makes a good participant for another reason, which I discovered while interviewing her, namely the fact that she’s a linguist and currently deepening her knowledge of linguistics, which in turn depicts her as a more reflective and conscious participant. Equally valid issues such as code-switching, inner speech, and private speech in her L2 (English) emerged but they will not be discussed here.

Research design & Materials

This study applies a qualitative research method for its research design. This is done for two reasons. First, this study’s above-mentioned purpose matches the purpose of the qualitative research, which is perceived as to provide an in-depth description as well as to understand the human experience in a given context (Lichtman, 2006). Furthermore, the poststructuralist interpretation of reality, on which this study is based, concurs with the main characteristics of the qualitative approach, namely people’s behaviours change over time and are influenced by context; all individuals are unique and non-generalizable; the ways people perceive reality are multi-layered; and people’s actions are built on their interpretations of particular situations (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2011).

Two types of instruments were applied to collect data, i.e., an interview and a questionnaire. The in-depth semi-structured interview was aiming at considering the interviewee’s mind and her perceptions of English learning experiences, with a particular focus on accent and identity. This was done to capture the complexity and ambivalences in the participant’s identities in relation to English. The second instrument, the 6-point Likert-scale questionnaire was created by means of combining and adapting specific items from various questionnaires measuring L2 English experiences with focus on accent and identity (Aydemir, 2013; Borges, 2014; Pullen, 2011; Zoss, 2015). Several of the items were taken directly while others were adapted to better serve the current study’s purpose. The questionnaire also collected the participant’s background information and her experiences and perceptions of learning English.

Procedure & Data analysis

The participant was approached by a researcher in person and gave a verbal consent to willingly participate in this study. The interview was scheduled and the questionnaire was given to her to fill out and return the following week. The participant was provided with the necessary instruction concerning the completion of the questionnaire. Additionally, the purpose of conducting this study was clearly explained.

The interview as audio-recorded and conducted one-on-one with the participant in English (some translanguage occurred in the exchange of cultural information). The interview protocol covered a few areas, including the participant’s experiences of learning English in China, her pronunciation background, background and views, and her identity as a learner. The interview lasted approximately one hour and was later transcribed in NVivo. Later, the interview was analysed by the researcher both by visually inspecting the data and creating codes and nodes in NVivo. In the process of data analysis, the research findings emerged from the frequent and
dominant categories and themes were created within the data set. To ensure that the analysis was firmly grounded in the specifics of the actual data, the emerging themes went through three separate cycles of analysis so that the findings could be substantiated and revised if necessary. Patterns between categories and themes were developed via constant questioning and comparing the collected data. Finally, the findings were confirmed by the participant by her reading over this paper.

Findings & Discussion

The participant stated that her speaking English with a Chinese accent is closely related to her identity: ‘it’s my personal marker, my identity’. She never tried to speak without an accent mainly because after attending a pronunciation course she realized it was too hard for her to acquire a British or American accent. Also, she showed strong preference towards American accent, claiming that British accent ‘is just too hard to understand’. When asked about which pronunciation she aims at when speaking, she responded: ‘I’m aiming probably for my own accent. I don’t care.’

After having been in the US for over three years, she does not identify herself as an American, but shows a powerful desire to return to China, her home country, right after completing her studies in the US. ‘I’m only 10 or 20% Americanized’. She doesn’t have many Chinese friends in the US, but she experienced discriminatory treatment from her American classmates. She feels that any instances of being treated differently by native speakers are related to her speech’s intelligibility rather than her accent. She recalls: ‘All of my native classmates would gang up against the international students. They won’t talk to us or do group work with us’. What’s more, she uses her mother tongue to communicate with her parents in China and her boyfriend there, but feels like she’s losing her Chinese identity to which she is deeply attached. ‘I feel my Chinese has deteriorated. [...] I don’t want to lose my culture or my language but I’m feeling it right now. I get so worried sometimes, because my English isn’t good and so isn’t my Chinese’. Accordingly, with advances in L2 and exposure to C2, difficulties in using the L1 naturally begin to appear. According to Pavlenko (1998), the process of immersing into L2 learning environment often results in gradual loss of L1. Jasmine reported to have experienced this challenge: ‘I lose words in Chinese. Even when I’m talking to my parents, it’s sometimes hard for me.’

When it comes to her perceptions of English, she displays negative attitudes towards learning it, or any learning any languages for that matter. ‘I use it as a tool’. This attitude corresponds with Halliday’s (1975) concept of seven functions of English, namely the instrumental one, where learners view a given language as an implement to express their needs.

In terms of identity, she noticed both advantageous and detrimental elements of the American society and hence does not feel like she can get involved in the society: ‘[…] in the academic world or with the classmates in my cohort, I feel it’s okay for me to get involved, but if I wanna get involved in real society, it’s really difficult’. This coincides with Schuman’s (1976) idea that the bigger the social and psychological distance from the target culture, the harder it is to acquire the target language. Since Jasmine perceives herself as Chinese all the way, she sees a broad gap between native speakers and immigrants in the United States. In terms of strategies foreigners usually apply to blend in linguistically and culturally, she differentiates between making friends with Americans and with Chinese people. ‘I tried once. I had a native speaker
friend in the buddy programme, so we became really good friends but still the friendship [here] is very different from the Chinese friendship. We cannot talk about a lot of topics.’, Jasmine said. This finding suggests limitations in the interactional function of language, which is responsible for contacting others and creating bonds (Halliday, 1975).

Analogously, Lambert (1967) emphasises that if one wants to successfully learn a target language, she or he must be willing to adopt various aspects of behaviour typical for this language’s natives. The learner’s attitudes towards the target language group determine to some extent how successful learning the language would be. So, in Jasmine’s case, the lack of interest in learning English or deepening American culture impeded her accent’s development. When asked what her attitudes towards English are, she said: ‘If I do not have to use it, I’d probably just drop it’. I also wanted to know what in her opinion drives this negative attitude and I learnt that amongst discouraging experiences with English teachers in China (their methods were not engaging and their accents were entirely Chinese), her own fear of ‘losing face’ plays a significant role. ‘Sometimes when you make mistakes, you feel people lose attention when talking to you. I feel that’s the source of my negative attitude. Because people don’t want to talk to me’.

Jasmine, being a conscious English learner and a scholar of SLA, mentioned as well that she notices certain aspects of English, pronunciation in her case, underwent a process of fossilization and therefore might never change. This statement agrees with Lightbown and Spada (2006), who wrote: “some features in a learner’s language may stop changing” (p.80). In such case, her social identification with an American or British culture may have already been ‘fossilized’, thus after her early years of studying English, the degree of linking with the target culture will most likely never increase or decrease. In this participant’s case, the level of identification with a foreign culture appears to be lower than a middle ground.

Moreover, Jasmine sees the need for constructing a good L2 learner identity, but she is not willing to sacrifice the goal of speaking intelligible English for the sake of showing identification with the target community through changing her accent. It appears as if she thought that using the local accent at this point of her journey with English would be juxtaposing her desired identity as an L2 learner, even her linguistic identity. To put it simply, trying to speak English with a native accent at this point could be seen as maintaining her perceived identity of a good language learner but it would not be concurrent with her perceived social identity.

After having moved to the United States, Jasmine did notice a visible improvement in her accent. However, she does not display any desire to have a minimal foreign accent as possible. This finding goes against many mainstream research studies on accent reduction. As many English L2 speakers want to be judged as competent users of L2 and members of C2, Jasmine does not follow this desire. ‘I don’t care about my accent’. As Lippi-Green (1997) underlines popular accent reduction courses in the US promise their participants: “Sound like us, and success will be yours. Doors will be open; barriers will disappear.” (p.50). This is an interesting finding, because it debunks the widespread belief that all language learners try to sound like native speakers.

Surprisingly, Jasmine did not indicate a typical behaviour of a foreign student in the US. Even though being a graduate student makes her attend courses in the L2 and creates the need to communicate in English primarily, she is not willing to become a full member of the C2. This can be partially attributed to the constraints of her graduate student life, but also might be seen as
a survival method of preserving her identity in a foreign environment to make her return to China less painful. This is commonly displayed choice amongst short-term visitors (Marx, 2002).

Furthermore, to become a fully competent speaker of English, especially regarding accent, seems to be extremely difficult, particularly for Chinese people. Jasmine observed: “Chinese and English are two different language families. I don’t know if it’s true but I heard that if your first language is a European language, then you’re 50% better than Asians at learning English.” As Marx (2002) clearly mentions, one does not require native competence to participate in the L2 community. Similarly, in her questionnaire items, Jasmine indicated that she strongly believes that one can become a legitimate member of an L2 country without having to speak its language.

All in all, the co-existence of two or more identities amongst bilinguals is not a scarce phenomenon. Norton (2000) indicates that it is possible to unite these identities without having to choose between them. This can be achieved through self-translating, which is often described as a continuous process. In Jasmine’s case, however, self-translation does not appear to be a favourable method to shift between identities. She prefers to attain her Chinese identity rather than delve into taking part in the C2. Since the ability to navigate between borders of linguistic and hence cultural identities depends strongly on one’s need for survival, Jasmine did not have to practise the fusion of both aspects.

Conclusion

This study emphasises how one Chinese national’s identity correlates with her pronunciation perceptions. Her journey with learning English offered her a new and distinct set of cultural values and ways of interpreting the world. She had become more aware of the uniqueness of the Chinese culture and how differences in values influence her communication with people from other countries. Apart from being able to experience the world, the study process also offered her a chance to encounter herself, her Chinese identity. In this case, with the relation to accent, Jasmine seemed to have challenged her own assumptions about the possible associations with identity. Her extensive expedition to the unknown world of an L2, allowed her to reinforce her social identity. Jasmine represents a bigger group of Chinese students who have recently become globally mobile for education and whose identities are formed via means beyond geographical boundaries of China.

This study showed that there is a relationship between the perceptions of cultural identity and L2 accent, but it juxtaposed multiple studies’ findings which state that the more learners identify themselves with the C2, the higher their accent score would be (e.g., Marx, 2002; Rindal, 2010). The most important finding seems to be the fact that this learner prioritizes comprehension and intelligibility rather than the way she sounds. In terms of pedagogical implications, this fact alone points out that teachers should be aware of the goals learners set for themselves when planning their instructional practices.

It is most surprising that this participant, as a member of linguistic academic body, does not perceive the L2 accent as a contributing element to the construal of the L2 identity. Instead, she sees using her native accent as natural. This perception seems to be motivated by pragmatic considerations rather than trying to build one’s identity. Considering this, teachers should be determined to accommodate pronunciation self-concept in the curricula to help students understand their L2 identities in-depth.
I also hope that this study presents valuable insights into the perceptions of ELF because it focused on a conscious learner’s experiences. I wish that this inquiry adds to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between identity and accent, as discerned by L2 users. However, this was an exploratory case study conducted with one participant and so its findings cannot be representative of all Chinese speakers of English.

