

BOOKLET of ABSTRACTS

for

the symposium

***Learning, teaching and assessment of second
foreign languages in school contexts***

Lund 12 – 13 December 2016

Plenary talks

In order of presentation

Alex Housen

(Free University of Brussels (VUB), Belgium)

The whats and hows of developing oral language proficiency in the classroom

Oral language and oral language proficiency have for a long time been treated in a stepmotherly fashion in second/foreign language teaching and testing. Oral language and speaking in particular were not considered worthy of much attention in the grammar-translation approach. And while the audio-lingual approach emphasized the oral fluency and accuracy of phonology and grammar, thus providing a new perspective on oral second language proficiency, second language proficiency still continued to be assessed through written skills (still a common practice in many parts of the world today). A different kind of lack of alignment can be observed in more recent communicative approaches to language teaching. Although 'communicative' here is typically taken to mean 'oral + interactive' (Thompson 1996) and said approaches often see speaking as central to teaching and learning activities, speech still tends to be viewed mainly as a medium rather than as a target skill to be developed (Bygate 2009). However, the last few years have witnessed within both the teaching and testing communities a growing attention to the nature of the constructs of oral language, oral language proficiency and oral language development, and to how they can be validly and feasibly operationalized for teaching and assessment purposes.

In order to adequately teach or test oral second language proficiency, one must have at least some understanding of what oral second language performance (speaking and listening) involve, of how more and less proficient second language speakers differ, of what conditions and activities are required for developing (or for showing the development of) learners' oral L2 proficiency, and of the relevant constructs to be used to assess their changing oral performances.

Against this background, this presentation aims to provide a (necessarily brief) discussion of the following issues:

- 1) What does the construct of *oral (second) language* entail; that is, what is the repertoire of language features (along with their respective combinations and probabilities) that oral language manifest, and what are the relevant conditions that account for its relevant features (i.e. what is the nature of the processing involved and of the conditions under which this processing occurs)?
- 2) What does oral (second) language *proficiency* entail; that is, what are the relevant types of knowledge, skills and abilities (cognitive, linguistic, socio-pragmatic and pragma-discursive) that enable learners to engage in oral language performance in a second language? How can this proficiency be adequately assessed (cf. recent proposals to model and test oral second language proficiency in terms of complexity, accuracy and fluency)?
- 3) How does oral (second) language proficiency *develop*, that is, under what conditions does learners' oral language proficiency change over time, what are the relevant processes involved in this development, and how can this development be shown and assessed?

Throughout the overview, implications for second/foreign language teaching and testing will be suggested.

Neus Figueras Casanovas

(University of Barcelona, Spain)

Developing and using tasks for the assessment of speaking

A lot has changed in how the skill of speaking in a foreign language is researched and in how it is assessed since the turn of the century. The publication of the CEFR in 2001 has had a role in the changes, but the impact of previous work on discourse analysis and corpus studies since the 1980s cannot be underplayed. Moreover, there are other, more recent, factors contributing to how speaking in a foreign language is learnt, taught and assessed today, amongst which feature the increasing number of CLIL initiatives across Europe and the growing importance given to language in knowledge building in multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

This session will first address how research and social changes have reshaped the way the skill of speaking is defined and operationalized in 2016, and will then focus on how speaking can be assessed validly and reliably in this context. The central role of tasks, both in teaching and assessment will be discussed, and the importance of taking into consideration the implications and impact of different task characteristics on students' performances will be analyzed. The last section in the session will outline useful steps to take in the development of useful and meaningful assessment tasks and in fostering uses of assessment which contribute to learning.

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Heini-Marja Pakula

(University of Turku, Finland)

Teaching speaking

In my talk, I will discuss the teaching of SL/FL oral skills as part of language teacher's pedagogical content knowledge. I will focus on the following questions: What does a language teacher need to know about speaking? and What is important in teaching speaking?

What does language teachers (and the learners as well) need to know about speaking? Firstly, it is important to be aware of the role of speaking as part of language proficiency (communicative competence). In speaking, the language chosen for spoken communication (linguistic competence) depends on the register, degree of formality and politeness (sociolinguistic competence), and the function and situation of speaking (pragmatic competence). The above three competences comprise the model of communicative competence adopted by the Common European Framework to guide spoken interaction and production. Secondly, speech is different from writing (fixed phrases, fillers, hesitation markers, slips and errors (Luoma 2004). Thirdly, speaking has different functions: people speak to maintain social relations, e.g. small talk, to exchange information, e.g. buying something in a shop (Brown and Yule 1983) and to transmit information, usually in the form of a monologue in front of an audience (Burns 1998). Finally, speaking can be planned (prepared talks) or unplanned (most conversations). Fluent speech is dependent on a reservoir of proceduralized "chunks" of language, which are the product of repeated practice (de Jong & Perfetti 2011).

