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EDITORIAL

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EDITORIAL

Almost two decades ago, in an article titled “Language Testing-SLA [Second Language Acquisition] research interfaces,” Lyle Bachman (1988) wrote that “Language testing research and second language acquisition research are often seen as distinct areas of inquiry in applied linguistics” (p. 193). But, Bachman, concluded the article by stating that “researchers in language testing and SLA are finding an expanding area of common ground in terms of both the research questions they address and empirical approaches to those questions” (p. 205). Ten years later, in their lead article for the book titled *Interfaces Between Second Language Acquisition and Language Testing Research*, Lyle Bachman and Andrew Cohen (1998), provide an update to the 1988 article. In this update, they list some of the areas that researchers in both fields have explored. These include the development and role of discourse domains in language acquisition and test performance, the nature of second language ability and factors that affect its development in classroom settings, in majority and minority language settings, assessing word order and grammar through communicative interaction and communicative contexts respectively, assessing sociolinguistic ability and cross-cultural pragmatic ability, and multilingual versus monolingual language learning.

In a more recent paper, titled “Defining and Measuring Second Language Acquisition,” John Norris and Lourdes Ortega (2003) conclude that it might be useful for language testing and language acquisition researchers to collaborate:

Within the language testing field, it has been suggested for some time now that a research priority should be the development of comprehensive programs of validation for the various intended uses of language ability tests ... We would suggest that validity generalization of this sort ... should also be a priority for measurement used within SLA research and should constitute the site of true collaboration between language testers or measurement specialists and measurement-informed SLA researchers. (p. 749)

It is keeping these efforts in mind that a group of language assessment and language acquisition researchers planned to present their research in a featured colloquium at the American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL) Conference held in Portland, Oregon, USA in May 2004. The colloquium, sponsored by the International Language Testing Association, was titled *Language Assessment and Language Acquisition Research: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective* and was jointly

organized by us. The idea for the colloquium was based on the belief that there is much to learn from language assessment and language acquisition researchers working in bilingual and multilingual settings and working in non-European languages settings. This is because most language assessment insights have mostly come from research in English (although to a somewhat lesser extent in language acquisition research). The presenters at the AAAL colloquium were Virginia Yip and Stephen Matthews, Liliana Sánchez, Noriko Iwashita, Usha Lakshmanan, Chuanren Ke, and Suchitra Sadanandan, with an introduction by Antony John Kunnan. In this issue we are presenting all the papers except Sadanandan's paper due to lack of space; her paper on the use of the cloze test in Malayalam will appear in a subsequent issue of the journal.

In their contribution, Yip and Matthews, address assessment issues pertaining to the commonly reported phenomenon of language dominance in the development of a bilingual child's two languages. A problem facing researchers in bilingual first language acquisition as well as professionals working in school and clinical settings is how to determine which of the bilingual child's two languages is the dominant language. As Yip and Matthews observe, the notion of dominance has often been defined in terms of proficiency. Yip and Matthews argue against this approach, proposing instead that dominance is more appropriately viewed as a property of the bilingual mind and a concept of language knowledge, which they distinguish from proficiency as a concept of language use. They discuss ways in which competency-based dominance may be assessed. Based on their analysis of data from the Hong Kong Bilingual corpus of Cantonese-English children's development, they demonstrate how differences in the MLU (mean length utterance) of a bilingual child's two languages, particularly languages that are of a similar morphological type, can yield a useful measure of dominance, revealing asymmetrical development where there is an imbalance between the child's two languages. Addressing the issue of syntactic transfer, they further demonstrate that the directionality of syntactic transfer is primarily from the language with higher MLU value to the language with lower MLU value, and that the MLU differential in turn reflects the pervasiveness of transfer effects. Crucially, Yip and Matthews found that Cantonese-dominant children with a larger MLU differential use null objects, (permitted in Cantonese, but not in English), more frequently than children with a lower MLU differential. The results of their analyses further indicate that although the MLU differentials also match with language preferences and silent periods, they do not predict the directionality of code mixing. This result is not at all unexpected in view of the fact that the Cantonese-English children were exposed to code-mixing in their input as well.

