ABSTRACT

Second language acquisition (SLA) research has long been concerned with how cognitive factors influence language learning processes and outcomes. Although we have gained a lot of insights about the role of cognitive individual differences in SLA, many of the findings relating to the impact of working memory (WM) have remained inconclusive. Issues relating to the conceptual specifications of WM and the large variety of testing measures are some of the key reasons for the contradictory results. Another problem is that the investigation of the WM often fails to consider the pedagogical relevance of cognitive individual differences. In this talk I will discuss how understanding the role of WM in second language (L2) learning processes and outcomes can promote inclusive language teaching. First, I will present recent theoretical models of WM in cognitive psychology and offer a brief critical evaluation of the tests used in our field for assessing WM. Next, I will argue that the study of the link between WM is important because teaching and assessment tasks can vary in their demands on attentional resources. Hence, tasks that are excessively taxing on the storage and processing functions of WM and attentional resources might not contribute to L2 development and might unfairly disadvantage L2 learners with lower levels of WM functioning. Using contemporary models of WM and drawing on recent studies in our research group, I will discuss how the characteristics of language learning and assessment tasks can interact with individual variation in WM functioning. The talk will conclude with suggestions on how language teaching pedagogy can create an inclusive environment where differences in L2 learners' cognitive characteristics do not hinder successful L2 acquisition.

WORKING MEMORY: CAN WE MAKE IT WORK FOR INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING?
Guest Speaker:
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October 28, 2021
10:00AM-11:30AM EST
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