What are academic English demands in technology-mediated environments? - A corpus approach

As technology plays an increasingly large role in higher education, Dr. Kristopher Kyle, Dr. Geoff LaFlair, and Dr. Nicole Ziegler felt a need for updated research into the language used in academic settings, especially related to technology. Along with PhD Student Ann Tai Choe from UHM SLS, and Dr. Ute Römer at Georgia State University, they began a project sponsored by the U.S. Educational Testing Service (ETS) to create a corpus of texts produced in technology-mediated environments at U.S. universities.

Their project, A Linguistic Analysis of the Communicative Demands in Typical Technology-Mediated Learning Environments, was awarded $100,000 by TOEFL Committee of Examiners for the next two years. By doing research in typical online discourse at the academic level, the project fulfills two research gaps: the lack of corpora for studying second language acquisition that have been compiled in online environments (rather than from spoken interaction or writing samples), and the lack of research on English for Academic Purposes that is based on digital environments (rather than classroom contexts or writing centers).

Through analyzing common software where students and professors interact regularly, such as Blackboard and our very own Maulima, the researchers will collect data and look at the specific language that is used. This information will be able to assist TOEFL in updating their tests to make them more relatable for an international student's future experience in a US university setting. While previous research, dating back 15 years or so, only looked at presentations, slideshows, and textbooks to determine what specific language should be put into the TOEFL test, the increase in technology-mediated environments at the postsecondary level leads to the question of how academic language has shifted over the past few decades in terms of these new platforms for interaction.

At a recent Brown Bag presentation, the team showed some of its preliminary results. A multi-university survey revealed that while much digital content was being created and disseminated from institutions and instructors to students (e.g., texts, Powerpoints, videos) there was a dearth of student-generated content. Thus, teaching implications of the study are a side area worthy of investigation.

Due to the size of the grant, graduate students will be needed over the next few years to assist with data analysis for this project. For those interested, keep an ear out for opportunities coming soon!

National Science Foundation Award for PhD Student's Research on L2 Mandarin Learning

PhD student Wenyi Lint has received a $9,000 National Science Foundation (NSF) Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant for her psycholinguistic study “The Perception, Processing, and Learning of Mandarin Tone by Second Language Speakers,” supervised by Dr. Theres Grüter.

Although it is known that an L2 user of Mandarin must distinguish between different tones, connect tonal information with word meaning, and do this in real time while listening and speaking, little is known so far about what aspects of this task are particularly challenging for L1 English learners of Mandarin and what instructional processes can help them overcome this challenge. To that end, Wenyi's study consists of three experiments: (1) the role of L2 experience in identification and discrimination tasks; (2) L2 learners' use of tone in real-time comprehension of spoken Mandarin in an eye-tracking study; and (3) a look at how beginning L1 English learners of Mandarin learn novel words with tones under different training conditions. Findings on how learners perceive, process, and learn tones in Mandarin can generate evidence-based L2 instruction and inform curricular materials.

When asked about the most rewarding part of her project, Wenyi replied, “While in my teaching, I noticed that there are some L2 acquisition questions, which could not be answered or studied by the traditional methods. I realized the possibility of exploring them from a more cognitive-psycholinguistic perspective by doing experimental research.”
Summer 2018 Thai Practicum

Over this past summer, a group of Second Language Studies graduate students had the opportunity to travel to Thailand and spend six weeks testing out their English teaching skills in university classrooms. The trip was part of an ESL Teaching Practicum offered by the SLS department each summer.

The six graduate students who went included Hayley Cannizzo, Precious Aroa, Lin Wang, Linda Wong, Moeko Norota and Leesel Park. Their students were all college aged but varied in their English abilities as well as their academic backgrounds and majors, which resulted in a very challenging teaching environment for our SLS students. On October 4th, they presented these experiences at the department-wide Brown Bag lunchtime lecture. As many of them mentioned in the presentation, this was a good opportunity to put to the test the training in needs analysis and teacher action research they had received thus far at UHM. They worked with their students to figure out what the students’ expectations were and found that many wanted to be able to communicate with native English speakers while traveling or in other scenarios and also wanted to be able to talk about things that they felt were important to them, such as their everyday lives and environmental issues.

While it was a challenge to jump right in to teaching a six-week course, the group took it head on and got a glimpse of how it was to teach English and develop their own identity as teachers. Aside from their time in the classroom, they also had a few opportunities to go out and travel around Thailand as well as participate in conferences. Overall it was a great opportunity for them to gain teaching experience that complemented their studies here at UHM.

Dr. Gilliland’s Fulbright Sponsored Sabbatical in Chile

This fall semester, Associate Professor Betsy Gilliland was at the Universidad de Atacama in Chile on a Fulbright Fellowship. A 20-minute presentation of her work there in front of other Fulbright Chile scholars can be watched at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_pF77sNGo. While this is not her first time in Chile, this has been a much longer trip than her first, three-week visit. During the semester, she taught three different English language classes at three different levels. One was a workshop elective for first year translation majors; the second class was for second year translation students focusing on drama; the last class was for 5th year students focusing on writing in pedagogy and translation. With this higher-level course, Dr. Gilliland was able to try different teaching approaches, even though her time with the students was limited to 90 minutes per week.

