LAMiNATE Talks

Abstracts

Autumn 2023

LAMiNATE Talks is a seminar series that aims to foster interdisciplinary discussion on language acquisition, multilingualism and language teaching. Talks are held every other Tuesday afternoon 15.15-16.30 CET, with participants from Lund and beyond.

The autumn Talks series starts on September 5 and will host 8 presentations by national and international colleagues. This term includes one thematic block and five independent talks.

Zoom link:
https://lu-se.zoom.us/j/66584942

September 20
Passcal Gygax (University of Fribourg)
Inclusive language: What is it? And what does it mean for mono- and bilinguals?

When referring to a person's personal, social or professional role as scientists, travellers or managers, knowing the person's sex is not always crucial for comprehending the discourse. In fact, it rarely is. Research nevertheless suggests that when reading or listening to sentences where gender is not specified, such as "The professors were really interested" or "Les professeurs étaient vraiment intéressés", we still form a mental representation of these people that includes gender.

In the presentation, I will present data across different languages (from monolingual and bilingual data) to show that we tend to attribute gender in ways that unnecessarily narrow our perceptions of the world. I will specifically argue that language inevitably compel us to attend certain properties of the world that are not always relevant. I will further explore certain properties of grammatical languages (e.g., using the masculine form as the default value), and discuss whether these properties do or do not bias the way we attribute gender. I will also briefly explore some practicalities of the issues at stake, of what is often referred to as "inclusive language".

September 19–October 17
Thematic Block: L2 Pronunciation Instruction

Pronunciation is a well-known difficulty for L2 learners but often also for their teachers. Indeed, many language teachers report insecurities around the What? Why? and How? of pronunciation teaching. This thematic block consists of three talks focusing on the How? of pronunciation instruction with a particular attention to the potential benefits of using gestures in two of the talks. In the first of the three talks, Marieke Hoetjes will present a study on the effect of phoneme and gesture complexity on L2 phoneme acquisition. In the second talk, Joan C. Mora will discuss challenges in L2 pronunciation instruction, specifically in communicative language teaching. In the third and final talk, Pilar Prieto will report on a series of studies exploring the potential impact of embodied practices on L2 pronunciation.

September 19
Marieke Hoetjes (Radbout University)
Using gesture to facilitate L2 phoneme acquisition: How important are gesture and phoneme complexity?

I will discuss a study, conducted together with my colleague Lieke van Maastricht, on the role that gesture may play in L2 phoneme acquisition. Given the close relationship between speech and co-speech gesture, previous work unsurprisingly reports that gestures can facilitate language acquisition, e.g., in (L2) word learning. However, gesture studies on L2 phoneme acquisition tend to present less clear-cut results, which could mean that specific properties of gestures and phonemes used in training may be relevant.

In this study we investigated the effect of phoneme and gesture complexity on L2 phoneme acquisition. In a production study, Dutch natives received instruction on the pronunciation of two Spanish phonemes, /u/ and /θ/. Both are typically difficult to produce for Dutch natives because their orthographic representation differs between both languages. Moreover, /θ/ is considered more complex than /u/, since the Dutch phoneme inventory contains /u/ but not /θ/. The instruction participants received contained Spanish examples presented either via audio-only, audio-visually without gesture, audio-visually with a simple, pointing gesture, or audio-visually with a more complex, iconic gesture representing the relevant speech articulator(s). Preceding and following training, participants read aloud Spanish sentences containing the target phonemes. In a perception study, Spanish natives rated the target words from the production study on accentedness and comprehensibility.

The results show that combining gesture and speech in L2 phoneme training can lead to significant improvement in L2 phoneme production, but also that type of gesture and type of phoneme affect successful learning: Significant learning only occurred for the less complex phoneme /u/ after seeing the more complex iconic gesture, whereas for the more complex phoneme /θ/, seeing the more complex gesture actually hindered acquisition. The perception results confirm the production findings and show that items containing /θ/ produced after receiving training with a less complex pointing gesture are considered less foreign-accented and more easily comprehensible as compared to the same items after audio-only training.