What does the above mean in teaching speaking? It means a lot of oral practice and repetition to produce automatization of frequent and useful language. Fluent spontaneous interaction is dependent proceduralized lexis, often in the form of prefabricated fixed chunks. It means practising pronunciation, suprasegmentals in particular. Rhythm, intonation and stress are more important for comprehension than correct pronunciation of individual sounds. It means teaching conversational rules and structures (openings, topic shifts, closings, adjacency pairs), communication strategies (e.g., paraphrasing), active listening, ("polite noises"), narrating, describing (use of cohesive devices), attitudes: openness, willingness to communicate, and good manners.

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Paper presentations

In alphabetical order of first author

Camilla Amft

(Stockholm University, Sweden)

Metalinguistic knowledge amongst learners of German

Within multilingual research it has been suggested that the metalinguistic knowledge of learners is increased in relation to the numbers of languages learnt (cf. eg. Jessner, 2008). Metalinguistic knowledge can be defined as "an individual's explicit knowledge about language" (Roehr, 2008: 70). Some studies have been made in order to examine if there is a correlation between metalinguistic competence and language proficiency. The results are somewhat diverging. While Alderson *et al.*, 1997 and Elder *et al.*, 1999 could only see a weak connection between the two, Elder & Manwaring, 2004 and Roehr, 2007 were able to show a greater correlation. Nevertheless there are still many open questions to study. Previous studies have in common that they have examined adult university learners. My paper focuses on metalinguistic competence amongst upper secondary school learners of German. I have chosen to focus on the correlation between metalinguistic competence of grammar and language proficiency, since the current Swedish curricula of modern languages (French, German and Spanish) hardly mention grammar other but in general terms, such as *grammatical structures* and *structure of sentence*. This can be explained by the increased focus on communicative ability during the last three decades (Elder & Manwaring, 2004: 145). This paper is part of a larger project examining and comparing metalinguistic competence of upper secondary school learners in Finland and Sweden. At the symposium, I will present preliminary results of the Swedish data.

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Hanne Leth Andersen¹ & Susana S. Fernández²

(Roskilde University, Denmark¹; Aarhus University, Denmark)

Oral proficiency in second foreign languages in the Danish educational system

In this presentation we intend to offer an analysis of how oral proficiency is understood in the Danish educational system in reference to the three biggest second foreign languages taught in the country: French, Spanish and German. We will adopt a comparative perspective and analyze how these language subjects are addressed at primary school, secondary school and university levels. We will compare the three languages to find similarities and differences and we will focus on learning objectives, pedagogical approaches and evaluation forms, as they are presented in the official curricula for each of the three educational levels. As both primary and secondary school levels are going through a structural reform, we will focus on how oral proficiency has been or is being renewed (or not) as part of the reform process. We will relate the Danish stance on oral proficiency to current international research on the field and to European tendencies, for example through the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe 2001).

Linda Borger

(University of Gothenburg, Sweden)

Raters' perceptions of second language peer interaction

In the Swedish national tests of foreign languages, oral communicative proficiency is assessed through a paired speaking test. Several advantages of this test format have been emphasized, such as authenticity, positive impact on classroom practices, and the potential of eliciting a wider range of interactional skills than in the examiner-led interview format (Brooks, 2009). Nevertheless, there are challenges regarding scoring. One concern is the effect test-takers may have on each other when interacting, and the unpredictability that this brings about. Another issue involves the co-constructive nature of interaction, which makes test-takers' performances interdependent and potentially difficult to separate (May, 2011). In this presentation, theoretical perspectives on the assessment of foreign/second language interaction are discussed in relation to an empirical study of raters' perceptions of peer interaction. Thirty-one raters assigned holistic scores to six audio-recorded conversations from a Swedish national test of English and provided written comments on features that contributed to their judgement. These written justifications were segmented and coded. Analyses indicate that the raters attended to a range of interactional strategies, for example topic extension moves, turn-taking management and interactive listening strategies. As part of the decision-making process, raters also frequently compared and contrasted the two test-takers' performances, as well as reflected on the impact of the pairing of students. Examples from rater comments are given, focusing on separability of scores and assessment of co-constructed interaction. Finally, implications for teacher/rater training as well as rating scale development are considered.