While not teaching, Dr. Gilliland spent a great deal of time participating in extracurriculars. She joined a group of hikers who regularly went hiking in the area and took yoga classes in Spanish. She also had the opportunity to travel to other parts of South America, spending a long weekend visiting Argentina and doing a full week of traveling in Colombia, as well as attending the WorldCALLS conference in Concepción, Chile. For those interested in learning more about her trip you can visit her blog at betsyg.wordpress.com or ask her to tell you some stories when she returns in the spring!

MA Student Awarded National Fellowship for Study Abroad

MA in SLS student Ruadhán Hughes spent summer 2018 in Yogyakarta, Central Java, supported by a U.S. Department of Education Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowship. In their own words, these were the challenges and rewards of that experience.

1. What was the most eye-opening thing that happened to you in Indonesia?

   I think the most eye opening thing from my 2018 summer in Indonesia was how fluent I felt I could be in my L2. This is the first time in Indonesia that I lived outside of the family structure, and I had to do a lot more linguistic fending for myself. I am surprised at how many deep conversations I could have in Indonesian.

2. Why do you think it is important to support the study and teaching of Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs)?

   Whereas Indonesian is not a minority or indigenous language, I think any work in minority language education in the US context is beneficial in changing the minds of a monolingual public. Especially with 2019 being the year of Indigenous languages I think more attention should be given to preservation and expansion of LCTLS. As Michael Krauss has been quoted to say, "When you lose a language and a language goes extinct, it’s like dropping a bomb on the Louvre."

3. What advice would you give an SLS student who is also seeking to apply for the FLAS fellowship?

   If you are applying for the FLAS fellowship for the study of South East Asian Languages be ready to take every immersive opportunity you can get your hands on for the summer. As for applications, be sure to have proof of your year 2 abilities in your target language.

'Olelo Hawai'i-'Olelo Pali'ai Education Summit at UHM

Revitalizing Hawaiian using Hawai'i Creole as a resource

This past October, the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa hosted a Hawaiian-Pidgin Summit: ‘Aha‘ākūkā o ka ‘Olelo Pali’ai a me ka ‘Olelo Hawai‘i. The purpose of the summit was to begin sharing and promoting Pidgin (Hawai‘i Creole) as a language and showing its strong connection with the Hawaiian language. The event, from 12-4 pm on October 25th, started with lunch and a keynote address, which was given by Dr. Jason (Iota) Cabral from Ka Haka ‘Ula o Keelikolani College of Hawaiian Language at UH-Hilo. His childhood was spent on a sugar plantation on the Big Island surrounded by the Pidgin language because of all the local and migrant workers working on the plantation. Growing up just outside of Hilo, in Kukui Village, he interacted with people of many different backgrounds: Hawaiian, Japanese, Cantonese, Portuguese, and English. The conference room was packed with students and faculty as he told stories, and plenty of jokes, about Pidgin and his childhood. As he grew older, he began to make connections between the Pidgin language and the Hawaiian revitalization efforts that were going on and decided to combine the two interests and start working at UH Hilo with the Hawaiian revitalization team. He has been able to use Pidgin to teach in the classroom because of its many similarities with Hawaiian and also to connect with the students he teaches.

The other presenters carried that theme and also how to maintain the thriving Hawaiian revitalization movement and push Pidgin to be more prominent in the education system as a whole. One of the many ways to accomplish these goals is to begin writing dissertations and doing academic work in both languages. It was a hopeful day as a great many stories of resistance and cultural regeneration were told.

Teachers on break at the sweet drinks café (photo courtesy of Lin Wang)

Dr. Gilliland (left) with hosts from Universidad de Atacama
2018 SLSSA Retreat: Way more budget-friendly, just as great

In recent years, the Student Activity and Program Fee Board (SAPFB, pronounced “spur-bal”) has needed to cut back on student activity funds, reflecting a need to balance the university budget. At the department level, SLSSA president Hayley Cannizzo aimed to balance the organization’s budget by holding this year’s grad student retreat at Ala Moana Beach Park, a short ride from campus. Instead of renting a van and driving for nearly an hour, SLS grad carpooled and commuted to Ala Moana, where they enjoyed a continental breakfast (big mahalo to drivers Precious Aran, Les Black and Jiamin and Jiaxin Ruan)!

After the faculty academic panel, there was Thai food for lunch, followed by card/board games or volleyball, and the annual SLSSA auction. Performed in front of countless generations of grad students by comic emcees Joel Weaver (HELP) and Kenton Harsch (BA in SLS), the auction featured activities led by students and staff (hiking, snorkeling, arts and crafts, pub/café crawls, and cooking). The good news is that SLSSA is now in the green by several thousand! As Weaver and Harsch say each year, “It all comes back to you!”

