

15th Annual Research Symposium
TESL Ontario, October 16-18, 2014

Report submitted by
Hedy McGarrell and David Wood

The 15th Annual Research Symposium was held as part of the 42nd annual TESL Ontario Conference in Toronto from October 16-18, 2014. The Research Symposium addressed three topics and included a total of eight presentations

- Learner Beliefs and Attitudes
- Language Processing and Memory in ESL
- Discourse Analysis – in and out of the Classroom

The three topics strands were each presented in a three-hour session that included time for presenters to respond to questions arising from their presentation and for symposium participants to engage in discussion with the presenters. All three topics were well attended by between 40-60 participants, clearly reflecting the overall drop in conference participants.

A brief synopsis of each of the three symposium topics follows.

Learner Beliefs and Attitudes

Thursday, 16 October 2014, 14:15 – 17:15 hrs.

Presenters: Elaine Horwitz, PhD, University of Texas at Austin
James McCrostie, Daito Bunka University, Japan
Kimberly Noels, PhD, University of Alberta

Learners' own beliefs about and attitudes language learning are an important factor in their motivation and eventual success as second language (L2) learners. Elaine Horwitz reported on some common learner beliefs about language learning and how such beliefs impact the learning process. She then explored how learner and community misconceptions about language learning as well as mismatches between learner and teacher beliefs contribute to learner and teacher anxiety about L2 learning. Horwitz concluded with suggestions intended to help learners develop realistic expectations and effective learning strategies. James McCrostie's study presented results from his study of the use of vocabulary notebooks, a widely recommended teaching technique, kept by 124 EFL university students in Japan. Results indicate that learners find it difficult to judge the frequency of individual vocabulary items and view all new items as equally important. In addition, results show that learners believe in the value of vocabulary lists and teacher generated materials. Kimberly Noels reported on two studies of L2 learning outcomes depending on whether learners held the belief that the ability to learn a new language is fixed or potentially malleable. Reported findings point to various differences between the two groups and have implications for theory, research and L2 education.

Language Processing and Memory in ESL

Friday, 17 October, 2014, 09:30-12:30 hrs.

Presenters: Philippa Bell, PhD, University of Quebec, Montreal
Craig Chambers, PhD, University of Toronto, Mississauga
Xavier Gutiérrez, PhD, University of Alberta

Philippa Bell explored the relationship between memory capacity and L2 grammar learning. Whether individuals' memory capacity influences whether grammar is learned implicitly or explicitly. Results suggest that memory capacity is important for grammar learning but does not appear to be related to implicit or explicit learning. The presentation concluded with a discussion of the relevance of these findings to teaching L2 grammar. Craig Chambers' presentation discussed the underlying mechanisms required for L2 learning to result in individuals' attainment of relevant linguistic knowledge and processing fluency typically expected of competent language users. Factors such as contextual environment, considered unimportant in much of the earlier work in language acquisition, are shown to be central to the development of communicative ability. The discussion focused on how such more recent insights enhance understanding of memory and language processing in L2 development. Xavier Gutiérrez presented findings from a study that explored how the use of different knowledge sources in individual and collaborative writing tasks contributes to the resolution of language-related episodes (LREs). The study focused on whether the participants resorted to implicit and explicit knowledge of language in the writing tasks, and how the resolution of linguistic problems in relation to those types of representations was achieved. A discussion of pedagogical implications concluded his presentation.

Discourse Analysis – in and out of the Classroom

Friday, 17 October, 2014, 14:15-17:15 hrs.

Presenters: Julie Kerekes, PhD, University of Toronto
Michael McCarthy, PhD, University of Nottingham

The first of the two presentations on discourse analysis explored features of discourse in the workforce while the second focused on classroom language. Julie Kerekes discussed current trends in approaches to teaching ESL for the workplace, with a focus on the roles of language, power, and status in discursive practices. Her presentation included several examples from studies that observe immigrant professionals' employment trajectories and acquisition of employment-suitable language practices and focused on how these skills can be taught in the ESL classroom. In the second presentation, Michael McCarthy reported on key elements of interaction which emerge from the investigation of native- and expert-user spoken corpora and compared these with evidence from classroom corpora when students are presenting and interacting. Examples of selected discourse features in both types of corpora illustrated what contributes to successful interaction. Insights from these studies led to the argument that students who succeed in breaking through the Classroom Interactional Communication barrier have a greater chance of achieving the goal of general interactional competence, and this process can be stimulated early on in their L2 learning attempts.

Part of the research symposium is the publication of the proceedings in a special

refereed issue of *Contact*. The co-editors of the proceedings, Dr. Hedy McGarrell and Dr. David Wood have set up a Reading Committee consisting of experts on the topics addressed to assist with reviewing the manuscripts. The due date for manuscript submission for the refereed proceedings is in December 2014, the projected publication date of the proceedings is 31 May 2015. The issue will be published through the TESL Ontario website and be available to teachers, researchers and language professionals throughout the world, wherever access to the Internet is available.

Many thanks to presenters, participants and TESL Ontario staff for their support of this event.