

vocabulaire en langue étrangère. [The influence of polysemic mother-tongue words on learning vocabulary in a foreign language]. *IRAL* (Heidelberg, Germany), **36**, 2, 161–71.

This article reports on a study carried out in the Department of Modern Languages of the University of Yarmouk, Jordan, which looked at the negative ways in which polysemic words in their mother tongue (Arabic) influenced undergraduates' learning of French vocabulary. An analysis of their spoken and written performances, of which numerous examples are given, shows that, in contexts where the target language requires greater semantic precision than would be the case in the mother tongue, these learners experience considerable difficulty in making or even understanding the correct lexical choice. The author argues that this problem is exacerbated by the considerable linguistic distance between the two languages in question and that such learners have much in common with children learning their mother tongue.

99–260 Thomas, Margaret (Boston Coll., MA, USA). Programmatic ahistoricity in second language acquisition theory. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* (New York, USA), **20**, 3 (1998), 387–405.

Second language acquisition (SLA) theory conventionally represents itself as having been invented *ex nihilo* in the last decades of the twentieth century. This article investigates the nature of this largely unexamined disciplinary self-concept and questions its validity. The author disputes arguments that might be formulated to support the notion that SLA theory has no relevant earlier history, enumerates what she sees as some of the unfortunate consequences of maintaining this belief, and speculates about benefits to the field that might accrue from abandoning it. Instead of presenting SLA theory as having its origin in the last 20 or 30 years, she suggests that we need to look for ways to identify, investigate and eventually reconceptualise its true history.

99–261 Truscott, John (Nat. Tsing Hua U., Taiwan). Instance theory and Universal Grammar in second language research. *Second Language Research* (London, UK), **14**, 3 (1998), 257–91.

This article considers the possibility of applying instance theory to the study of language, second language in particular. Instance theory de-emphasises the role of abstract principles in knowledge and its acquisition and use, focusing instead on the storage and retrieval of specific experiences, or *instances*. It is argued here that the application is feasible only if one also adopts a restrictive theory of Universal Grammar (UG). A sketch is then presented of a combined UG-instance theory approach, in which invariant aspects of UG are maintained and variability is allowed in exactly the same areas as in standard theories, but the variation occurs in pools of stored instances, not in abstract parameter values. It is suggested that this approach can be productively applied to various problems in language

learning research, including noisy input to learners, undoing of errors during the learning process, transfer and fossilisation, and the non-discrete character of learning.

Reading

99–262 Lee, Wai Ying and Allison, Desmond (Nat. U. of Singapore). Developing a reading-based support course for secondary school students of physics. *RELC Journal* (Singapore), **29**, 1 (1998), 34–54.

Although recent discussions of second language reading comprehension suggest that it is more effectively taught and learned in content-based classes, there have been very few published investigations of comprehension difficulties experienced by students in English as a Second Language settings in the course of content-based reading, and relatively few accounts of pedagogic initiatives in this important area. This article reports an exploratory study which was motivated by concerns over difficulties apparently encountered by secondary school learners of physics in reading, understanding and applying the material in their subject textbook. The study combines two phases: (1) a diagnostic phase, in which the 14–15-year-old learners' perceptions of their own reading habits and difficulties were examined through questionnaire and interview; and (2) an implementation phase, which involved the development, teaching and evaluation of a short course in content area reading. The article sets out the main findings of both phases, and suggests implications for pedagogy and educational change.

99–263 Wilkinson, Ian A. G. (U. of Auckland, New Zealand). Dealing with diversity: achievement gaps in reading literacy among New Zealand students. *Reading Research Quarterly* (Newark, DE, USA), **33**, 2 (1998), 144–67.

Among all countries participating in the latest survey of reading literacy conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), New Zealand showed the second largest difference in achievement between girls and boys in primary school and the largest difference in achievement between those students learning in their home language and those not. The study reported here sought to identify school and classroom factors moderating the gender and home language gaps in the reading achievement of New Zealand students. Using data from the IEA survey, comprehension and word recognition scores and other information relating to 3,027 nine-year-old students from a sample of 176 primary schools were analysed using the hierarchical linear model. The magnitudes of the gender gap for comprehension and of the home language gaps for comprehension and word recognition were found to vary across schools. Factors moderating the gap were largely

those reflecting teachers' capacities to handle diversity. Well-educated teachers who showed commitment to their work and set up rich literacy environments for their students—and these tended to be mostly female teachers—and who frequently assessed students' progress in order to address their needs were helping close the gender or home language gaps. However, many teachers were struggling to cope with increased diversity among students under conditions making it difficult for them to be responsive to individual needs. Additional school and classroom factors that might minimise reading difficulties experienced by boys at an early age and students from non-English-speaking backgrounds are discussed.