Finally, given the considerable scarcity of research into the relationship between accent, identity, and SLA, there is an evident need for further research. For instance, it would be effectual to consider reasons underlying L2 English speakers’ accent proclivities. Also, alleged fear of losing identity by adopting a native-like pronunciation could be empirically explored.
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The Implementation of ISLA in MALL Technology: An Investigation into the Potential Effectiveness of Duolingo

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Abstract

Following the increased implementation of mobile learning across the globe, specifically in the area of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL; Burston, 2015; Duman et al., 2015), the current paper provides an evaluation of the highly popular MALL application Duolingo. Specifically, this evaluation targets how effectively instructed second language acquisition (ISLA) research and theory has been implemented by Duolingo programmers. While current frameworks for the evaluation of MALL technology (e.g., Reinders & Pegrum, 2015) place a significant focus on the learning affordances available, less emphasis has been placed on the implementation of ISLA theory. As such, Chapelle’s (2001) evaluation framework, originally developed for computer-assisted language learning programs, is revisited due to its basis in ISLA theory. Six criteria thus serve as the basis of this evaluation: Language Learning Potential, Meaning Focus, Authenticity, Learner Fit, Positive Impact, and Practicality. While certain benefits of Duolingo as a language learning tool are discussed, overall the evaluation indicates that the benefit of Duolingo is more likely as a learning support app than as the sole tool for autonomous learning.

Keywords: Duolingo, Evaluation, ISLA, MALL, Technology

The use of mobile technology globally, across developed and developing countries, has made significant strides over the last 15 years, with internet-enabled mobile devices surpassing the number of desktop and laptop computers as of 2013 (Pegrum, 2014). Accordingly, there has been increased focus on mobile learning (m-learning), in which teaching and learning is facilitated through the use of mobile technologies, including smart phones and tablets (Duman, Orhan, & Gedik, 2015). One area of empirical inquiry that has shown significant growth in this area is mobile-assisted language learning (MALL; Burston, 2015; Duman et al., 2015). Though MALL could be seen simply as an extension of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), there are affordances of MALL that distinguish it from CALL beyond a simple mobile versus...
fixed distinction (Kukulska-Hulme, 2012; Pegrum, 2014; Reinders & Pegrum, 2015). Kukulska-Hulme (2012) lists ready access to help and information, flexibility in time and space, adaptation to personal habits, and continuity between learning in different settings as a few key benefits. Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008) also note the spontaneity of access and interaction across different contexts of use. Reinders and Pegrum (2015) highlight the ability to link between local and global, episodic and extended, and personal and social learning (among other affordances). Though existing MALL research is severely limited by a lack of objective, quantifiable measures of learning outcomes, when such measures are present, MALL technology has been shown to promote learning for reading, listening, and speaking (see Burston, 2015, for an overview of existing research).

Within MALL, Reinders and Pegrum (2015) distinguish between mobile materials and mobile activities. While the latter focuses on the use of mobile-based tasks within a larger learning context, mobile materials refer to web services and applications (apps) that include built in language learning content and pedagogy. Despite perceived limitations, including a tendency to rely on a behaviorist, teacher-centered approach towards language instruction (Reinders & Pegrum, 2015), such apps have proven to be quite popular for autonomous language learning. One such app that has gained global recognition is Duolingo, the Apple iPhone App of the Year (https://itunes.apple.com/app/duolingo-learn-spanish-french/id570060128?mt=8).

Launched in November 2011 (Robertson, 2011), Duolingo self-describes as a free science-based language education platform created by Luis von Ahn and Severin Hacker. In the initial two years of operation, Duolingo saw over 120 million users register for their language courses (www.duolingo.com/press). While course availability is currently geared towards first-language (L1) English learners of second-languages (L2s) (e.g., German, French, Spanish), an increasing number of courses are being put online for speakers of various other L1s (e.g., Korean [L2 English], Russian [L2 English, French, German], Turkish [L2 English, French, Russian]). Though also accessible via desktop computer (duolingo.com), one of Duolingo’s biggest affordances is that it provides worldwide mobile access. The Duolingo app is downloadable for all tablets and mobiles using iOS, Android, and Windows operating systems (www.duolingo.com/press), with learner progress on one platform synced with the others.

As previously discussed, MALL provides affordances for language learning beyond those traditionally considered within the L2 classroom. In an effectiveness study funded by Duolingo, Vesselinov and Grego (2012) proposed that for L1 English speakers with no previous knowledge of Spanish, an average of 34 hours of Duolingo usage would be equivalent to a full 11-week university semester of study. This claim, which has served as a primary selling point (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OebgtUjLg4), presents Duolingo as more effective than a university language course, because such courses usually require beyond 34 hours of total work (von Ahn, 2013). In essence, Duolingo claims that their software provides advantages to learners beyond what they can accomplish within the L2 classroom. However, Vesselinov and Grego cautioned that even though it would be fair to expect similar results across other languages, such a claim could not be made without further empirical study. Despite this limitation, which stems from their own self-commissioned paper, Duolingo does not make this distinction when promoting their program.

One conceivable way to determine the potential generalizability of Vesselinov and Grego’s (2012) findings is to consider how effectively Duolingo makes use of empirically
researched theories of L2 learning. However, literature targeting this relationship is currently sparse. Krashen (2014), in responding directly to Vesselinov and Grego, highlighted how Duolingo utilizes language instruction that promotes conscious learning, which he argued is less efficient in developing language competence compared to methods that promote subconscious language acquisition. Additionally, Wagner and Kunan (2013) stressed that the primary tasks “harken back to the 1950s, when audiolingualism was the dominant theory in language learning” (p. 330), highlighting a lack of tasks that target communicative or interactional competence. These criticisms put forth by Krashen and Wagner and Kunan would simultaneously appear to advocate for a greater focus on language teaching methods promoted within instructed second language acquisition (ISLA) research. Such research may serve as an appropriate means in which to evaluate how effective Duolingo can be as a language learning tool.

ISLA considers “how the systematic manipulation of the mechanisms of learning and/or the conditions under which they occur enable or facilitate the development and acquisition of a language other than one’s first” (Loewen, 2015, p. 2). Though empirically based approaches that define ISLA inquiry have primarily been conducted within the L2 classroom (Loewen, 2015), the same systematic manipulation that defines ISLA is necessary in the programming of MALL-based apps such as Duolingo, indicating potential alignment between the two types of instruction. How to measure the potential of MALL-based apps as language learning tools requires a range of considerations, from educational affordances to affective design (Reinders & Pegrum, 2015), though at the heart of such an evaluative framework must remain a theoretical approach towards language instruction.

While several ISLA-based evaluation frameworks for CALL exist (e.g., Chapelle, 2011; Hubbard, 2006), Reinders and Pegrum (2015), to our knowledge, is the lone framework addressing MALL. Within Reinders and Pegrum’s (2015) framework, the authors place a primary emphasis on learning affordances MALL technology can provide. Examples of which include how well the technology can:

- link local (interaction within local environments) with global (connections with global networks of people and resources) learning
- allow for both episodic (bite-sized learning at users’ convenience) and extended (continuation between session) learning
- promote both personal (self-tailored learning) and social (community-based) learning.

Such MALL technology potentially advocates for both autonomous and networked learning. While these characteristics should not be devalued, there is limited overlap with an ISLA perspective. While Reinders and Pegrum include meaning-focused constructs (e.g., input, output, negotiation of meaning), very few form-focused considerations (e.g., corrective feedback) are provided. Considering the dual importance of meaning- and form-focused instruction in ISLA (Loewen, 2015), a more comprehensive evaluative approach is necessary (Hubbard, 2006). Though a handful of CALL evaluation rubrics have been proposed (e.g., Chapelle, 2001; Egbert & Hanson-Smith, 1999; Hubbard, 2006; Underwood, 1984), to our knowledge only Chapelle’s (2001) ISLA-inspired framework has been practically utilized to empirically evaluate CALL tasks (Jamieson, Chapelle & Preiss, 2004, 2005).

Though not designed specifically for MALL technology and subsequently lacking the affordances that are highlighted in Reinders and Pegrum’s framework, Chapelle’s (2001) ISLA-
informed criteria, which places a greater emphasis on the systematic manipulation of input and learner engagement (Loewen, 2015), allow for a more in-depth analysis of the learning potential MALL-based apps such as Duolingo may provide. Chapelle (2001) introduced six criteria to guide an analysis of CALL materials as an appropriate and potentially effective language learning tool. The criteria included: (a) Language Learning Potential, (b) Meaning Focus, (c) Authenticity, (d) Learner Fit, (e) Positive Impact, and (f) Practicality.

Using Chapelle’s (2001) framework, the rest of this paper will provide an evaluation on the extent to which Duolingo adheres to ISLA-informed research theory, and relatedly, what this adherence may tell us of Duolingo’s potential as a language learning tool. We begin with an operational description of the Duolingo program, followed by an in-depth overview of the six key criteria to Chapelle’s framework. Once the framework is established, we will apply the framework to the program, to address the following two research questions.

1. In what ways does Duolingo adhere to ISLA-informed research theory?
2. Based on the level of adherence, how effective as a language learning tool across multiple target languages can Duolingo be predicted to be?

Evaluation Methodology

The current analysis is based on 34 hours of Duolingo usage by the authors, who were learning Turkish as part of a larger research study investigating the learning gains and experiences of nine ab initio learners, focusing on how far a group of motivated, highly linguistically aware students could progress. All nine participants were either graduate students or instructors in an MA or PhD level second language studies program.

Operational Description of Duolingo

Before attending to how Chapelle’s (2001) framework, we offer an operational description and an evaluation of the features and activities available in Duolingo. These features will then be used to determine whether Duolingo implements ISLA theories. Based on the work of Burston (2003) and Hubbard (1988, 1996, 2006), three criteria were used to guide this evaluation: (1) technological features, (2) activity types, and (3) presentational schemes.

Technological features. Technological features are concerned with the technological aspects of a software program. Considering features such as ease of installation or platform compatibility, users can judge whether the language learning program is readily accessible and, thus, user-friendly (see Burston, 2003 for a full list of features). Duolingo has great merit in both ease of installation and platform compatibility, as web browser and mobile versions are offered free of charge with the latter available on both Android and iOS. While web browsers require Internet connection, a handful of lessons can be completed via mobile devices through an offline mode, with the only disadvantage being that progress made during offline sessions is not counted towards overall progress.