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Jessica Berggren¹, Annika Nylén², Karina Pålsson Gröndahl

(Stockholms University, Sweden¹; City of Stockholm, Sweden²)

Task design to explore oral interaction

In this paper, we present an ongoing research project initiated and carried out with researchers and teachers in *Stockholm Teaching & Learning Studies*, a platform involving several school organisers and Stockholm University. The study, which aims to develop tasks promoting oral interaction in English and second foreign language classrooms, is characterised methodologically by collaboration, intervention and iterativity.

The starting point for the project is the interest to study strategy use in oral interaction. More specifically, the four subprojects within the study, design and test focused tasks in the classroom with the same communicative outcome and pedagogic purpose. As defined by Ellis (2003), the communicative outcome is the end-product and the pedagogic purpose, also referred to as aim, is that the learners use meaning-focused language. In our case the outcome is to reach an agreement (to be specified further by each group). The 'focus' in the focused tasks is yet to be decided, but rather than choosing a grammatical structure, we are aiming to zoom in on a linguistic feature linked to the interaction leading to an agreement. By organising several subprojects around a shared purpose, it is hoped that the project as a whole can benefit from several small-scale studies and synthesise the findings.

The presentation will share findings from the first cycle of the project and discuss the use of task design to explore oral interaction in second foreign language classrooms. We are also interested in receiving valuable feedback from researchers and practitioners for the next cycles of the project.

References

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Beate Lindemann

(UiT the Arctic University of Norway)

Norwegian students' subjective self-assessment of their oral skills in their L3. First results of a pilot study

Norwegian students learn their L3 (*German / French / Spanish*, after English as L2) for three or five years at school. When looking at their ability to use their L3 in “real life” after school education, their language competence doesn’t appear to be good enough for studies abroad (in their L3) and for work-related interaction with partners in L3-countries. Accordingly, one can document low interest for student exchanges to L3-countries (with lower language competence as an excuse and explanation). Further evidence are business expert quotations, claiming that there is a lack of language and intercultural competence among young employees. The students themselves tend to judge their writing and reading skills in their L3 to be much better than their oral skills.

The actual pilot study intends to look at the students’ subjective self-assessment of their own oral skills in their L3. In the first part of the survey the students are asked “what” they actually can understand orally and what kind of subjects in which kind of communication situations they can/could talk about (using a similar format as in the European Language Framework GER). In the second part of the study, the students face “real life language situations” and are asked to respond in an appropriate way.

My presentation in Lund is going to share first impressions and results from this study.

Rosamond Mitchell

(University of Southampton, UK)

Learning spoken French in the English primary school

When the 1990s English National Curriculum was introduced, a commitment was made to “languages for all”, i.e. to compulsory FL study between the ages of 11 and 16. However both motivation and attainment proved problematic, and in the 2000s this policy was modified. Languages are now compulsory only to age 14, and numbers of students taking national languages examinations at ages 16 and 18 are falling (Tinsley & Board, 2016).

Partly in compensation for this secondary school decline, from 2000 to 2010, there was considerable investment in languages projects in the primary school, followed in 2014 by the introduction of compulsory FL study from age 7 (Wade & Marshall, 2009; Cable et al., 2010; Department for Education, 2014). There are high expectations of this policy, both in terms of promoting improved motivation among learners, and also raising eventual attainment through an early start. Many schools are enthusiastic, and most are delivering some FL instruction. However the initiative is constrained by low subject status, limited curriculum time, and persistent problems concerning teaching expertise and progression to secondary schools (Tinsley & Board, 2016). To date, there is very limited empirical evidence on classroom practices and learning outcomes in particular languages.

This paper reports on a longitudinal study which comprehensively videorecorded the first 34 hours of French instruction with a class of 7 year old Anglophone learners. Instruction prioritised speaking and listening; children’s progress was assessed at 3 time points (mid, post and delayed posttests). Firstly, their overall development in French oral proficiency is reported. Through a case study approach, children’s L2 development is related to their classroom engagement and language learning awareness/ motivation. Overall the study contributes valuable evidence to debates around the effectiveness of primary languages with limited time provision, and the learning outcomes which can typically be expected.

Elke Peters

(KU Leuven, Belgium)

English as a second foreign language in Flanders. Is it really learner's second foreign language?