Writing

99-264 Daoud, Sada A. (U. of Warwick, UK). How to motivate EFL learning and teaching of academic writing by cross-cultural exchanges. *English for Specific Purposes* (Exeter, UK), **17**, 4 (1998), 391–412.

Learning and teaching academic writing in EFL/ESL (English as a Foreign/Second Language) contexts is often described as challenging. In the case of Arab learners and teachers, the task is often formidable, mainly because of students' lack of proficiency and motivation to write. This paper describes a strategy which has proved useful in motivating intermediate-level EFL/ESP students to write better. Two teachers were involved in the strategy, which was based on the exchange of student essays. Students on both sides began by answering one another's questions; subsequently, they wrote essays—very much with the reader in mind—which reflected their personalities, lives and cultures, or dealt with issues of international concern. The teachers kept closely in touch throughout, sharing implementation and management issues, including responses—both their own and students'—to the experiment. The paper discusses how the strategy apparently helped to effect improvement in the learning and teaching of academic writing skills, as well as some change in students' attitudes toward the target culture, perhaps as a result of increased audience awareness.

99-265 Desmarais, Lise (Institut canadien du service extérieur) **and Bisailon, Jocelyne**. Apprentissage de l'écrit et ALAO. [CALL and learning to write.] *Etudes de Linguistique Appliquée* (Paris, France), **110** (1998), 193–203.

The authors of this article consider writing to be a skill particularly well-supported by computer assisted language learning (CALL), since it lends itself to various forms of development in a CALL environment. Not only can simple word-processing lead to effective learning, but so also can writing tools such as the spellchecker, text analysis tools and the concordancer, as well as telematics, a writing environment which allows

exchanges between writers. The authors report an experimental study involving 60 advanced students of French as a second/foreign language, which suggested that the teaching of writing strategies combined with the use of word-processing would significantly improve the students' revising skills and writing performance. The article goes on to offer an overview of the various CALL tools available for the development of writing skills, discussing the advantages and drawbacks of each, and looking at ways in which they might be used as more or less successful aids to learning.

99-266 Dong, Yu Ren (Queens Coll., CUNY, USA). Non-native graduate students' thesis / dissertation writing in science: self-reports by students and their advisors from two U.S. institutions. *English for Specific Purposes* (Exeter, UK), **17**, 4 (1998), 369–90.

Writing a thesis/dissertation is a formidable task for many graduate students, and perhaps particularly so for the fast-growing number of non-native (NNS) students in the fields of science and technology. This paper reports results from a survey about thesis/dissertation writing in science which involved 169 graduate students and their advisors at two US southeastern institutions. The paper compares the article compilation and the traditional five-chapter thesis/dissertation, reveals NNS students' lack of social networks and use of resources and their suggestions for an adequate and improved writing supervision, and examines the impact of language and cultural differences on NNS students' thesis/dissertation writing. It is suggested that the findings point to a need for teaching knowledge transformation skills in EAP (English for Academic Purposes) classes, for establishing helping networks, and for collaboration among disciplines on audience/genre/discipline-specific writing instruction.

99-267 Grundy, Peter (U. of Durham, UK) **and Li, Vivian**. Responding to writing: credible alternatives to the 'You write: I correct' syndrome. *NovELTy* (Budapest, Hungary), **5**, 3 (1998), 7–13.

This paper discusses current ways of responding to language learner writing. In the first part the authors address the unsatisfactory nature of current assessment practice and suggest reasons for this continuing situation. It is suggested that error correction of finished products is the typical response mode and that this tends to respond to learner language rather than to apprentice writing. The authors claim that process writing lends itself naturally to a whole range of new response modes which product-orientated approaches never considered. In the second part of the paper alternative methods are considered, including commenting on drafts, conferencing, checklists, learner logs and portfolios. It is concluded that teachers need to experiment more with these new techniques and that learners need to be encouraged to take more responsibility for assessing their own writing.