Activity types. Philips (1985) lists six key activity types: game, quiz, text reconstruction, text construction, problem solving, and exploratory (refer to Phillips, 1985, for a detailed breakdown). Of these six, Duolingo employs two formats: quiz and text reconstruction. In quiz activity type, learners are provided items that target grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation, and
which employ a mechanical drill that is guided by a stimulus-response interaction. Text reconstruction requires learners to decompose a text manipulated by the program. From these activity types, Duolingo generates seven types of questions in four forms:

- multiple choice (vocabulary-picture matching, select correct translation)
- matching (tap the correct translation pairs)
- ordering (unscramble sentence translation)
- direct stimulus-response items (oral repetition, transcribe what you hear, translate sentence/word)

**Presentational schemes.** Presentational schemes consider the way in which an activity type is presented to the user (Hubbard, 1988). Though many schemes exist, the seven most prominent ones incorporated by Duolingo include interface, timing, control options, feedback, user input, input judging, and help options.

The *interface* or *screen layout* addresses the presentation of the materials on screen. Components falling under this category include, but are not limited to, font size, spacing, location, and quality of animation/graphics/text. In Duolingo, while certain components of screen layout are consistent across question types (e.g., visualized progress bar, feedback with different colors) a number of layouts are relevant only to certain questions (e.g., the dual input of visual [written or image] and audio, slow-paced repetition). Time limitations, a second factor related to presentational schemes, appears only twice. First, regarding specific question types, only the oral repetition task provides a time limit for users to respond. For all other question types, users have full control over the time necessary to submit their responses. However, when completing a Strengthen Skills review lesson (a series of questions targeting a specific, previously encountered skill), users have the option of a timed (thirty seconds, with time added for each correct response) or an untimed session. The third factor is *control* which can be imposed by three entities: the instructor, the program, and the learner. When considering Duolingo as an autonomous learning tool, only the latter two are relevant, specifically in controlling the pace of and access to materials. Lesson sequence is one element strictly controlled by Duolingo, as users proceed through a predetermined path of lessons, with new lessons unlocked only as previous lessons are completed. One benefit for users is the option to “Test Out” of any specific skill, which, if successful, unlocks all lessons up to the point. Other features of which learners have control include skipping individual questions, quitting lessons, and seeking additional input, all of which can be performed using the “Skip”, “Quit”, and “Tips and Notes” functions, respectively. The fourth factor, *feedback*, relates to “information the program communicates in response to specific input” (Hubbard, 1998, p. 59). Duolingo provides automatic feedback to all responses with corrected forms, an occasional metalinguistic note, and different sound effects in response to correct and incorrect responses (see Figure 1). This feedback occurs in response to *user input*, in which the user responds to a given item (e.g., typing a translation, pronouncing a sentence, selecting a multiple-choice response).

The type of previously referenced feedback is determined through *input judging*, in which Duolingo decides if the input received for a specific item matches the expected input for that item. The extent of correctness impacts the amount and type of feedback provided. The last component of the presentational scheme is the *help options*, which indicate whether the software provides assistance to learners in completing activities. Duolingo features that fall under this factor include direct translations that are provided when the user places the cursor above an unknown word, an adjusted speed option for the “Type What You Hear” questions, and Tips and
Notes, a minimal description of the target grammatical feature, available every session, though only when using a PC.

Figure 1. Example of metalinguistic feedback.

Tools of Analysis: Chapelle’s (2001) framework

Having described the operationalization of Duolingo, Chapelle’s (2001) six criteria (Language Learning Potential, Meaning Focus, Authenticity, Learner Fit, Positive Impact, and Practicality) are described as the guidelines for our evaluation. After, we will consider how such criteria are or are not realized within Duolingo.

Language Learning Potential. Chapelle defined Language Learning Potential (LLP) as "the extent to which the activity can be considered to be a language learning activity rather than simply an opportunity for language use” (p. 55). Language learning activity here aligns closely with focus-on-forms, instructional approaches incorporating variations of explicit instruction (e.g., consciousness raising, PPP; Loewen, 2015). Such approaches place an emphasis on linguistic form that may not be appropriately addressed within language use. Given the difficulty of attaining high levels of linguistic accuracy without attending to specific linguistic items, this criterion is important for evaluating CALL (and for our purposes, MALL) materials for language learning purposes. The primary guiding question put forth by Chapelle was whether the “task conditions present sufficient opportunity for beneficial focus on form” (p. 59).

To allow for easier evaluation, Jamieson et al. (2004) divided LLP into three sub-categories: input enhancement, interaction, and production. These three were chosen as targets because they had "a strong theoretical, pedagogical, and empirical base" (p. 399). In evaluating a series of ESL/EFL online materials, Jamieson et al. defined and implemented each of these targets. The evaluation presented below follows these revised guidelines.

Input enhancement. The evaluation of input enhancement targeted techniques employed to draw learners' attention to targeted linguistic features. Specifically, Jamieson et al. (2004) identified salience (e.g., visually marking a grammatical form), modification (e.g., altering initial input using linguistic and non-linguistic means to increase understanding), and elaboration (e.g., making grammatical additions to increase understanding). Examples of how these were operationalized included highlighting, animation, and repetition (salience), simplification, image/video, and L1 translation (modification), and adding grammatical phrases or clauses to
texts (elaboration).

**Interaction.** Three types of interaction are proposed in Jamieson et al. (2004): between people, between a person and computer, and between the self and the mind. Interaction between people allows opportunities for "negotiation for meaning, co-construction of meaning, and prompting their [the learner] attention to form" (p. 404). When interacting with a computer interface, there is potential for enhanced input, such as the use of hyperlinks to access online supplementary material. Finally, interaction between the self and mind occurs when a learning task requires the consideration of multiple linguistic options, thus prompting learners to engage in deeper cognitive processing of the linguistic input (focus on linguistic form).

**Production.** The type of output elicited can be evaluated from three perspectives, derived from cognitive, sociocognitive, and interactionist frameworks (Jamieson et al., 2004). The amount of planning time (cognitive) and the amount and type of correction (interaction) provided are seen as enhancing the benefits of language production. The co-construction of meaning with help from an interlocutor (sociocognitive) is acknowledged to push the learner beyond what they are able to produce on their own.

**Meaning Focus.** Meaning Focus targets how “primary attention is directed toward the meaning of the language that is required to accomplish a task” (Chapelle, 2001, p. 56). Specifically, within a Meaning Focus task, the learners are expected to complete an objective through the use of the target language, with examples including making a decision on a specified issue or an exchange of information. As discussed by Chapelle, Meaning Focus is not limited to oral communication, but includes both writing and reading tasks, assuming language is used purposefully to construct and interpret meaning.

**Authenticity.** Authenticity considers the practical, real-world implications of both LLP and Meaning Focus. Authenticity begins to move beyond the conditions believed to be relevant for language acquisition, with a larger focus on how L2 learning tasks reflect the language likely to be encountered beyond the L2 classroom (Chapelle, 2001). While not explicitly stated in Chapelle’s initial definition, authenticity appears to have a strong alignment with a task-based teaching philosophy, where tasks are designed using needs analysis to target what learners need to do in real-world contexts (Long, 2015). This real-world connection is clear through the guiding questions provided by Chapelle, which ask whether there is a strong correspondence between CALL and real-world tasks and if learners are able to recognize this relation.

**Learner Fit.** Chapelle’s (2001) definition of Learner Fit is relatively vague, though implies a need to take into account differences in linguistic ability of learners along with differences in non-linguistic characteristics. Hubbard (2006) provides a more in-depth description of learner fit, highlighting the necessity to link syllabus choices to individual learner needs. Specifically, Hubbard lists seven considerations: learning style, classroom management, linguistic objectives, language skills, language difficulty, program difficulty, and content. Table 1 provides a brief overview of each consideration.
Table 1.

Seven Considerations of Learner Fit (Hubbard, 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consideration</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Style</td>
<td>Cognitive style, preferred learning strategies, motivational orientations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
<td>Use of hardware/software in regards to individual versus paired/group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Objectives</td>
<td>Discourse/text, syntax, lexis, morphology, and phonology/graphology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Skills</td>
<td>Reading, Writing, Grammar, Pronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Difficulty</td>
<td>Level of linguistic challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Difficulty</td>
<td>Level of difficulty associated with using the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Consistency between course targets and course objectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Positive Impact.** With Positive Impact, Chapelle’s (2001) criteria begins to move beyond a strictly language learning-based evaluation, focusing on how the instructional approach employed benefits the learner beyond linguistic knowledge. Examples provided include accountability within the learner for their own study, a willingness to interact with and within the target culture, and pragmatic ability. Beyond these potential non-linguistic benefits, Positive Impact asks whether the learner will have a positive learning experience with the technology they interact with.

**Practicality.** Though not directly related to theories of ISLA, practicality is inseparable from any evaluation of CALL/MALL software, as it relates directly to the "adequacy of resources to support the use of the CALL activity" (Chapelle, 2001, p. 55). While for CALL such resources often include the availability of and access to necessary hardware and software, along with knowledgeable personnel for on-site assistance, the readily available nature of MALL apps such as Duolingo require different considerations in regards to adequacy. Of importance to these additional affordances are the potential costs, and the availability of online connectivity during usage. In essence, practical MALL apps should be easy to implement in various language learning settings, compatible to different platforms, and available to as many people as possible with sufficient technical support.

An Evaluation of Duolingo Following Chapelle (2001)
Language Learning Potential.

**Input enhancement.** The enhancement of linguistic input is one of the more developed features that Duolingo provides. Of the different types of typographical effects used to increase saliency (color, bold, italic, underlining, and capitalization), color manipulation is most frequently employed, serving multiple purposes. For instance, orange is applied to highlight newly introduced vocabulary and/or linguistic features (see Figure 2). Color and cross out techniques are simultaneously provided to create a stronger effect on drawing users’ attention to erroneous output. Such negative evidence is accompanied by positive evidence in which input is highlighted in red bars to indicate correct forms. Despite the use of various attention-drawing devices, Duolingo fails to draw selective attention to critical linguistic features of the target language. Figure 1 exemplifies a typical textual enhancement of a newly introduced linguistic feature, the present continuous in Turkish. Duolingo highlights biliyorsun (you want), despite the central importance being the morpheme –iyor. In fact, biliyorsun encompasses three linguistics features, the stem bil- (want), the present continuous marker -iyor-, and the second person singular marker -sun, but by enhancing the whole word, users’ attention disperses to features that are not necessarily the focus of the current lesson.

