Abstract

Hong Kong’s New Senior Secondary (NSS) English Language Curriculum: Perspectives from Corpus Linguistics

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Abstract

This study explores the Hong Kong’s New Senior Secondary (NSS) English language curriculum and discusses potential implications for using corpus linguistics (CL) in a pedagogical context. While spoken and written corpora have mainly been used to facilitate language description, they can also have a place in the language-teaching context by providing learners with typical patterns of language use some of which are not open to intuition. Specifically, this paper discusses how corpora might aid the teaching of formulaic sequences and workplace English in the classroom, which is of prime concern in the task-based, learner-centred teaching approach upheld in the new curriculum for English.
Differentiating Speech Accents and Pronunciation Errors—Perceptions of TESOL Professionals in Hong Kong

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Abstract

It has been the dilemma of many TESOL professionals that they have to decide whether they should treat ESL/EFL learners’ L1-influenced features as ‘identity-revealing’ accents, or ‘fossilized’ pronunciation errors. This paper explores this issue by presenting findings from a mini-survey about how a group of 16 TESOL professionals from a teacher education institute in Hong Kong would classify a list of common Hong Kong English (HKE) accent features as errors or accents, and whether they based their judgements on factors such as ‘social stigmatization’ and/or ‘obstruction to intelligibility’. Results of the survey showed that the majority (66.7%) of the HKE-influenced segmental features scored a high error% of 60 or more even though only a minority of them were felt to be intelligibility-obstructing or socially stigmatizing. Findings from follow-up interviews with six voluntary professionals revealed a general tendency for the respondents to practice what Foucault (1988) called technologies of the self since these TESOL professionals’ considerations reflected a strong sense of subjectivation, or self-regulation and re-invention, based on their institutional roles and obligations as educators, and perceptions of own status and power as English users. Implications for the prospect of a World Englishes HKE phonology are discussed.

Backward Transfer from L3 French to L2 English Production of Relative Clauses by L1 Cantonese Speakers in Hong Kong

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Abstract

This paper reports a case of ‘backward transfer’ involving L3 French influence on L2 English relative clause production by Cantonese-speaking university students in Hong Kong. Although substantial research has revealed that forward transfer, from a previously acquired language to a later acquired one, affects all linguistic subsystems, backward transfer has received less attention. In this study, both Cantonese-English bilinguals learning French as L3 (the experimental group) and bilinguals of Cantonese and English (the control group) performed a written picture elicitation task where they produced different kinds of relative clause in English as the language being tested. The production of both groups was compared quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively, the frequency counts of different types showed that the experimental group was influenced by French in terms of syntactic formulation of subject-extracted (SRC) and object-extracted relative clauses (ORC). They tended to (1) employ a full SRC with a relative pronoun as opposed to a reduced relative clause, and (2) insert a relative pronoun, which is optional, in ORCs. It was also observed that L3 French can account for some errors the experimental group produced, such as the use of the human relative pronoun who for non-human antecedents, and others that they did not produce, such as subject relatives with inappropriate omission of relative pronouns. It is concluded that backward transfer from L3 French to L2 English did take place in the production of relative clauses in this study, and hence that transfer is bidirectional in multilingual contexts.
The Effects of Language Proficiency on Unfamiliar Word Processing in Listening Comprehension

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of language proficiency on unfamiliar word processing in listening comprehension. Data were collected using the procedures of immediate retrospection without recall support and with stimulated recall. Twenty subjects of two proficiency levels participated in the procedures. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were made. The results indicate that language proficiency affects the subjects’ use of strategies (inferencing and ignoring) and knowledge sources (e.g. semantics, morphology, and background knowledge) to infer word meaning. Proficient subjects used the inferencing strategy more frequently than less proficient subjects. Proficient subjects also displayed marked differences from less proficient subjects in the use of the knowledge sources. Noticeably, proficient subjects were more able to use their overall understanding of the texts to infer word meaning, whereas less proficient subjects more frequently used clues from the target words, and prosodically salient or heavily repeated words to infer word meaning. The pedagogical implications of these findings are then discussed.

Putonghua’s Spread in Hong Kong: Four Teachers’ Experiences of Learning the National Language as Adults

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Abstract

This study investigates the experiences of four Hong Kong learners of Pǔtōnghuà who did not begin learning the language until adulthood. The four informants teach Chinese and Pǔtōnghuà at local sub-degree granting tertiary institutions. Teachers from this background were chosen by the investigator because they are agents of the spread of Pǔtōnghuà and because a large number of Pǔtōnghuà teachers in Hong Kong learned the language as adults. Based on the analysis of qualitative interview data, the study illuminates three themes common to informants’ experiences: contact with Pǔtōnghuà, learning of Hányǔ Pīnyīn and focus on phonological form, and attitudes about Pǔtōnghuà in teaching. By providing a thematic account of informants’ experiences of learning Pǔtōnghuà, this study paints a small part of the overall picture of the status and spread of China’s common language in Hong Kong.
Learning to compose: Characteristics of advanced Chinese heritage writers

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Abstract
This paper studies the characteristics of the writing of advanced Chinese heritage language learners. Judging from their lexicon, syntax, and textual organization in writing, I categorize them as native speakers but semi-native writers. Not identifying either the direct English or the circular Chinese style in their disorganized rhetorical structuring (cf. Kaplan 1966; Tsao 1983), I argue that written discourse patterning is a higher cognitive development threshold these advanced students need to reach after achieving certain linguistic competence (cf. Cummins, 1976). I also propose teaching methods that emphasize extensive reading, instructive assignment directions, outlines, itemized grading and multiple drafts in order to help students improve their composing skills.

The interpretation of Japanese word order patterns by kindergartners

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Abstract
This paper reports the results of an act-out comprehension experiment on the interpretation of Japanese word order patterns by 51 kindergartners (aged 4–6) who are acquiring Japanese as a first language (JFL). The results imply that the type of situation denoted by the sentence plays a more critical role than the canonical word order and the grammatical relation to the target sentence structures. This paper concludes by supporting the Isomorphic Mapping Hypothesis (IMH) (O’Grady, Yamashita, & Lee, 2005) of first language acquisition.