Editorial

Alessandro Benati and Elena Nuzzo

We would like to express our gratitude to Kook-Hee Gil and Stefano Rastelli for bringing together six important and interesting papers in the first special issue of the journal, which has been conceived to create a unique dialogue between Generative Linguistics and the second language classroom. Natural input has a special place in the heart of many generativists. However, most research findings in generative second language acquisition are based on the performance of second language learners whose main source of input lies in the classroom. Classroom input may be characterised by the presence of focused attention, scaffolding and interaction, selective feedback, repeated practice and explicit teaching of grammar rules. Whereas some core ideas of generative grammar cannot be reduced or minimised, the relationship between generative theory and second language teaching research needs to be revisited. While doing so, one also has to investigate if the current classroom input best represents the use of language that matches natural input, and further, to what extent classroom input provides a privileged environment for implicit learning and acquisition.

The first paper, by Carroll and George, provides a review of laboratory research investigating how beginning language learners solve word learning problems after minimal exposure to input. Along with the research findings, the two co-authors of this paper also refer to and examine a specific theory in second language acquisition (Autonomous Induction Theory) which draws from formal linguistic research and is concerned

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with explaining a learner's linguistic competence. They argue that despite the possible pedagogical implications of theory and research within this paradigm, the research findings (laboratory) should be used to develop a more re-focused classroom-based research agenda.

The second paper in this special issue, by Sabir, deals with the matter in relation to the teaching and learning of the English articles' semantic properties (definiteness and specificity) by Hejazi Arabic-speaking participants. Sabir looks at the effects of explicit instruction versus no instruction. In this experiment, Sabir shows that the instructed group outperformed the uninstructed group and that the effects of explicit instruction are durative. One of her conclusions for pedagogy is that 'generative linguistics can inform the language classroom by predicting areas of acquisition difficulty. It also stresses that explicit language instruction is more beneficial than standard classroom instruction in teaching articles'.

In the third paper, Snape and Umeda examine fluctuation in learning the English articles system (*the* and *a*) by Japanese speakers. Snape and Umeda measure the effects of explicit instruction (instruction group) compared with no instruction (control group), and the results seem to indicate that explicit instruction has some beneficial effects. However, the effects of explicit instruction are clearly short-lived. One of their conclusions is that 'it is possible to provide instruction in complex areas of grammar, but any explicit knowledge gained from intervention classes is unlikely to be retained over the long term'.

In the fourth paper, Abumelha examines the role of explicit and implicit classroom input on the acquisition of English generics by L1 Najdi Arabic speakers. In this experimental study, Abumelha compares the effects of two experimental groups (implicit input versus explicit form-focused instruction) and one uninstructed control group. The main findings from this experiment indicate that explicit input (explicit instruction) seems to be more effective than implicit input.

In the fifth paper of this issue, Brandel presents the results of a study investigating the relative effects of input flood with and without explicit positive evidence on the unlearning of properties associated with the Null Subject Parameter by Hebrew-speaking learners of L2-English. Findings from this study show that input flood accompanied by explicit positive evidence is more helpful than input flood only in the immediate post-teaching test. However, one of the conclusions of this paper is that 'the immediate improvement in null-weather-expletives and post-verbal subjects was not fully maintained. This might suggest that the parameter was not truly reset in the +EPE group; that is, the input did not affect the children's linguistic

competence, but rather, a separate mechanism of metalinguistic, learned knowledge’.

In the final paper of this special issue, the guest editors rely on Chomsky’s ‘three factors for language design’ – which bring together the Faculty of Language, input and general principles of economy and efficient computation for language development – to provide a new insight into GenSLA classroom research. In light of recent developments in the Minimalist Program, Rastelli and Gil present a theoretical rationale for how classroom research can offer a unique environment to test the learnability in L2 through the statistical enhancement of the input to which learners are exposed.

Instructed Second Language Acquisition (ISLA), now in its second year, is moving steadily towards accomplishing some of the aims set out at the beginning of our journey. One area that we wish to grow is to receive suggestions for book reviews and letters from readers which take forward some areas of debate touched on in ISLA’s pages.