![Image of Duolingo interface with highlighted text](image)

*Figure 2. Example of enhanced vocabulary input.*

Audio repetition is another function of input enhancement. Duolingo accompanies most visual input with audio representation, which allows for multiple, multimodal repetitions of the input. Though the number of repetitions is user-dependent, the potential exists for a frequency effect on the formation of stronger associations between words, as well as picking up on targeted linguistic features.

Three forms of modifications are present that enhance access to target language meaning (images, hypertext translations, and slow-paced repetitions). Mostly relevant to vocabulary learning, both visual and verbal information (see Figure 3) are simultaneously provided to promote users’ understanding and retention of a new item (Paivio, 1986; Sternberg, 2003).
In a similar vein, both visual (hypertext) and aural (slow-paced repetition) modifications are linguistic forms of modifications provided to aid in comprehension of input. As shown in Figure 4, the hypertext facilitates comprehension as it provides a direct translation of the target items. In the case of slow-paced repetition, users listen to an audio version of the visual input multiple times at a slower rate. The adjusted pace function, mostly present for the “Type What You Hear” task, aids comprehension by adjusting the speed to a slower pace. Access to the hypertext and slow-paced repetition is voluntary and the extent to which the modification benefits learning is an empirical question depending on various factors (e.g., proficiency level, seriousness about the task, etc.).

Of the three enhanced input techniques, elaboration is the least developed feature available to users. In Duolingo, absence of contextualization is a key limitation (see Authenticity below); therefore, finding a lack of elaborated input, which is intended to enrich users’ understanding and to clarify textual meaning, is not surprising but rather expected. However, as will be discussed later, it might be the case that the inclusion of phrases and clauses, both
examples of elaboration, is intentionally avoided in the beginning to intermediate units, as these may be seen as complex linguistic features.

**Interaction.** Duolingo does allow for interaction between people, but is limited to those who choose to partake in online discussion board conversations, which are often in English. For each question, users can access a discussion board to post their comments, concerns, difficulties related to the item, and subsequently respond to any previous comments (while this option is available on the PC and Android platforms, it is oddly absent from mobile iOS platforms). Though such discussions provide limited opportunities for negotiation for/co-construction of meaning, they do provide an opportunity for greater attention to form. However, whether users make use of the discussion board is self-dependent, and thus the potential benefits may not be generalizable across users.

Surprisingly, a primary area where users could benefit from Duolingo's mobile, online status is relatively underused. By interacting with a computer (or tablet, mobile device), there is potential to link users' learning experience to resources/supplementary resources from across the Internet. However, Duolingo remains completely self-contained, with the only support provided being the aforementioned Duolingo-moderated discussion board.

The presence of the final interaction of interest, between self and mind, is debatable. Through the use of multiple-choice questions, Duolingo does indeed present the user with multiple linguistic options to consider, though the depth of cognitive processing involved is questionable. For example, in Figure 5, the user is required to choose the correct translation(s) of the English phrase "Come to the bar with me". However, of the three options, only one includes the Turkish translation for "the bar" (bara). For learners with strong lexical knowledge, there is no need to process the linguistic form at a deeper cognitive level, as lexical knowledge is all that is needed to complete the task.

In sum, interactive limitations are noticeable throughout the multiple-choice based items. ISLA research has focused considerably on the benefits of human interaction (Gass & Mackey, 2015). Considering this importance of interaction, the above limitations greatly impede Duolingo’s potential effectiveness.

**Figure 5.** PC-based Duolingo Turkish selection task.
Production. It is in this area of production that Duolingo demonstrates its most significant limitation. For speaking, production is limited to a speech repetition task (with textual representation provided, see Figure 6), a task available only through PC. Similarly, written production is limited to translating sentences from English to the target language (see Figure 7). For neither productive skill is there a task that requires the user to produce spontaneous output. Considering the vital role that researchers argue output plays in language acquisition (Swain, 1995), the lack of productive tasks in Duolingo is a serious limitation. Without opportunities for language production, users are denied the potential acquisition benefits of planning time, correction, and co-construction of meaning identified by Jamieson et al. (2004).

Figure 6. PC-based Duolingo Turkish pronunciation task.

Figure 7. PC-based Duolingo English to Turkish translation task.

Meaning Focus. A key limitation to Duolingo, as echoed in other critiques of MALL technology, is a focus on a behaviorist, teacher-centered approach towards language instruction, which ignores active and collaborative modes of learning shown to be beneficial to acquisition (Reinders & Pegrum, 2015). Whether targeting receptive (reading, listening) or productive
(writing, speaking) skills, Duolingo learning activities place primary focus on lexical and grammatical learning with a limited focus on pronunciation, but no focus on meaning construction and interpretation. For example, one common translation activity provides users with a sentence in the target language and three potential meanings in their L1. Learners are then required to choose all correct responses (see Figure 5). Another activity presents a sentence in the target language and asks the user to provide a translation (see Figure 2). A final example requires users to repeat aloud a sentence in the target language (see Figure 6). None of the above activities require the user to produce the language in such a way that requires them to construct meaning, and while interpretation is present in the translation activities, it is limited to word level understanding, and devoid of any contextual meaning. Such a lexical and grammatical focus permeates the remaining Duolingo activities (e.g., transcribe what you hear, vocabulary-picture matching). As opposed to attention being drawn to the meaning of the language needed to accomplish an activity (Chapelle, 2001), Duolingo uses activities to draw attention to specific lexical items and syntactic forms.

**Authenticity.** Following the lack of a Meaning Focused approach towards language learning, it is unsurprising to see a lack of authenticity in Duolingo. As already described, there is a significant emphasis on lexical and grammatical learning, which rarely moves beyond the sentence level. Furthermore, many of the sentences are unlikely to be encountered outside of Duolingo (e.g., The rabbit reads the book), and while it could be argued that units targeting everyday phrases (e.g., how are you?, I'm fine thank you) have immediate usage potential, such phrases are presented in isolation, even separated from their traditional speech act partner (e.g., how are you and I'm fine thank you are never presented as a pair). Even if not subscribing to the strong sense of task-based language learning described in Long (2015), Duolingo still makes little attempt to relate the language learned to authentic usage in real-world contexts. This subsequently limits the potential beneficial relationship between technology and task previously indicated in language learning literature (Ziegler, 2016).

**Learner Fit.** Hubbard (2006) identified seven primary components for the analysis of Learner Fit, each italicized below. Progression through Duolingo follows a relatively linear path, with new lessons becoming available as current lessons are completed. As such, Duolingo proves quite easy to navigate, limiting any concerns in regards to Program Difficulty. Such an approach makes Duolingo accessible for a range of potential users. However, despite this range, there is little consideration for variations in Learning Style across users. Specific learning strategies users may employ are required to meet the needs of the program, which places a heavy emphasis on developing explicit over implicit knowledge. How this impacts Language Difficulty is a more subjective category, depending on individual users. Duolingo, though, seems to subscribe to a cumulative approach where linguistic forms and vocabulary items can often be seen re-emerging in later units. The primarily autonomous nature of Duolingo usage limits Classroom Management considerations, though Duolingo has recently launched “Duolingo for Schools”, creating a more relevant environment for such consideration (though not one considered in this review). One area of concern is in Linguistic Objectives and Learning Skills, where users have little control over the syntax, lexis, morphology, and phonology addressed, how each linguistic dimension is addressed, and the proportion of reading, writing, grammar, and pronunciation practice they receive. This is not to say that strict adherence to a predetermined path of development is a limitation, though, the path chosen has placed a primary focus on explicit knowledge over meaning construction, thus limiting the potential overall effectiveness of
Duolingo as a learning tool (discussed later).

**Positive Impact.** For Duolingo, the extent of Positive Impact can be seen in how the gamification of the learning process (Werbach, 2014) promotes accountability within the user. Duolingo allows users to set personal goals for study in the form of experience points (XP) earned (e.g., 50 XP would be equivalent to completing 5 lessons of study), and through the use of online connectivity, to compare their total XP gained to that of their peers. Users are also given the option to choose between strengthening previously completed units, advancing to new units (though following a predetermined path), and strengthening their knowledge as a whole (e.g., progress quiz). All of the above options contribute to how quickly a learner can “level up” in Duolingo. Beyond this gamified accountability, though, the Positive Impact of Duolingo is limited. There is little opportunity to interact with and within the target language culture, which is in contrast to the global affordances that MALL technology can provide (Pegrum, 2014), nor does Duolingo address pragmatic knowledge in the target language. Further, though it is unrealistic to objectively determine whether a user's learning experience with Duolingo will be positive or not, potentially informative in this regard is that within Vesselinov and Grego's (2012) effectiveness study, only 42% (66/156) completed the entire 34-hour training course, and 25% of the entire sample completed less than 8 hours (Krashen, 2014). While these statistics by themselves cannot be taken as definitive evidence of a lack of positive learning experience in Duolingo, combined with the lack of cultural and pragmatic knowledge, such figures raise concerns about the overall Positive Impact Duolingo may have on the user.

**Practicality.** The mobile nature of MALL technology allows users ready access to language learning apps in a wide array of settings. As previously indicated, Duolingo is accessible by PC via duolingo.com, but is also available as an app for tablet and mobile device operating systems (e.g., iOS, Android), with user progress synced across the multiple platforms. The only caveat to this readily available access is the need for an Internet connection, as Duolingo has limited mobile storage capacity when offline (https://support.duolingo.com/hc/en-us/articles/204567584-Do-I-need-the-internet-to-use-Duolingo-). This one caveat aside, the free-of-charge nature of Duolingo combined with relatively wide-ranging accessibility provides users with a learning tool that appears quite accessible for a variety of learning needs and contexts.