In this talk I will present this in more detail and open the floor to a discussion of whether these results indeed point to a role of gesture and phoneme complexity, or whether there are other potential explanations for our findings.

Thursday September 28, 10:15–12:00
Joan C. Mora (University of Barelona)
L2 speech training in the classroom: methods and issues in developing L2 pronunciation in instructed SLA

Teaching and learning second language pronunciation is a major challenge in communicative approaches to language education. Teachers do not only find it difficult to know what to focus on when teaching pronunciation, they often lack the methodological resources and training to effectively integrate pronunciation into their communicative language classes. Although research has provided empirical evidence for the effectiveness of several pronunciation training and teaching methods for pronunciation development (e.g., high-variability phonetic training, explicit phonetic instruction, computer-assisted pronunciation instruction), effectively integrating them into the communicative language classroom remains both a methodological challenge and a largely unexplored area of research. Effectively integrating pronunciation instruction into communicative language teaching requires creative pedagogically-oriented innovations with clear identification of pronunciation teaching goals (e.g. speech intelligibility and comprehensibility; Levis, 2018; 2020) that would allow pronunciation learning to take place without decontextualized practice in meaningful language use contexts to facilitate transfer of learning gains to real-life communication.

The development of noticing and awareness of L2 phonetic features that differ systematically from those of the learners' L1 and the integration of pronunciation instruction in communicative activities are crucial components of effective pronunciation instruction. This may be achieved through dual-focus approaches that combine explicit instruction with communicative tasks (Cerce-Murcia et al., 2010; Darcy, 2018; Darcy & Rocca, 2022), or through task-based pronunciation teaching (TBPT: Mora & Levkina, 2017; Mora-Plaza, 2023), an approach to prounciation instruction that makes use of the task-design principles of task-based language teaching (TBLT) to enhance learners' attention to phonetic form in tasks involving meaning-based interaction. In addition, in foreign language (FL) instructional contexts where L2 exposure is often limited to 3 weekly hours of classroom instruction, making out-of-class individual pronunciation training activities available to learners that enhance their attention to phonetic form and raise their awareness of L2 pronunciation features can be very helpful in supporting and enhancing the benefits of integrated classroom pronunciation instruction. Such tasks include (but are not limited to) high-variability phonetic training (HVPT), shadowing, multimodal pronunciation training through captioned video, embodied pronunciation training, foreign accent imitation and L2 speech self-assessment training. In this talk we will address and discuss challenges in L2 pronunciation instruction based on current research that has focused on the effectiveness and limitations of current pronunciation instruction methods and techniques.

References listed at the end of the programme

October 17
Pilar Prieto (Universitat Pompeu Fabra)
Moving pronunciation instruction forward. The benefits of embodied prosodic practice and embodied music practice for pronunciation learning

Recent cognitive models such as the Embodied Cognition and the multimodal enrichment paradigm (e.g., Mathias & von Kriegstein, 2023; Shapiro, 2019) have emphasized the benefits of whole-body movements and hand gestures for the development of cognitive abilities and language learning processes. In the context of second language learning, while some work has shown that multimodally enriched trainings can help L2 vocabulary learning and recall (e.g., Quinn-Allen 1995; Tellier 2008; Macedonia & Klimesch 2014), still little is known about the benefits of embodied practices in the area of L2 acquisition of phonology.

In this talk, I will report on a series of pronunciation training studies that have been carried out in the GrEPG lab at UPF that test the potential benefits of two types of embodied practices for boosting the acquisition of L2 pronunciation, specifically prosodic-based embodied practices and music-based embodied practices. Crucially, given the parallels between language prosody and music, and the close relationship between melodic and rhythmic skills in L2 speech and music
(Chobert & Besson, 2013), it is expected that prosody-based and music-based embodied training are effective scaffolding mechanisms for L2 pronunciation learning. All in all, the results of the training studies show that (a) different embodiment techniques (e.g., the use of hand gestures, hand-clapping, and whole-body movements) marking phrasal sentence prosody are able to boost the learning of both suprasegmental and segmental speech features; and (b) purely embodied music training practices (involving no access to L2 speech) are also able to facilitate the learning of both second language sentence prosody and segmental features. These results back up the embodied cognition and multimodal enrichment paradigms in their application to phonological learning. Finally, I will suggest that the integration of embodied practices into a more context- and pragmatic-based multimodal approach to teaching L2 language pronunciation has the potential to be successfully applied to a more multimodal view of second language teaching and learning.