Unlike most European language learners, Flemish learners' first foreign language (FL) is French and not English. In Flanders (Belgium), learners are taught French from the age of 11, whereas English tuition starts at 13. French is a FL that is typically learned in an instructed setting (Munoz, 2008): 1) instruction is limited to three 50-minute sessions per week, 2) learners have limited exposure to French, 3) French is not the language of communication between learners, and 4) is not spoken by the learners outside the classroom. Flemish English-as-a-foreign (EFL) learners, on the other hand, are typically exposed to English outside the classroom through music, television, computer games, the Internet and social media.

Out-of-class exposure to the FL is beneficial to learners' language proficiency (Muñoz, 2008; Schmitt & Redwood, 2011). However, it is unclear how large the effect of extensive extramural exposure is on FL learners' vocabulary size. This study aims to explore the effect of out-of-class exposure on Flemish learners' vocabulary size in English and French.

In the present study, data were collected among 14-, 16-, and 19-year old EFL learners (N=241) and French-as-a-FL learners (N=413) by means of an English and French frequency-based vocabulary test and a questionnaire. The findings revealed that learners have massive exposure to English, but not to French. Secondly, the findings showed a huge effect of exposure to English on vocabulary acquisition, as learners' vocabulary size in English was much larger than in French. The difference in vocabulary size is already noticeable at the age of 14 and seems to grow only larger as learners get more exposure to English. Yet, the learning goals for French and English, set by the Ministry of Education, are the same. This presentation will discuss the factors contributing to the differences in vocabulary knowledge and some pedagogical implications.

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Between Theory and Traditions – Student Teachers' Perceptions of Oral Production and Grammar in Foreign Language Teaching

In the syllabus of second foreign languages in Sweden, the development of communicative competence in oral and written production is of high importance, including learning how to interact in the foreign language in different everyday situations (Skolverket 2011, CERS 2001). However, reports and studies have shown that there are many challenges for students and teachers when it comes to actually attaining those goals in the foreign language classroom (Granfelt et al, 2016, Österberg & Bardel 2016). This presentation focuses on how student teachers of foreign languages (Spanish, German, French and Italian) reflect on the importance of oral production and grammar in foreign language teaching during their theoretical courses and after their school practicum. The data have been gathered as part of a comparative study (University of Helsinki and Stockholm University), investigating how language student teachers in Sweden and Finland develop a professional language teacher identity. Their narrative discourse is analyzed within the overall framework of teacher cognition (Borg 2003, 2006), identifying institutional and contextual factors that influence student teachers' beliefs. Special attention is paid to transitions of student teacher perceptions from before to after their school practicum, by categorizing their narratives as reflecting either possibilities or challenges for them in their development towards an identity as professional foreign language teachers (cf. Beauchamp & Thomas 2009, Ruohotie-Lyhty 2015). Preliminary results from case studies show that student teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching partly contradict their wishes to promote students' oral production in the classroom. The results also indicate that the student teachers' prior beliefs and their own experience as language learners play an important role in the process of reflecting on theoretical knowledge and traditional practices.

Kalpana Vijayarathan

(The University of the Faroe Islands, Faroe Islands)

An Investigation of Teacher Cognition about Teaching Oral Proficiency and its Impact on Praxis: Case studies from The Faroe Islands

In The Faroe Islands, Danish is the first foreign language with English as the second. In recent years, the importance of English as *lingua franca* has been acknowledged, and the Ministry of Education is giving it prominence in education. This has affected the role of Danish negatively, resulting in it being increasingly replaced by Faroese and English as the preferred academic languages.

The aim of this communication is to present some results from an ongoing PhD project studying the influence of teacher cognition on teaching oral proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in grade 8 (14-15 year olds) in The Faroe Islands. This study posits teacher cognition (TC) and teaching oral proficiency (TOP) praxis as mutually influencing each other to a greater or lesser degree.

Based on early preliminary findings from an ongoing case study with 7 Faroese teachers of English, it appears that TOP is done in an implicit, incidental manner and does not figure much in the classroom. Teacher talk time in English, including teacher instructions and questions, is the prime activity in the classroom. Students' response is patterned and predictable. Planned student presentations become reading aloud exercises. Teachers either see themselves as role models and predominantly use English in the classroom or fear that student ability exceeds theirs and seldom speak English.

In the field of error correction and feedback, teachers exhibit great awareness and sensitivity when correcting students in class and practise differentiation in feedback to students. The fluent and confident students are corrected while they speak, while the shy and insecure students are allowed to carry on without teacher interruption. This indicates that teachers understand the importance of the 'when' of feedback. They are keen to increase student motivation to speak the target language in the classroom and make them feel that the classroom is a safe environment.