**Discussion**

Two research questions guided this evaluation of the MALL-based app Duolingo. The first related to how strongly Duolingo adhered to ISLA-informed theory, the second to how effective Duolingo could be predicted to be based on this theoretical adherence (in absence of other non-design-based considerations which were not measureable within the current analysis). To address these questions, a CALL-inspired evaluative framework developed by Chapelle (2001) was utilized, with evaluation based on the researchers’ combined experience learning Turkish (34 hours of study each). Table 2 provides a summary of this evaluation.
Table 2

Summary of Duolingo Evaluation (Chapelle, 2001; Jamieson et al., 2004, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Judgment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Learning Potential</strong></td>
<td><strong>Input Enhancement</strong></td>
<td>Salience: Color; cross out techniques; lack of direct focus in attention drawing techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Modification: Images; hypertext; slow-paced aural repetitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elaboration: Clarification clauses, phrases; lack of context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interaction</strong></td>
<td>Discussion board; self-contained; items with multiple possible responses, choice of distractors too simple</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Production</strong></td>
<td>English to target language translation; spoken repetition task</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning Focus</strong></td>
<td>Lexical and grammatical focus; no interpretation beyond word level meaning; no construction of meaning</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authenticity</strong></td>
<td>No real-world context; lexical and grammatical focus; phrases presented out of context</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learner Fit</strong></td>
<td>“Test Out” option; limited consideration of individual differences; need to consider in classroom setting</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Impact</strong></td>
<td>Daily reminders; goal setting; limited cultural and pragmatic learning; overall learning experience unknown</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practicality</strong></td>
<td>Free; Available across multiple platforms; Requires Wi-Fi</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Following Chapelle's (2001) ISLA-informed criteria, there is an apparent bias towards form-focused instruction, with the benefits of Duolingo being found in its ability to make salient and elaborate on lexical and grammatical elements of the target language. This approach is defined by the incorporation of techniques from both the explicit (consciousness raising) and implicit (input enhancement) ends of the form-focused instruction continuum, indicating a willingness to utilize both focus-on-forms and focus-on-form (Loewen, 2015). However, focus-on-form occurs within meaning-focused instruction, key aspects of which (i.e., interaction and production) are absent from the Duolingo instructional approach. A primary reason that multiple instructional approaches exist is to account for the limitations of the other. While form-focused instruction has been critiqued for potentially leading only to explicit knowledge, meaning-focused instruction has similarly been critiqued for potential shortcomings in linguistic development (Loewen, 2015). Based on our analysis, Duolingo prioritizes explicit knowledge, devoid of contextual meaning. Of considerable concern, then, is whether Duolingo promotes the implicit knowledge necessary for productive L2 communication or merely “language-like behavior” (Ornstein, Ewton Jr., & Mueller, 1971, p. 57), in which users complete programmed instruction without developing underlying competence (Hoopingarner, 2009).

This final point becomes vital when considering Duolingo’s claim, based on Vesselinov & Grego’s (2012) effectiveness study, that 34 hours of Duolingo usage is equivalent to (or more beneficial than) a semester of university language study. However, it is important to consider the type of knowledge measured in Vesselinov and Grego’s study, in which they used the Web Based Computer Adaptive Placement Exam (WebCAPE; http://www.perpetualworks.com/webcape/overview). While commonly used in higher education settings (Lin & Warschauer, 2015), WebCAPE primarily addresses vocabulary, grammar, and reading knowledge/ability (Lin & Warschauer, 2015) assessed via multiple-choice questions, essentially placing form before meaning (Krashen, 2014). It should not come as a surprise to see Duolingo users demonstrate significant gains in knowledge on an assessment that allows them to call upon the explicit knowledge that Duolingo prioritizes. So, while 34 hours of Duolingo usage may parallel the features of form-focused instruction addressed during a one-semester language program, the extent to which it compares to the benefits of meaning-focused instruction is unknown (see Krashen, 2013, for a similar argument regarding Rosetta Stone). Between the lack of a meaning-focused knowledge assessment in Vesselinov and Grego’s effectiveness study and the poor integration of productive and interactive tasks identified in our evaluation, Duolingo would appear to have a long way to go before it can effectively meet the real-world needs of teachers and learners alike.

The above evaluation is not meant to dismiss Duolingo as a language-learning tool outright. Form-focused instruction indeed plays a vital role in language acquisition, and though limited as a sole tool for language learning, Duolingo could potentially serve as a support tool in a classroom setting. In fact, founder Luis von Ahn has argued that Duolingo was never intended as a replacement for the language teacher, but as a tool to motivate learners to continue their learning beyond the classroom (“Interview with founder of Duolingo,” 2016). In support of this claim, Duolingo launched “Duolingo for Schools” in 2015 allowing teachers to track student progress, identify individual learner patterns and address individual- and group-level difficulties (https://schools.duolingo.com/). However, despite this argument put forth by von Ahn, supported by Duolingo for Schools, Duolingo still markets itself as a private tutor (https://www.duolingo.com/info), advocating the Vesselinov & Grego (2012) effectiveness study,
without making clear the potential limitations of a solely autonomous approach to learning.

It should be noted that the above evaluation is limited in several ways. A key limitation is that only the Turkish curriculum was considered, and only through 34 hours of usage. It cannot be claimed that progression through other language courses parallels that of Turkish, or that the type of instruction and tasks offered beyond 34 hours are the same as those offered before. An additional limitation of the current evaluation is that it focused specifically on how ISLA-based theory is implemented within Duolingo, leaving aside sociocultural and technological affordances that have come to define MALL technology (Reinders & Pegrum, 2015). This evaluation was carried out under the belief that a theoretical approach to language learning should underlie any instructional design; therefore the additional affordances that MALL technology can provide, such as access to local and global, episodic and extended, and personal and social learning (Reinders & Pegrum, 2015), are left unaddressed, even though they may provide new ways in which such language learning theory can be implemented with MALL technology. Finally, the current study considered only the potential of Duolingo as a language learning tool, in relationship to how well it adhered to ISLA-based theory, and provides no actual measures of acquisition. Therefore, future effectiveness research accounting for learners’ outcome is encouraged. Based on the limitations of the WebCAPE assessment used in Vesselinov and Grego (2012) to address the effectiveness of Duolingo, there is a need for a more in-depth holistic assessments of Duolingo as a language learning tool, especially given its current worldwide popularity.
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Teaching and Learning English through Songs: A Literature Review

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Abstract
This literature review presents a report on research studies exploring the benefits of music at the cognitive, linguistic, and pedagogical levels. Ten studies that deal with the effects of music for young learners carried out in various contexts and countries were included in this account. Increasing motivation, gaining vocabulary and grammar understanding, and recalling information are the main recurrent themes mentioned as a result of implementing pedagogical interventions using songs, and, in some cases stories. To conclude some ideas for further research were briefly considered.

Keywords: Music, Language gains, Cognitive process, Motivation

The benefits of music have been extensively discussed from its aesthetic value to its therapeutic, cultural, social, and pedagogical features in the field of SLA and cognitive science. In the light of theory about music and its benefits in language learning (e.g. Cooper, 2010; Paquette and Rieg, 2008; Trinick, 2011), the pedagogical value of music and songs in foreign and second language learning has been researched in numerous studies (Ajibade and Ndububa, 2008; Chou, 2014; Coyle and Gómez Gracia, 2014; Davis and Fan, 2016; Duarte Romero, Tinjacá Bernal, and Carrero Olivares, 2012; Schön et al., 2008; Salcedo, 2010). Thus, this paper aims at providing an account of current studies involving music and songs by contextualizing them within a theoretical framework based on cognitive, behavioral, and linguistic works that support the use of music and songs in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) field. This literature review has been guided by the following questions: 1) What works have been published? 2) What skills have been studied? 3) What instruments have been used to measure gains? 4) What kinds of songs have been used and who has been the audience? 5) What aspects of songs seem to be the most helpful?

To begin, a theoretical framework about the benefits of music can be introduced by considering its great cultural and social value. For example, Mashayekh and Hashemi (2011) described music as a resource that promotes international communication among people from a diversity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Other researchers like Paquette and Rieg (2008) have highlighted the cognitive, affective, and linguistic benefits of music by arguing how it helps to develop automaticity, have a weak affective filter and promote genuine language interactions. They made the case for using music to teach language skills such as sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm and parts of speech as well as prosodic features of the language – stress, rhythm and intonation patterns. Also, while pointing out the importance of explicit instruction, they emphasize the idea of using music to create a more conducive learning environment.
atmosphere in classrooms socially, academically and emotionally, since music motivates children to learn and take risks.

Cognitively speaking, music has been found to be of high value in recalling information. For instance, the advantages of using songs based on mnemonics effects are cited by Salcedo (2010), and Davis and Fan (2016). Similarly, Murphey (1990) hypothesized that using songs can enhance acquisition by means of din or involuntary mental rehearsal and the stuck-in-my-head phenomenon, while Williamson, Jilka, Fry, Finkel, Müllensiefen, and Stewart (2012) reported on the mnemonics benefits that songs may constitute by becoming “earworms” (Williamson et al., 2012) that people repeat in their minds almost involuntarily.

Music has also been associated with benefits in language acquisition (Cooper, 2010; Trinick, 2011; Schön et al. 2008; Mashayekh and Hashemi, 2011). Trinick (2011), making the case for the use of songs in classrooms in New Zealand, mentioned how the common repetitive pattern found in songs help children internalize language and practice syntax and semantics while providing a meaningful learning context. Schön et al. (2008) conducted a study to add supporting evidence as to how learners of a foreign language may benefit from the structuring properties of music in songs. They designed a study with three experiments: In condition one, French students listened to a stream of spoken nonsense words; in condition two, a different group of learners listened to the same stream of words, but this time in sung mode; in condition three, a third group of learners listened to the sung stream of words but this time some features to the related contour of music were added. Findings showed significant statistical difference for the group of students in condition two, the sung mode. They were able to discern more segments than the two other groups, which could be attributed to the properties of the combination of words and music. The authors posed that songs might help language acquisition in three main ways: emotionally by increasing the level of attention, perceptually since the pitch contour aids phonological discrimination, (syllable change usually co-occurs with a change in pitch), and linguistically since “the consistent mapping of musical and linguistic structure may optimize the operation of learning mechanisms” (p. 976).

Together with cognitive theory favoring the use of music and songs in language learning and foreign language learning, several research studies in a variety of contexts have been carried out. A wide range of rationales have been provided for such studies. Some of them have been focused on the motivational features of songs and how these help create a more relaxed learning environment, (Ajibade and Nduubua, 2008; Coyle and Gracia, 2014; Duarte Romero, Tinjača Bernal, and Carrero Olivares, 2012), while other studies have emphasized the cognitive and linguistic facets of songs and how they help vocabulary and language learning (Coyle and Gracia, 2014; Chou, 2012; Davis and Fan, 2016). The most relevant ones will be summarized as follows for the purpose of this paper.

Let us begin by considering the studies conducted to explore songs as a motivational strategy, which have mainly addressed young sixth graders. Duarte Romero, Tinjača Bernal, and Carrero Olivares (2012), guided by objectives related to how to use songs and their impact on students’ oral production, set out to do an action research study as they found out that their students were afraid to talk and lacked motivation. Eighty-four sixth-graders in two different courses at a public school in Bogota, Colombia participated in the study. The researchers specifically identified five students with diverse profiles to account for individual differences: “a high-achiever, a smart student, a lazy student, a difficult student and, a naughty student” (p. 12).
They followed an action research model approach consisting of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. Lessons around pop songs content were planned following a workshop format. A qualitative approach was followed for data collection and data analysis by using instruments such as observation, field notes and video-recorded lessons, and surveys, during four stages: assembling, coding and comparing data, interpreting, and presenting the outcomes. At the end of their study, they found that students showed more motivation and willingness to talk in a “non-threatening” environment (p.20) and the combination of curricular activities helped students to develop their speaking and grammar skills.

