

The earliest stages of second language acquisition and the adult capacity for learning

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How do adults break into the continuous speech stream of an unknown language in the wild? Despite the work on the role of input in adult second language (L2) acquisition, the advances of artificial and statistical language learning studies, etc., surprisingly little is known about this crucial first step in adult L2 acquisition. The learning task minimally consists of three components: (1) isolating a relevant string in continuous speech, (2) identifying and mapping meaning onto it, and (3) generalising from known exemplars to novel items. In this talk I report on three experiments that examine what information adults can extract from audio-visual input in an unknown and typologically distant L2 after minimal exposure and without help. We test whether Dutch adults can recognise Mandarin Chinese words and extract lexical meaning after minimal exposure, and what role item frequency and gestural links between sound and meaning play for such initial input processing. We also investigate whether adults can generalise from encountered exemplars in the input to novel items after minimal exposure, and extract phonotactic information. While emphasising the complexity of the learning task, the results also suggest that the adult learning mechanism is more powerful than normally assumed when faced with small amounts of complex, continuous audio-visual language input.

A two-edged sword: comparative assessment frameworks and language education

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The last two decades have seen the growing use of assessment in the shaping of educational policy in relation to languages. The clearest examples of this in Europe and beyond are the Common European Framework of Reference and the program of PISA testing of reading. What are the positive and negative impacts of such developments? What social, political and cultural values do such assessments embody? The paper interprets these developments in the light of the failure of validity theory in language assessment, and calls for a program of critical research on the local impacts of assessment policies which attempt to further the processes of globalization.

Multilingual practices in the late modern speech community

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It is part of most European national ideologies that languages, speakers and places constitute a unity. Languages belong to specific speakers, and speakers belong to specific places. This tying together of places, languages and people is not only characteristic of most lay people's

conceptualizations of languages. A tight connection between place, body and language also lies at the basis of most variationist and dialect studies, whether linguistic variation is described horizontally, as linked to geography, or vertically, as linked to social stratification. Variationist sociolinguistics has from the beginning been criticized for focusing too narrowly on ethnically homogeneous speech communities, pointing to the fact that they are the exception rather than the rule (Le Page 1980: 336). Such criticism become even more relevant today as the Western, late modern speech community develops in ways that in particular challenge the connection between language, body and place. Increased geographical mobility, linguistic heterogeneity, CMC and new information technologies integrated in everyday communication are some of the phenomena that make it intricate to carry out traditional variationist sociolinguistics in the city. On this background, I will address the question: How can we study variation in the speech community from a sociolinguistic perspective in the heterogeneous urban context of late modernity? I will discuss this question by critically scrutinizing the connections between language and place, place and body, and body and language. Notions of style and practice will be suggested as the main means needed to grasp the complexity of the late modern speech community. The discussion will draw on findings from a study of linguistic and stylistic practices in the ethnically mixed neighbourhood Nørrebro in Copenhagen (Quist forthc.). Connected with all of this I will also address questions on how to include immigrant related speech practices, such as multiethnolects (Quist 2008), in the analysis; are 'lect' terms useful in the sociolinguistic study of the speech community?

References

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Researching and Applying Metaphor: From fundamental to applied research and back again

Gerard Steen, VU University Amsterdam

In this talk I will sketch some developments of metaphor research since the cognitive turn at the end of the seventies, with the publication of Ortony's (1979) *Metaphor and Thought* and Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) *Metaphors We Live By*. After a decade of cognitive-linguistic and psycholinguistic groundwork, the mid nineties saw the rise of an applied perspective on metaphor, which was most notably represented by the first Researching and Applying Metaphor meeting, in December 1996 in York, UK. This led to the publication of Cameron and Low's (1999) *Researching and Applying Metaphor* as well as to a series of conference meetings under the same title, which went from Copenhagen and Tilburg via Tunis and Paris to Leeds and Cacères, with the next meeting being planned for Amsterdam 2010. It also led to the foundation of the scholarly association RaAM, which is the international organization for the study of metaphor and other forms of figurative language in the real world.

The fruits of these developments are now beginning to be reaped in such diverse areas as language acquisition, language teaching, interaction, as well as intercultural communication.

But they have also reinforced critical questions about the original idea that metaphor is always or necessarily a matter of thought (e.g. Steen, 2007, 2008). In this talk I will offer my own view of this crucial question, against the background of these applied developments, and I will sketch out a new horizon for metaphor research which will have novel fundamental as well applied challenges.

References

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