October 31
Simone Pfenninger (University of Zurich)
Continuity vs. cut-off points in SLA across the lifespan: From significant life events to high-stakes thresholds

Second language (L2) acquisition has been described as (a) both continuous and discontinuous (Rastelli 2014) and (b) influenced by environmental changes (Ramscar et al. 2013). The possible existence and nature of discontinuity patterns and thresholds in the process of language learning and use across the lifespan raises many questions. For instance, although the existence of thresholds has often been suggested in various fields of linguistics – such as critical periods in infant speech perception development (Werker & Hensch 2015) and L2 learning (Lenneberg 1967), internal resources thresholds (e.g. brain and cognitive reserves, Stern 2002), thresholds in language maintenance and shifts (Grin 1993), minimum comprehension thresholds in the legal community (Pavlenko et al. 2019), as well as thresholds for a diagnosis of dyslexia (Cilibrasi & Tsimpli 2020) – the search for the most likely location for a threshold has turned out to be difficult.

In this talk, I propose novel ways of detecting and estimating thresholds in the association between a continuous independent variable and a continuous dependent variable. My main focus is on retirement as a socially determined and linguistically constructed concept that potentially alters the process of cognitive aging and language acquisition, use and attrition later in life. Life course theory (Elder 1992) emphasizes that retirement, like so many other significant life events, is not an isolated event, but rather a transition and process embedded in a person's biography of prior and current roles and relationships. I suggest that this requires not only more complex, non-linear statistical models to estimate the point of change in a slope as a function of retirement, but also qualitative approaches that examine how L2 learners interpret their experiences 'here and now' as being coherent with their own internal frameworks, and how socially constructed categories are changing. I will also propose that apart from its analytical relevance, a clear concept of 'threshold' could provide a powerful tool for planning and intervention.

References listed at the end of the programme.

November 28
Minna Lehtonen (University of Turku)
TBA

November 28
Rima Haddad (Uppsala University)
The lexical and narrative abilities of Arabic-Swedish-speaking children

Despite Arabic being the second most spoken home language (after Swedish) in Sweden, relatively little is known about the lexical and narrative abilities of Arabic-Swedish-speaking children.

In this talk, I will present results from my doctoral dissertation (Haddad, 2022) on the lexical skills and narrative abilities (in both languages) of 100 Arabic-Swedish-speaking bilingual children aged 4 to 7 residing in Sweden. The children's narrative abilities were analysed in relation to age, as well as task and story effects for both narrative comprehension and narrative production. The children's lexical skills were analysed in relation to age and effect of various language input factors (such as parents' language use with the child, estimated daily language exposure, and shared book reading). Additionally, the children's lexical skills in Arabic were compared to those of Arabic-speaking bilinguals in Lebanon.

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December 12
Raphael Berthele (University of Fribourg)
"After my formation, I really want to improve my English." The impact of digital translation tools on written second language output.

Second/foreign language writing in European languages is increasingly done with the help of digital online tools (AI powered translators and/or dictionaries). In the research presented here, the impact of such tool use on the writing process and on the output produced by adolescent and young adult learners of English as a foreign language is investigated. Texts produced by a total of 274 learners whose first or dominant languages are either French or German are analyzed.

In a first series of analyses, I compare to what extent writing with such tools affects metrics of lexical and syntactic complexity, of accuracy, and of fluency (number of tokens produces per time unit). Moreover, I investigate the impact of a short instruction on the characteristics and features of online tools on their use in the writing process.

In a second step, I demonstrate to what extent the texts produced can be automatically categorized (via machine-learning algorithms based on the texts' unigrams and bigrams) as to whether they were produced with/without tools and as to whether they were written by learners who are dominant in French or German. The lexical and collocational units most strongly associated with the two languages and the two experimental conditions are discussed.

I will end the talk thinking possible implications of the results for second/foreign language teaching and learning.

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