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ABSTRACTS

PLENARY SPEECH

A Sociocultural Perspective on Young Language Learners' Language Learning Strategies

by Lawrence Zhang Jun

Abstract

In this paper I report on part of a larger research project funded by the Singapore Ministry of Education. The project is interested in examining how successful and less successful young bilingual Chinese-English learners learn the two languages as required subjects in the national school curriculum. The ultimate aim is researcher-teacher partnership for enhancing the efficiency of schoolchildren's bilingual/biliteracy learning through boosting self-regulated strategic engagement based on the learning strategy use profiles thus obtained (Zhang et al., 2008). As a pilot study, this paper focuses on examining young learners' language learning strategies for bringing to bear on the range and patterns of such strategies. Taking a case study approach to providing "holistic" and "context-sensitive" descriptions of the learning activities (Patton, 2001), examined through a sociocultural lens, I describe the process of the language learning activities to observe the use of learning strategies in meaningful interaction. Instead of following the conventional method of tallying the strategies used and regarding "less successful" learners as suffering from a "learning disability" syndrome, I take a critical theory perspective by arguing that "successful" and "less successful" learners contribute to the meaningful interaction in language learning in different ways. Following calls for a "sociocultural turn" (Block, 2003), I maintain that there is a need to nestle and reframe a cognitive view of language acquisition within a socially-embedded system so that these commonly used constructs are not treated in isolation but in osmosis so that they are understood as "interactionally open and ecologically situated" (Canagarajah, 2007). Learners' willingness to communicate and the opportunities for peripheral participation in classroom language activities are discussed in light of sociocultural theory that framed the data. Pedagogical implications of this study in terms of the utility and benefits of learning strategy-based instruction through task-based approaches for English language learners

in similar contexts are discussed.

LAWRENCE ZHANG is associate professor in the English Language & Literature Academic Group, National Institute of Education, Singapore. He delivered this plenary speech at the Bloomsbury Student Conference on Applied Linguistics and Communication 2009, Birkbeck College, University of London, UK.

PHD ABSTRACT

Task-Based Information Seeking as a Constructive Process: A Study of Chinese ESL Students

by Mary Ellis

Abstract

Using Kuhlthau's information search process, a task-based model which includes predictable actions, thoughts and feelings, this study investigated a group of 56 Chinese ESL students of different English language proficiency aged 17–19, as they completed an academic writing research task. They were enrolled in an academic English preparatory course at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. The qualitative study, supported in part by descriptive statistics, examined the extent that these ESL students experienced Kuhlthau's model, their subsequent information-seeking behavior, and the impact of English language proficiency on their search process.

Data sources included a modified version of Kuhlthau's process survey, search diaries and interviews. Progress on the students' research was followed for 6 weeks in 2004 and 2005 as they completed a research assignment for an academic writing course. For the majority of these students, this was the first research paper they had written in English.

In general, the 3 groups in this investigation shared a more common than different experience of the research process and the information-seeking behaviors (feelings thoughts, and actions) predicted by Kuhlthau's information search process model. The cognitive and behavioral aspects of her model most clearly corresponded to those students who had an advanced level of English. Although the intermediate and lower level groups did not progress through the

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process as quickly as the advanced group in terms of their thoughts and actions, all 3 groups generally shared similar emotions regarding their information-seeking experience.

This study extends Kuhlthau's information search process model to a different cultural context and has implications for educators working with Chinese students, one of the largest groups enrolled in educational institutions internationally.

It also has ramifications for designers of information literacy instruction for ESL students. Awareness of how students' English proficiency affects their information-seeking behavior is important for those involved with teaching and designing research tasks.

MARY ELLIS is lecturer in the English Language & Literature Academic Group, National Institute of Education, Singapore. This is the abstract of her PhD dissertation, which she completed at the Nanyang Technological University in 2009.

EDD ABSTRACT

Towards Language Awareness and Learner Autonomy in Collocation Learning: Learner Perspectives and Practices on an "AWARE" Approach

by Yang Ying

Abstract

The study reported in this thesis aimed to gain an in-depth understanding about English collocation learning and the development of learner autonomy through investigating a group of EFL learners' perspectives and practices in their learning of English collocations under a recommended AWARE approach. The AWARE approach is an eclectic and multifaceted process-oriented learning approach that integrates practices grounded in Chinese traditional beliefs of learning and recent ELT developments and recommendations such as language awareness and learner autonomy, to support the key elements of "developing awareness of selected language features, seeing meaning in learning, acquiring strategies for effective learning, reflecting on learning process and exhibiting what is learned".

The study engaged a group of 20 PRC students learning English in Singapore, using the research method of a qualitative collective case study. Data from

multiple sources including two semi-structured interviews, learner-produced documents such as reflective journals, writing assignments, recorded oral reports and proficiency tests results were gathered to gain a full understanding of students' learning perspectives and processes in English collocation learning and how these may have affected proficiency performance. Miles and Huberman's (1994) framework of a three step "data reduction", "data display" and "drawing and verifying conclusions" was adopted in data analysis.

Findings emerging from the study revealed some major patterns of differences between the collocation learning perspectives and practices of students who made significant learning attainment in their proficiency development and those who made marginal attainment. Interpretation of the data, through an inductive development of theory, led to a description and explanation of the learners' processes of learning English language collocations in four main areas: First, a collocation learning trajectory was discovered and the more successful learners in the study were found to travel along this path at a faster speed. Secondly, there were preliminary findings of a possible trajectory for the development of learner autonomy. Third, the study revealed a possible conversion from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation through the use of moderately challenging tasks with proper instructional support. Finally six factors that affect learners' task motivation were identified.

The findings constitute an original contribution to both the theory and practices in English language teaching and learning, especially in the area of collocation learning. Based on the findings from the study, and discussion of pedagogical implications, a differentiated teaching model is proposed for pedagogical attention and practices in three main areas, namely, differentiated focus of teacher help for weak and strong students, differentiated teaching (proper scaffolding) in the different stages of collocation learning strategy training and differentiated collocation learning task types to facilitate learning. Recommendations for future research and pedagogical development are made.

YANG YING is a lecturer at the Centre for English Language Communication, National University. This is the abstract of her EdD thesis which she completed with the University of Western Australia.

CONFERENCE

15th English in South East Asia Conference University of Macau, 9–11 December 2010

The ESEA organisation and annual conference is the result of a collaboration between the following member institutions: Ateneo De Manila University (Philippines), Curtin University (Australia), Hong Kong Institute of Education (Hong Kong), King Mongkut's University of Technology (Thailand), National Institute of Education (Singapore), Sanata Dharma University (Indonesia), University of Brunei Darussalam (Brunei), University of Macau (Macao), and University of Malaya (Malaysia). The annual ESEA conference celebrates the linguistic and creative diversity of English across the region of South East Asia and confronts challenges that are typically presented in the teaching of English. The conference theme of 2010 is '**Our Diverse Communities**'. Like ESEA conferences in the past, the 2010 conference in Macau will provide a valuable forum for faculty and students engaging in research and teaching in English language and literature. Recognizing that South East Asia is a large and diverse region, the conference organizers will welcome a variety of proposals related to research and teaching in linguistics, literature, cultural studies, and language pedagogy.

The meeting URL is <http://www.umac.mo/fsh/de/esea2010>

Meeting location:

University of Macau, Macau SAR

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Meeting dates:

The 15th English in South East Asia Conference will be held from 9–11 December 2010.

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