A second study focused on motivation is that by Ajibade and Ndububa (2008). The authors set the context of the study by stating that even though English is an official language in Nigeria, learners at the primary, secondary, and tertiary level fail to learn the language, which is partly attributable to teachers’ beliefs, lack of preparation, and the methods they use. In an attempt to explore more motivational activities, the researchers set out to implement lessons based on games, and songs. Questions related to motivation and English performance guided the study, which followed a pretest-posttest design with control and experimental groups. 100 senior secondary students were placed in the experimental and controlled groups randomly. Four instruments were used for data collection: Questionnaire on Students’ Motivation in the Learning of English (QSMLE), Achievement Test in English Language (ATEL), Instructional Package, and oral interview. Data analysis included statistical tests such as t-tests and Pearson's correlation, which revealed statistical significance for the experimental group. After the treatment, researchers found that game words and culturally relevant activities such as songs had a significant effect on students in terms of motivation and performance.

Both of these studies were carried out in the context of public schools, and even though they were set in two countries far apart from one another, the lack of motivation in secondary school students was common in the two contexts. The first study, qualitative in nature, made use of a variety of artifacts and was focused on designing materials to teach the chosen songs. The authors succeeded in providing a description of students' behavior, but a possible limitation of this study is the lack of instruments to measure vocabulary and language gains beyond the descriptive level. In contrast, the second study provides a more systematic approach to measure language gains. As stated earlier, the motivational power of songs has been acknowledged by different authors, and the findings of these studies corroborate such an acknowledgment.

Another group of studies includes research done on vocabulary and language gains in foreign language learning. For example, Coyle and Gracia, (2014), within the curricular demands for students to learn English in Spain, set out to explore activities that would help pre-school children start to learn English as foreign language. More specifically, they wanted to research the effectiveness of activities such as using songs and vocabulary learning both at a productive and receptive level. A group of twenty-five preschoolers participated in the study in which lessons including songs were given in three sessions of thirty minutes each. Students took vocabulary picture tests before and after the three lessons organized around a popular children’s song. Children heard the song seven times in total while class sessions were video recorded and four children were interviewed to gain further insights. A post-test was administered five weeks after the last lesson had finished. Based on Friedman and Wilcoxon test results, the researchers concluded that using a song to teach English to preschoolers helped them develop their receptive knowledge of vocabulary, but no changes in productive knowledge were found. Also, the two
researchers cautioned teachers on the overuse of onomatopoeia and gestures on the teacher’s part as children may pay too much attention to these rather than the words themselves in the song.

A similar study involving kindergarten students took place in mainland China. Davis and Fan (2016) implemented a study to measure vocabulary acquisition through songs as compared to choral repetition in two private kindergartens in Beijing. They did it during fifteen classes of forty minutes in length over a period of seven weeks. The study involved three groups that participated under three conditions: experimental (songs), choral repetition, and control group (no song or choral repetition treatment) in a within-subject repeated measures design. A task consisting of picture description was carried out before and after the instruction period to measure vocabulary gains (pre-test, posttest). Results showed significant difference for the songs and choral repetition conditions at an equal level, but no evidence in favor of songs alone was found. In other words, they concluded that both songs and choral repetition held pedagogical value reflected by students’ vocabulary gains and while having a positive effect on students’ motivation to learn.

A third study with young learners was conducted by Chou (2012) in Taiwan. The researcher wanted to investigate the effect of games, songs, and stories on students’ motivation and vocabulary learning and whether or not different testing techniques would influence students' performance in the vocabulary test given. Seventy-two primary school students between eight and eleven years old participated in the study as follows: Second grade: 20; third grade:16; fourth grade: 17; and fifth grade: 19. They were given five 100-minute lessons about international holidays. To collect data, the researcher followed a mixed-method approach using instruments like classroom observation, field notes, and a semi-structured interview for qualitative data, while a pretest, post-test, and self-assessment questionnaire were used for quantitative data. The vocabulary test administered before and after intervention consisted of four techniques, namely, true/false, matching, anagram with pictures, and gap-filling with pictures. Field notes and the self-assessment questionnaire revealed that games, songs, and stories had a positive effect on vocabulary learning. Thus, children reported that songs helped them understand vocabulary and topics in the story (especially in the lower levels), but stories had a higher impact. Vocabulary gains were found too, especially for students in higher courses, and it was also found that results were influenced by test technique.

Putting it all together, the three studies presented above were administered to young learners and focused on vocabulary gains and motivation. The leading researchers succeeded in using a variety of designs and instruments to account for vocabulary gains in a systematic way. Another factor present in this group of studies is stories, which, along with songs, have been used as a resource to help develop cognitive capacity and vocabulary (Cooper, 2010). This explains the presence of stories in these pedagogical interventions. Simply put, these studies contribute to a deeper understanding and further evidence to use stories and songs in the EFL/ESL classroom.

Even though both songs and spoken stories have proved fruitful in language learning, Salcedo (2010) analyzed whether songs and spoken texts had the same effect upon text recall based on involuntary mental rehearsal (din). The study consisted of a quasi-experimental design where participants were tested in three different conditions while exposed to a text. Ninety-four students enrolled in Spanish classes in four courses in the U.S. (L1: English) participated in the study and were tested in three different conditions: participants in condition 1 listened to the
sung text; those in 2 listened to the same text but the text was read out loud, and those in condition 3 did not listen to the text in any form. Three ballads were used for students in condition one, while students in condition 2 listened to the same text of the song, which was spoken rather than sung. A cloze test was used to measure language recall while a questionnaire was used to collect information about the occurrence of the din phenomenon. Results showed a significant difference in text recall for the group that listened to the sung text as compared to the one who listened to the spoken-read text. However, no difference was found for delayed recall. As for involuntary mental rehearsal (din), participants in the sung text condition reported more occurrences than those in the spoken text, which was found statistically significant by means of a Chi square test. This study constitutes empirical evidence for the positive effects of music and word recall. Some limitations to this study, however, were the small sample, the lack of a proficiency measure before the intervention, and the need for longer exposure to songs to determine effects on long term memory.

**Conclusion and Ideas for Future Studies**

In sum, the studies considered for this paper contribute to making the case for the use of songs with positive effects at the cognitive, linguistic, and pedagogical levels while promoting motivation. It can be seen from this review that a wide range of studies have been conducted in various settings from kindergarten to high school. Moreover, the main audience has been children and young learners. A variety of research designs involving quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods along with various instruments for data collection has been used. Thus, having answered the questions that guided the present research review, it would seem logical to conclude this paper by establishing possible areas for further research on the topic. Therefore, some areas to explore are, first, conducting studies with adult learners to determine if the effect of music for learning English (or a foreign language) is comparable to that found for children. Transferability of language gains through songs can still be further explored, too, for example, what features seem to be more transferable: grammatical ones, vocabulary ones, or pronunciation ones? Finally, none of the studies presented particularly focused on pronunciation and prosodic features; therefore, it would be worth studying what features of pronunciation songs benefit more. All in all, this literature review aimed at constituting an initial stage for the possible studies suggested in this concluding comment.
References


Textbook Review- Anders Gedacht: Text and context in the German-speaking world

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Summary

Anders Gedacht is an intermediate high/advanced level German textbook, appropriate most likely for 3rd or 4th-year students in a 4-year undergraduate German program. This textbook is content-based, written entirely in the target language with an accompanying workbook with supplemental exercises and activities, some of which are tasks. This book seeks to integrate aspects of German, Austrian, and Swiss culture through the use of culturally authentic materials such as stories, works of art, poetry, and film. This textbook offers additional exercises and materials through an online portal. The online component offers the opportunity for a hybrid curriculum as well as flipping the classroom.

This book stands out from other intermediate high/advanced German books because of its extra emphasis on Austrian and Swiss culture. The authentic materials used in this textbook will promote critical thinking and reflection as well as partner discussions. The authentic materials are linguistically challenging for an intermediate student, which is why it may be more appropriate for advanced-level courses. One of the justifications for using this book is that German language acquisition is viewed as a cultural experience. The language should act as a vehicle for students to learn about the culture as well as discuss and interact with the culture.

The book consists of ten chapters, each with its own topic (which range from art to history, to popular culture in the German speaking world. Each chapter also contains specific grammar structures noted in the table of contents. The chapters contain speaking and writing activities, reading activities, listening and visual activities, and lastly, corresponding internet activities. Although the topic for each chapter is different, the process in which the material is presented is fairly similar, which provides consistency for the teacher and the students.

Anders Gedacht has the following components: the core textbook with an introductory learning unit followed by the ten chapters, an audio cd for classroom use by the instructor, a student activities manual (workbook) with grammar exercises and other activities, an online portal which corresponds with the workbook, and there is also a password protected instructor website that provides teaching suggestions, testing guidance, and transcripts of the audio
activities in the workbook. Due to the fact that the instructor website is password protected, it cannot be evaluated; however, it would be interesting to see if the website provides any scaffolding materials for the tasks in the textbook. It would also be interesting to see what suggestions are provided for the teacher.

The approach for this book is content-based learning with contextualized grammar. This textbook is designed with student-directed and task-oriented learning in mind. One of the goals of this book is to have students develop independent learning skills, and the teacher should act as the facilitator. The structure of each unit goes through the following five steps: 1. Introduction 2. Presentation 3. Awareness 4. Systematization 5. Application. In the introduction, students brainstorm their knowledge and vocabulary about each specific topic and also learn new expressions and words, usually by discussing an image. The presentation stage is when the students are exposed to the main content of the chapter, which is usually presented through a text such as a newspaper article, an excerpt from a primary source, a poem, film clip, artwork, or material from the internet. In the awareness section, students are expected to collect data and gain awareness about a specific fact or problem concerning the culture or linguistic features or both. This stage is where the task-oriented activities are used. After the awareness stage the students will systematize their findings by creating and using visual diagrams. Lastly, in the application stage the students will apply the acquired linguistic forms from the chapter in accordance with the culture insights they have gained from the chapter. This knowledge is displayed through the use of role plays, debates, writing activities, and projects.

This book has been updated from the second addition, and there have been some significant revisions. Some units in the book have been re-sequenced. There is a completely new unit on political movements. The workbook has been reorganized and streamlined so that all three sections of each unit (writing activities, listening activities and grammar explanation) are grouped together in order to be better aligned with the textbook.