New joint BA-MA in SLS

Effective this fall, the Department of SLS allows students to earn a Bachelor’s and Master’s degree in seven semesters (5.5 years). After students graduate with their BA degree, their status will automatically change to Graduate for the remaining three semesters (assuming 9 credits or 3 courses taken each semester, for a total of 27 credits for the Masters degree). This is a way for students to save money and time, as tuition for one of their MA semesters will be at the undergraduate rate. See http://www.hawaii.edu/sls/graduate/ma/bama-pathway

Students interested in pursuing this pathway are encouraged to send a message to the BA in SLS coordinator, Kenton Harsch, at slsba@hawaii.edu, to discuss the application process and what makes an effective application packet. The following tips may apply:

1. Start planning early (i.e., a year ahead) to know what it is you have to do. For example, standardized tests (GRE, TOEFL/IELTS) may be required.

2. Give your references ample time to write your rec letters – and allow time to develop relationships with them. Think of which faculty know your work in depth, both in terms of class participation and independent projects.

3. Get your feet wet doing research during your BA. Learn to do self-guided reading around a topic that interests you, collect data from your own classroom or natural settings, and do poster presentations at student conferences.

4. Get teaching experience! Theory only makes sense when you know how it can be applied. You don’t need to teach a big class of students; tutoring gives you a basis for critically linking theory and practice.

What was your favorite part of SLRF 2018 in Montréal?

Huy Phung: Keynote/plenary talks by Dr. Aneta Pavlenko on forensic linguistics and corrective feedback, and the colloquium organized by Dr. Ziegler and Dr. Moranski on multi-site research.

Carrie Bach: The plenary on forensic linguistics and Drs. Ziegler and Moranski’s colloquium, seeing familiar faces again (like Jing)… poutine, pastries, cheese, and the most beautiful pancakes I have ever eaten!

Masaki Eguchi: My favorite part was socializing! I was able to meet new people with similar interests and see my friends at other universities to see how their PhD was going. I also enjoyed the old Montréal maple syrup store, where they gave us samples!

Mery Diez Ortega: It was great to meet scholars like Rod Ellis and Luke Pionsky. Hearing some of my peers presenting and rehearsing our presentations the night before in our Airbnb, it felt like we’re all in this together and not so isolating as it sometimes feels. I LOVE all the coffee shops, pâtisseries and fromageries! Also enjoyed fall and the leaves, and being able to understand some French.

Hoa Le: My favorite part was that I learned so much by collaborating with a colleague on the study we presented. She was great and gave me a lot of support both mentally and emotionally! It was also a great experience to be able to socialize with SLS people (profs, alumni, and other students) in Montréal!

SLS grad students (clockwise from center): Kristen Urada, Mery Diez Ortega, Masaki Eguchi, Huy Phung, Jing Zhou (PhD alumn, Pomona College) and daughter, Wenyi Ling, Parvane Rezaee, Hoa Le, and Carrie Bach at a Chinese restaurant after a day of conferencing at the 2019 Second Language Research Forum

Congratulations Fall Graduates!

Congratulations to all those who graduated this semester. We wish you all the best of luck in your future, and we look forward to hearing of your many successes! (See page 4 for photos.)

MA Graduates
Kapuaokeo’laauikaulupua Angeline Leiko Adams
Shinsuke Kondo
Amy Marquardt
Kristen Kayori Urada
Linda Sook Wah Wong

PhD Graduates
Priscila Leal Bluth (Advisor: Dr. G. Crookes)
Hyunwoo Kim (Advisor: Dr. T. Gruter)
Patharaorn Patharakorn (Advisor: Dr. J. D. Brown)
Aya Takeda (Advisor: Dr. B. Schwartz)
Meet your Fall 2018 SLS MA graduates

Shakas of Solidarity: MA grads Kapua Adams, Amy Marquardt, Kristen Urada, Linda Wong, and Shinsuke Kondo

Amy Marquardt (former SLSSA newsletter editor) with Professors Betsy Gilliland and Marta-Gonzalez Lloret at the WorldCALLS conference in Concepción, Chile

Priscila Leal Bluth celebrates a successful defense, thankful for “friends (near and far), my family’s patience and unconditional love, and my committee’s genuine interest and kindness”

Dr. Geoff LaFlair’s end-of-semester photo with his students in SLS 600. As he has accepted an academic position on the mainland, we wish Dr. LaFlair the best in his future endeavors!

MA grad Kristen Urada presented her honors graduating project, “The effects of task based interaction on L2 learning: A replication meta-analysis” at SLRF 2018 in Montréal, Canada and received the Harry Whitten Prize for Scholarly Excellence. (Right: Kristen with Dr. Nicole Ziegler, who taught SLS 750: Research Synthesis and Meta-Analysis)