

Editorial

In this issue, we present three articles and an interview which reflect the continued significance of research in second language learning and teaching in the field of applied linguistics. The first two articles examine factors that may influence language learners, namely proficiency level and audio-visual support when attempting to interpret irony, and gender of the instructor and the learner during oral tasks. The third article explores language learners' and teachers' expectations regarding small group work in the language classroom. We close with an interview with an important and productive figure in the field of language teaching, Marianne Celce-Murcia, Professor Emerita of applied linguistics at UCLA.

Researchers have hypothesized that one's ability to understand irony in another language increases as one spends more time in the target culture and becomes more proficient. Nonetheless, few studies have examined this question empirically. Shively, Menke, and Manzón Omundson analyze the effects of L2 proficiency and audiovisual context on Spanish learners' ability to perceive irony in popular Spanish-language films, hypothesizing that learners who read transcripts should have a more difficult time understanding the irony than learners who read transcripts and watch the corresponding film clips. Study participants consisted of students from second-, fourth-, and sixth-semester Spanish classes at a U.S. university. The authors found that the more advanced students perceived irony with greater accuracy than did the less advanced students. In addition, though the authors found that audiovisual access makes it easier for advanced learners to identify irony, this access was not a statistically significant factor in the identification of irony for either the combined sample or the second-semester learners. The authors suggest that constraints on working memory and automaticity may make it difficult for beginning learners to take advantage of the rich audiovisual cues of film.

In the second article, Rahimpour and Yaghoubi-Notash investigate the role of gender in task-prompted speech activities commonly used in task-based learning classrooms. The oral performances of 20 male and 20 female Iranian students majoring in English were analyzed during conversations with either a male or female teacher. More specifically, the authors investigated the effect of the learner's gender and the teacher's gender on the fluency, complexity, and accuracy of the learners' oral performance. Although the authors found no significant effects on the learners' fluency or complexity of the oral performance, the influence of gender on accuracy validated the assumption of female superiority (Chaves, 2001): Females were more accurate than males when interacting with both male and female teachers, but were more accurate when addressing the male teacher as compared to the female teacher. The authors conclude with a discussion of the implications of these findings in oral language testing and language teaching.

Ewald investigates learners' and teachers' perceptions of small group participation in the American university language classroom. The learners surveyed were enrolled in an undergraduate first-year Spanish class; the teachers participated in a graduate methods class at the same university. Participation was defined as moments of task-relevant talk, and the data collected to explore the participants' perceptions of group work included audio recorded discussions, journals, questionnaires, and student homework. From these oral and written materials, the author concludes that teachers' and learners' beliefs converged on three points: that small groups are most successful when all members participate, group work is beneficial because it encourages collaborative effort, and knowing the right answer is not necessary for successful group work. She also finds that teachers' and students' beliefs contrast along two dimensions: the importance of participants' personalities and the nature of group composition. Learners expected members' personalities to influence group work more than teachers, and learners were more flexible in their beliefs about group composition while teachers believed groups should be frequently mixed up. Ewald concludes by discussing the pedagogical implications of these findings.

In an interview conducted by Bahiyyih Hardacre, Professor Emerita Marianne Celce-Murcia talks about work and life-related challenges she has faced after her retirement from UCLA in 2002. She shared with us her current projects including the updating of *Teaching Pronunciation*, and her last co-edited series the *Grammar Connection*, published by Heinle Cengage in 2007. Professor Celce-Murcia also reveals the books and authors that have most significantly influenced her work and discusses the latest trends in the field of applied linguistics and TESL.

This issue marks the first to be co-edited by Lisa Mikesell, Andrea Olinger, and Bahiyyih Hardacre. It is also the last for Satomi Kuroshima, who has been Production Editor since 2004. Satomi, we thank you for your tireless dedication, attention to detail, and, of course, your grace and artfulness with InDesign. We will miss you!

Lisa Mikesell
Andrea Olinger
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