To better evaluate the tasks in this book it is important to know how a task is defined. I am working with Van den Branden’s definition of a task, which is “an activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective and which necessitates the use of language” (2004, p. 4). The majority of the tasks in this book are structured around communication and meaning, which Willis (2001) considered an appropriate task; however, there are also activities in the textbook with a grammar focus in mind. Does this mean that these activities cannot be considered tasks? According to Willis (2001) the answer would be no, however, according to other researchers such as Nunan (2004) and Long and Norris (2000), tasks can have elements of focus on form and focus on meaning. Grammar explanation may also help carry out the task. There are many tasks throughout the textbook that have interactional authenticity (Ellis, 2003). The type of content in this textbook makes it difficult to have real world tasks because culture is a somewhat abstract concept. Because the content and culture are the primary focus, the tasks in the book are mostly based off of interactional authenticity.

**Evaluative Summary**

This textbook has a lot of opportunities for task-based learning, and there are some additional activities in the workbook that could be easily modified to become tasks. As I have stated in the section above, the awareness stage of each unit is where the task-oriented learning is intended. Sequentially, this makes sense because the preceding two stages can be grouped as pre-task time where the students are exposed to the necessary vocabulary and linguistic forms as well
as the content information to aid them in completing the tasks. Although the five stages of the units are clearly marked in the preface, these five stages are not as explicitly marked throughout the textbook, which means that the teacher must be conscious about which stage is happening during each unit. A key aspect of TBLT is providing a challenge for students to work through. For a pedagogical task information gaps could be more prevalent. Many of the activities in this book could become more task-like if the gaps were more prevalent. There are some tasks with information gaps in the text book. For example, in unit 7, one group of students watches a short film clip about a film that is related to the topic of the RAF (Rote Armee Fraktion), and the students who did not watch the film clip have to guess what was shown in the film clip. Then the other student who did see the film clip compares his or her view with the other student’s assumptions to re-evaluate what they actually saw.

There are fill-in-the-blank, sentence completion, and matching activities in each unit which may not qualify as tasks independently, but they could be considered pre-task activities to prepare the students for the main task, which is generally a writing task or a presentation. For future editions of this book, it would be very beneficial to have the five stages clearly labeled in each unit to guide the instructor towards the main tasks. One of the most prominent tasks/pre-task in each unit is discussing images. This could easily be modified into having the students not only describe the image, but also write a short story related to the image. Although this textbook has been designed to promote task-oriented learning, this book falls under the scope of lower-case tBLT and not TBLT, meaning that the tasks in the book are not central (they are more peripheral) and they do not guide the lessons. The tasks in this book are primarily pedagogical tasks, and the overarching focus is on language structures and form learning.

Conclusion

Anders Gedacht is an innovative textbook in the field of German studies and provides a cultural discourse that not many other textbooks have; the inclusion of Austrian and Swiss culture is not common in many German textbooks on the market in the United States, and if it is, then the information is usually surface level and is dwarfed by the amount of focus on German culture. The activities provided in the book and workbook lend themselves to tBLT. The sequencing of the units is well thought out and provides necessary scaffolding to complete writing and speaking tasks that occur later on in the units. This is a task-oriented, content based textbook with culturally authentic materials intended to promote and develop students’ critical thinking skills and independent learning skills, which makes this textbook innovative, but teachers who are interested in a task-based language classroom may have to supplement some of the materials and activities in the book to transform them into more real world type of tasks.
References


Interview with Martha Bigelow

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Martha Bigelow is a Professor in Second Language Education at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. She has been engaged in community-engaged and school-based research with East African youth for more than ten years on the intersections of literacies, language learning, schooling and (racial, religious, gender) identities. She has published numerous journal articles and two books related to her work with adolescent Somali refugees in the United States: Literacy and Second Language Oracy (2009, Oxford University Press) with Elaine Tarone and Kit Hansen and Mogadishu on the Mississippi: Language, racialized identity and education in a new land (2010, Wiley Blackwell). She is the co-editor with Johanna Ennser-Kananen for the Routledge handbook of educational linguistics (2015) and she is currently working on a book with Doris Warriner entitled Relationships, reciprocity and research with minoritized communities: Methodological meta-reflections on power and equity (Multilingual Matters).

Professor Bigelow kindly agreed to this interview as she was presenting at SLS Symposium, MSU. I conducted it on February 23rd, 2017 at Kellogg Center, East Lansing, MI.

How did you first become interested in SLA?
M: I guess it happened when I learned Spanish, in my early 20s. I had been an English Literature major and then I was a secondary high-school English teacher. I was licensed to do that, but I actually never did that job, beyond student teaching, because I went directly into the Peace Corps. So, then I learned Spanish and I dove into teaching English as a foreign language before ever knowing how to do that. I became fascinated with my own process of learning and teaching, as well as watching my students learn English.

What are your personal experiences with learning languages?
M: I studied Latin in high school and I studied French in college, but I didn’t learn French. I really didn’t think I was a good language learner until I went to the Dominican Republic, where I learned Spanish pretty quickly. And I’ve been speaking Spanish my whole life.

Moving on to your research, let’s talk about your work regarding Somalian refugees. Why Somalia, first of all? What sparked this interest?
M: What sparked the interest was the fact that we have the largest Somali community in the United States in the Twin Cities [ed., Minneapolis]. So, when I first came to the University of
Minnesota as an assistant professor, all of the teachers that I was working with kept telling me about Somalis and kept asking me about Somalis. I was lucky enough to get a small grant that allowed me to hire a grad student, in my second or third year at the University of Minnesota, and I did an SLA study in the community. Me and my student, and Elaine Tarone, and the rest is history, right? That SLA study was more in the cognitive realm. The grant also came at the same time as I got a single semester leave, as a junior faculty member. The grant plus the time gave me the time to spend in the community. So, people got to know me, I got to know the community. And then what happened was the kids basically told me what my research should be. Then, I shifted toward more qualitative questions that had to do with literacy and schooling. I worked a long time with girls and working with one group led to questions with different groups, in an iterative way. The community was also always telling me what they needed. There was a lot of synergy there. So, while I was working with girls, I felt I needed to understand more about boys, so I did a focus group that had boys in it. Kind of like focus group identity study, racialized identity. That led to a lot of advocacy in the community, working with police departments. I guess I follow my tangents based on what the community leads me toward. To me, that’s what engaged scholarship looks like. You’re doing things with the community, not just to form your own academic dialogue with researchers in the field, but to work with the community. And then, for me it became very rewarding and synergistic because I felt like I was a part of something great. I felt happy in academia. I enjoyed my time with the community.

So, were you accepted by the people straight away?
M: Yeah, I worked at it. I spent a lot of time learning and they very generously taught me about Islam. It took a while to get invited to people’s homes. It wasn’t like you have instant access. With the kids, I didn’t have access to every realm of their lives. I had a lot of access to their out-of-school spaces, but they never invited me into their school spaces. I don’t think they wanted me to see them at school.

Were they schooled in the mainstream schools?
M: They were in charter schools and mainstream schools, but they didn’t ever let me come to school, those girls. Later I wanted to do more classroom-based research so I made connections directly through the teachers and got access that way. The schools were unbelievably welcoming. The community was welcoming. The kids were welcoming to a certain degree. As an outsider, you’re legitimized through the teacher, too. I felt comfortable in the classroom and the kids got comfortable with my video recorder. But, you know, it’s always partial, what they will let you see.

So, what projects are you working on currently?
M: I’m working on a book with Doris Warriner titled Relationships, reciprocity and research with minoritized communities: Methodological meta-reflections on power and equity. I’m still working on some classroom data that I have from classroom with East African refugees and
multilingual teacher. That’s going to be a paper that explores the different uses of their multiple languages for learning.

We read some of your publications in class. The early papers were very much based on interaction, and then you shifted somewhat to the previously mentioned interests. Was there any specific reason for that or you just naturally developed different interests?
M: Well, like I said, the kids kind of led me down different paths. But I do remember very distinctively interaction with a teenage girl, and after we were done doing all of my very carefully crafted tasks and my protocol, she looked at me and said: “Can you teach me how to read?” And I said: “Yes. Especially if you bring three of your friends.” So, Mogadishu on the Mississippi: Language, racialized identity and education in a new land came out of that work.

Last semester, you taught Foundations of Second Languages and Cultures Education. Can you tell us a little bit more about this course?
M: That course is the first course that our Master’s students take in their programs. It’s an overview of issues in lots of different language contexts. We go through contextual issues in, let’s say, heritage language programs, English as a second, foreign or other language programs, foreign language traditional models, foreign language immersion, indigenous languages, and we have a bit on teacher education. Most of the students are teachers, but the emphasis is a critical examination of all of the different pressures each of those contexts have: the political tensions, teacher credentials, budgetary dilemmas, curriculum pressures. We go through all of that and then they read research in all of these areas.

That sounds very practical for someone who is about to become a teacher.
M: It’s super fun. They do a blog. It’s heavy on reading. I also do a mid-term assessment where they do a context comparison. In order to model multilingual teaching, they are allowed to do that assessment in any language they want or any mix of languages. So, it’s on me to find people that can help me read them. That’s kind of an innovation that I had. And they read the book by Sue Motha: “Race and Empire in English Language Teaching”. That’s a good one. It talks about some of the hot issues. We tackle the native speaker myth. One action thing that they do is that they find a job posting, native speaker-required, and they dialogue with the person about that. They write an email and ask why that’s a requirement, and say that they don’t think that should be a requirement. Teaching that book is a little bit jarring for some of the Chinese students and some of them get really angry, actually. They said: “Now I’m really upset that the native speaker was paid more than me when I did more work. I’m really angry that my Master’s Degree isn’t going to be as valuable as their so-called language ability.” It’s very disruptive to many of them, but kind of life-changing as well. They take that critical lens to the rest of their program.

It’s really important to have those kind of classes, I think. Because some students never ponder over such situations but simply accept them back in their countries.
M: One thing we practiced was saying: “I am bilingual.” A lot of the teachers were afraid to say that.

In Chinese context, when teachers switch into Chinese while teaching they often get penalized financially by the school. It happened to me a few times. And I did this because I saw nobody could understand me.

M: Oh my gosh. Well, sometimes the teachers just say: “I’m a Chinese and I’m a second language learner.” But they will never say they’re bilingual. So, we really worked on that. After we talked about what a native speaker is, and whether we could all say we’re native speakers, that was even harder. We did some therapy, [laughter] class therapy about who feels legitimized and who doesn’t.

That sounds like fun, to take this class.

M: I really enjoyed teaching this class, because we have a lot of methods classes, but this is not a methods class, it’s an issues class. A lot of it is reflecting on beliefs about language learning across all of those different contexts. Also, they’ll observe classes in context they’re unfamiliar with. We had one class that was only a weekend school language class, for Korean heritage kids. Many of them have never been in such classes and they were amazed by them.