Sánchez's contribution also addresses language assessment issues pertaining to bilingual children. Her focus, however, is on the assessment of oral proficiency in school age Aymara-Spanish or Quechua-Spanish bilingual children from rural minority communities in Peru. Sánchez discusses three major challenges or difficul-

ties facing researchers in the fields of child bilingualism and second language acquisition with regard to the development of data collection data tools and assessment instruments for use with bilingual children from rural minority communities with low levels of literacy, as is the case of the Aymara-Spanish and Quechua-Spanish indigenous communities in Peru. These encompass (a) the definition of proficiency along a bilingual continuum (b) the design of culturally appropriate language assessment tasks and (c) the development of cross-linguistically valid assessment tools in a multilingual context. Using evidence from bilingual acquisition research projects and communicative language assessment projects conducted among the Quechua-Spanish and the Aymara-Spanish communities, Sánchez demonstrates how approaches to oral data collection developed in the fields of bilingualism and second language acquisition research and oral proficiency assessment in the field of language testing can converge and be beneficial to academic communities preoccupied with language assessment among bilingual minority groups.

In her contribution, Iwashita focuses on the relationship between syntactic complexity measures and oral proficiency. The context in which she addresses the issue is Japanese as a foreign language. Specifically, she reports the findings of a study that examined the relationship between different syntactic complexity measures and Japanese oral language proficiency. Syntactic complexity measures were originally developed by second language acquisition researchers for the purpose of describing learner language and for investigating second language development over time. An important question concerns the viability of these measures in the language-testing domain. While complexity measures developed by SLA researchers have also been used by language testing researchers, particularly in relation to second language writing proficiency, the validity and reliability of using syntactic complexity measures in relation to the assessment of second language oral proficiency is not fully clear. Furthermore, syntactic complexity measures have been largely used in relation to languages such as English and the validity and reliability of such measures in relation to cross linguistically different languages such as Japanese needs to be examined. In this study, syntactic complexity measures were applied to speech samples gathered through three different oral narrative tasks from native speakers of English learning Japanese in the U.S. The oral proficiency of these learners was also assessed through the use of independent measures. Iwashita's findings indicate that of the various syntactic complexity measures used, only the length factor as measured in terms of number of T-units and the number of clauses per T-unit, was the best predictor of learner proficiency and further that this measure also had a significant linear relationship with independent oral proficiency measures. Interestingly, Iwashita's results in relation to the Japanese data were quite different in comparison to results based on ESL data, also gathered as part of a larger study, suggesting that the different results may be partly attributed to the typological differences between the two languages.

Iwashita concludes by discussing some of the challenges posed in the cross-fertilization of second language acquisition research and language testing research.

Lakshmanan's contribution addresses the issue of the assessment of children's knowledge of verbal inflection in the early stages of language acquisition. Lakshmanan focuses on the development of the verbal features of tense and agreement, in children acquiring Tamil, a language with rich verb inflections. Much of the previous research on children's knowledge of verbal inflection has dealt with English and other European languages. As Lakshmanan observes, there is comparatively little research on this issue in relation to Dravidian languages such as Tamil, with an underlying agglutinative structure and complex morphonemics, including complex phonological processes of deletion and assimilation, which make the underlying grammatical categories covert. A problem is that the spoken Tamil that the child is exposed to do not provide the child with the direct mapping to the underlying categories, as for example, the formal variety of Tamil does to a great extent. Lakshmanan first presents preliminary analyses of the two children's verb forms, which appear to support the position that children's knowledge of verbal inflection is fundamentally deficient prior to the age of 24 months. However, through the use of more fine-grained analyses, Lakshmanan demonstrates that Tamil children, prior to the age of 24 months, do indeed have knowledge of the grammatical categories and features that are instantiated in the adult grammar, although this is not immediately discernible based on their surface production.

In the final contribution, Ke explores the role of formative task-based language assessment in a task-based curriculum in Chinese as a foreign language setting. Ke discusses a model of formative task based language assessment that was recently implemented in the Chinese language program at the University of Iowa. The model implemented is based on empirical evidence stemming from research conducted by Ke and his colleagues as well as developments in assessment theory, particularly in relation to task-based second language instruction and second language testing. Using numerous examples in relation to various skills, Ke explains how criterion referenced formative task-based assessment is successfully integrated within the Chinese language curriculum and contributes to the learning and teaching goals of the instructional program, particularly in the areas of diagnosis, progress and achievement.

We hope the ideas presented in this special issue offer the stimulus for continuing discussions and dialogue between language assessment and language acquisition researchers. As globalization becomes a reality, we need to know more about different languages and the diverse settings they are situated in and we need to learn more from these contexts so that we can better serve our communities in their language learning and language assessment efforts.

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