If I made you choose one, would you say you’re a teacher or a researcher?

M: I would say I’m a teacher.

So, how do you find yourself in the field, where there’s constant pressure to perfect your research skills?

M: In our roles, in higher education, we’re teaching constantly. You’re not just teaching your assigned classes but you’re mentoring your juniors, your students, you’re serving in leadership roles in the community, and then you bring your teacher lens into all your research. I was a teacher long before I got my training as a researcher, but I feel like whenever I’m in a research space, I’m often thinking like a teacher. Methodologies where I’m only observing are kind of challenging for me, because it’s hard to bracket those thoughts of how instruction is happening or how learning is happening.

There are many young researchers who don’t have any previous training in teaching, so what in your opinion could institutions do to help those researchers become better teachers?

M: My institution has a center for teaching and learning for people who want to get better at teaching. They are matched with senior or more experienced professors. They get coaching and support. I think that’s important. In my field, I’m in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, we don’t admit people into our program unless they’ve had teaching experience prior. That’s because people who graduate from our program usually step into a teacher-educator role at some point and how can you do that without having been a teacher? I mean, it’s possible but
it’s hard and even our Minnesota Board of Teaching doesn’t allow you to teach courses for teacher licensure unless you have certain credentials. It’s very minimum, what we’re required to have, but you have to have some teaching background. It’s actually legislated. Some of us debate that, because sometimes we want to assign an instructor to a class and they a similar but not perfect teaching background match to that class, so we don’t like to be constrained. It’s hard to say somebody can teach elementary level students if they’ve never been an elementary school teacher. I want to add that making the switch from being a teacher to teacher education is not easy either, because a lot of times what people do when they make that switch they just base all of their thinking on their own experience, rather than bringing inquiry into teaching dilemmas.

After a while it’s really difficult to still have questions, because you got into routine and you think you’ve got everything figured out.

M: Right. And your job is to help them develop their own philosophy, practice and beliefs. I know, myself included, a lot of people are having a hard time making that shift to teacher educator.

In your opinion, what are some challenges that we have in the field of SLA right now?

M: I guess one of the things I’ve been trying to do, pretty much my entire career, is include more marginalized communities into our research corpus. Because I don’t feel you can safely develop SLA theories if you only work with a very narrow slice of a language learner type. I feel like there’s a lot of exciting things, too. Methodologically, the field’s opened up, so you can get research published that uses a lot of different methodologies now. That’s really exciting. It’s challenging to keep up with everything. But right now, I feel like our biggest fight actually is political. We have a new Secretary of Education that does not champion public education. I feel like the next four years are going to be the biggest fight of our careers.

That even comes from above her. The whole trend is very saddening.

M: Very disheartening. Those of us that work with communities, we have to recognize that possibly conversations that we have in communities and with teachers have a lot to do with policy. As people in second language studies and education, we need to be policy people now. We need to give our time to stakeholder groups, advocacy groups that are trying to advocate for minoritized communities. It’s a challenge to build capacity to be able to contribute to policy discussions.

Would you see such contributions in terms of activism?

M: Yeah. But it’s technical expertise too, that you give about multilingualism. Right now, with ESSA [Every Student Succeeds Act], there’s all kinds of decisions that are being made right now at the state level that we have expertise on and we need to be at the table. My colleagues and I are spending hours at meetings at our Department of Education. You need to be there because there are all kinds of things that they’re discussing. Simple things even, like the home language
questionnaire, which is required. We are living in this ethnocentric nationalistic new world order that basically dismisses anything that you can learn through having multiple cultural linguistic lenses. It’s terrifying. Those are probably our biggest fights at the moment.

For those of us who are trying to become researchers, in your opinion what constitutes a good researcher?
M: A good researcher comes up with the real question that they really don’t know the answer to. That’s the most exciting, right? A good researcher remembers why they came into the field and tries to hang on to some glimmer of that. A good researcher is an ethical researcher that treats their participants fairly and well. A good researcher is analytical, dives into data. It’s not about getting good data. It’s about doing a good analysis. In terms of researcher dispositions, I think it’s good to be reflective and really love your data. Spend a lot of time with your data. But you have to be able to produce, too. So, I think that doctoral students who are product-oriented, get done faster. They don’t have as much angst about producing. I’ve just noticed that over the years. Lots of different people can finish a PhD, but the ones that tend to get done quickly start writing and don’t have any hang-ups about writing.

I’m the only person in my cohort who is on the qualitative side of research and the writing and analysis are the most exciting parts, for me.
M: You know, with qualitative research a lot of it is learning by writing. I feel like the write-up is the analysis and the exploration.

What general advice would you give second language researchers and teachers?
M: I don’t know if this is very lofty advice, but I would say: make everything count at least once, preferably twice. So, if you do a conference presentation, produce a manuscript. If you do a course paper, do a conference presentation. Just try to make everything count more than once. If you can get synergy between your classes, then you know you’re in the right space. Because you’re reading about something that’s somehow complemented by something you do in another class. Then, it all takes shape together rather than having your learning in silos.

OK. Before we finish, is there anything you’d like to add?
M: Maybe I’d say: don’t ever forget the passions that brought you into the field in the first place. If it was language learning, keep learning a language. If it’s culture, keep exposing yourself to new cultures. Try to not forget why you got into it and keep getting out there. I guess, I see sometimes professors who somehow aren’t with kids anymore, even though that was their first love. I think that can be really degenerative, so just keep reminding yourself why you got there.

Thank you so much for your time.
M: Absolutely. Nice talking with you.
Interview with Andrea Révész

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Andrea Révész is a senior lecturer in applied linguistics and TESOL at Institute of Education, University College London. Her research interests lie in the areas of second language acquisition (SLA) and second language instruction. In particular, she has conducted research on the roles of tasks, implicit/explicit learning and teaching, and individual differences in instructed second language development.

Professor Revesz kindly agreed to this interview as she was presenting at SLS Symposium, MSU, in February 2017.

Could you tell us about how you first got involved in second language research and what motivated you to become interested in second language acquisition (SLA) and applied linguistics?
A: When I did my undergraduate degree, my interests lay in the area of theoretical linguistics, and later I went on to do an MA in theoretical linguistics. At the same time, I also did an MA in English Language and Literature, which had a mandatory teaching component. When I did my practice teaching, I realized that I very much enjoyed teaching. So, after finishing university, I decided to take up a language teaching position in a secondary school in Budapest. I wasn’t thinking about pursuing a PhD at the time. After three years of teaching, however, I felt that I wanted to study further. By then I was more interested in teaching-related issues, so I decided to apply to a PhD program in applied rather than theoretical linguistics. Then, as part of my PhD at Teachers College, I took a course on SLA, and got hooked!

After you got into the PhD program, did you become more interested in second language acquisition?
A: I think I had always been interested in SLA even as a secondary school student. I just wasn’t aware that the area I was interested in was called SLA. I didn’t know that the field existed.

Could you briefly describe the projects you are currently working on?
A: One of my current areas of interest is investigating cognitive processes involved in second language writing. I got drawn to this area through my interest in triangulating different...
methodologies. Examining writing processes provides a platform for combining methods such as keystroke logging, eye-tracking, stimulated recall, and measurement of cognitive individual differences. I find it fascinating how the triangulation of these various data sources can inform research on second language writing.

I'm also interested, of course, in second language developmental processes. My current research on developmental issues is conducted mainly in collaboration with my PhD students. With Jookyoung Jung, we are looking into the effects of task complexity on noticing in the context of reading. With Minjin Lee, we are investigating the impact of enhanced captions on the learning of second language grammar from a TBLT perspective. I additionally work on a project examining the effects of task repetition on second language writing development with my former PhD student, John Rogers.

I'm currently also involved in an EU-funded project based at UCL. We are developing an online infrastructure called iRead that will help first, dyslexic, and second language children to improve their reading skills. I'm working on the L2 component. This is a really large-scale project, involving 9 countries and several commercial partners. This is a very new experience for me. I've never been part of such a big project before, working with colleagues from variety of fields such as learning technology, computer science, gaming, learning disabilities, and computational linguistics.

It sounds very fascinating. Your PhD studies were related to corrective feedback, which is in line with task-based language teaching (TBLT). That’s what I understand.

A: Yes, the common thread in my research is an interest in tasks and TBLT. I tend to conceptualize my research through a TBLT lens. My current work on writing, listening and reading is also all task-related.

What motivated your particular interest in task-based language teaching? This question was partly answered, though.

A: When I did my first research methods course at TC, we were asked to critique a paper written by Peter Skehan and Pauline Foster, and I found the paper fascinating. This prompted me to read more on this topic. I immediately felt that this was a line of research, which has direct implications for language teaching. I could also relate my previous language teaching experience to the TBLT literature. As a language teacher, I used a task-supported approach, and really enjoyed using tasks. At the time, I was not aware that many activities I used were tasks. I didn't follow a purely task-based syllabus, but I think a large part of my teaching was task-based.

Many studies on TBLT have been conducted to provide pedagogical implications for second language (L2) teaching and learning. What do you think about the effectiveness of such attempts to fill the gap between theory and practice?

A: TBLT is becoming more and more popular in a variety of contexts. It is very difficult and time-consuming, however, to design a pure task-based syllabus as described in Michael Long's
work. A task-supported approach is more feasible to implement in most contexts, especially when local curricula do not explicitly support TBLT.

If a task-supported approach can be eclectic, can it also be more doable?
A: Yes, I think a task-supported approach is easier to adopt for teachers who have previously used more traditional approaches. Also, learners who are not new to language learning and have followed a structural syllabus in the past, often seem to prefer such an approach.

As a professor and supervisor, what advice can you give the PhD students to be good researchers in this field?
A: I believe it is really important that you choose an area of research that you are really interested in and passionate about. It's also very important to present at conferences and try to publish your work while you are doing your PhD. When I was applying for jobs, publications were already important, but the academic job market is much more competitive now. You all seem to be doing all of these things at MSU, this is such a great and inspiring place for PhD students. Reflecting on my own PhD studies, I also found very helpful and stimulating to meet other PhD students, work together, and support each other. As a PhD student, you might not have the chance to collaborate on research as you are so busy with your own project. After I had finished my PhD, however, much of my research involved collaborating with researchers I met as a PhD student. I still often consult these colleagues/friends for advice and feedback.

You mean collaboration with others is important.
A: Yes, both with peers and professors. You learn a lot through the process.

Before we end this interesting interview, is there anything you would like to add?
A: I would just like to thank you for inviting me to MSU. MSU is one of the most well known places to do second language acquisition research. It's a very stimulating context. It is wonderful to be here.