

<b>Institution:</b> University of Greenwich
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> (UoA 28) - Modern Languages
<b>Title of case study:</b> Bringing the benefits of grammar knowledge closer to L2 practitioners
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>The research focuses on the second language acquisition (SLA) of tense and aspect, which are persistently problematic areas of grammar for language students to master. It has led to the development and delivery of workshops for language teachers which deliver three impacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an enhanced knowledge of the linguistic properties of tense and aspect;</li> <li>• an understanding of the reasons underlying learners' difficulties;</li> <li>• the consideration of effective pedagogical techniques in grammar teaching.</li> </ul> <p>The teachers' improved confidence and skills lead to greater motivation and engagement by their students, delivering the main impacts which are improvements in education and the learning of second languages.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The research insights of <b>Dr Sarah Liszka</b>, (Lecturer in Applied Linguistics &amp; Language Acquisition, University of Greenwich, since Jan 2012) have contributed to three main issues in the field of SLA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the transfer of grammatical properties from the first language (L1)</li> <li>• the nature of ultimate attainment</li> <li>• whether or not a critical period for second language acquisition exists.</li> </ul> <p>Within tense and aspect studies (tense locating an event in time while aspect marks it as durative, complete or repeated), she has found that native-like attainment is rarely achieved. For example, Chinese speakers of English who learn English as a second language as adults appear to have persistent difficulties developing and producing the past simple tense in English (eg I <b>walked</b> to work), even at high levels of proficiency in English [3.5]. A further example is the acquisition of the present perfect (eg I <b>have walked</b> to work), where difficulties persist at high levels of proficiency across learners from many L1 backgrounds [3.6, 3.8].</p> <p>To tackle the issue of why these persistent difficulties arise, and in turn help teachers to understand their students' lack of attainment, it is fundamental to understand what learners bring from their first language and how the relationships between forms and meanings are constructed in the second language (L2). To this end, theoretical and empirical work undertaken by Liszka (1998-current) has contributed to shedding light on the acquisition pathways of different tense and aspect forms. She has raised and tested hypotheses concerning the reasons for lack of complete attainment in SLA.</p> <p>The findings suggest:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) tense and aspect properties are transferred from the L1 and continue to influence L2 development, even at very high levels of proficiency;</li> <li>b) where the L1-L2 pairing shares a certain property, learners acquire that property in a native-like way;</li> <li>c) where the L1-L2 pairing does not share a certain property, learners continue to have persistent difficulty acquiring that property;</li> <li>d) these persistent difficulties appear to be linked with the age learning begins, suggesting a critical period around or after puberty.</li> </ol>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

If Liszka has identified which learners have problems and why, **Professor Benati** (Professor of Applied Linguistics & Second Language Studies, 1992-current) complements her findings with an expertise in teaching grammar to second language students, ie helping students pick up grammar which is alien to them. He is a pioneer in the fields of Input Processing and Processing Instruction. Input processing argues that learners can be taught to note grammatical items, often without resorting to conscious knowledge; processing instruction looks at how best to enhance and present materials to learners.

Benati's research (2003-current) has been productive and informative for second language teachers. He has repeatedly demonstrated the effects of processing instruction under a variety of conditions, teasing out variables and testing the effects with different languages, different structures, and different learners. His research provides pedagogical solutions for a range of issues including tense and aspect, e.g. for teaching redundant forms such as -ed- and third person singular -s- and for syntactic structure as passive constructions in English.

### 3. References to the research (REF1 submitted staff in **bold**, \*\*REF2 Output)

- 3.1 **Benati, A.** (2005). The effects of processing instruction, traditional instruction and meaning—output instruction on the acquisition of the English past simple tense. *Language Teaching Research*, 9(1), 67–93. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1362168805lr154oa>
- \*\*3.2 **Benati, A.**, Lee, J. (2008). From Processing Instruction on the acquisition of English Past Tense to secondary transfer of teaching effects on English Third person singular present tense (pp.88-120). In A. Benati & J. Lee (Eds.) *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary And Cumulative Effects*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- 3.3 **Benati, A.**, & Mavrantoni, M. (in press, 2013). The effects of Processing Instruction and Traditional Instruction on two different School-age learners: the case of English Present Simple Tense. In J. Lee & A. Benati (Eds.), *Individual Differences and Processing Instruction*. London: Equinox.
- 3.4 Angelovska, T. and **Benati, A.** (2013). Third Person Singular (in press, 2013). In J. Lee & A. Benati (Eds.), *Individual Differences and Processing Instruction*. London: Equinox.
- 3.5 Hawkins, R. & **Liszka, S.** (2003) Locating the source of defective past tense marking in advanced L2 English speakers (pp. 21-44). In R. Van Hout, A. Hulk, F. Kuiken & R. Towell (Eds.) *The Lexicon-Syntax Interface in Second Language Acquisition, LALD Vol. 30*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- 3.6 **Liszka, S. A.** (2004). Exploring the effects of first language influence on second language pragmatic processes from a syntactic deficit perspective. *Second Language Research*, 20(3), 212–231. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/0267658304sr238oa>
- \*\*3.7 **Liszka, S. A.** (2009) Associating meaning to form in advanced L2 speakers: An investigation into the acquisition of the English present simple and present progressive (pp. 229-246). In N. Snape, Y-K. I. Leung and M. Sharwood Smith (Eds.) *Representational Deficits in SLA: Studies in Honor of Roger Hawkins; LALD Vol 47*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. <http://gala.gre.ac.uk/9316/>
- \*\*3.8 Roberts, L. & **Liszka, S.A.** (2013) Processing tense/aspect-agreement violations on-line in the second language: A self-paced reading study with French and German L2 learners of English. *Second Language Research*, 29(4), 413-439. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0267658313503171>

**Impact case study (REF3b)****Benati: research dates**

2003-2005 – L2 Acquisition of the Past Simple in English

2006-2008 - L2 Acquisition of the Past Simple in English and Present Simple third person singular –s- in English

(The above research was supported internally at the University of Greenwich).

2011-2013 – L2 Acquisition of Present Simple third person singular –s- in English (adults vs. young learners). This was partially support by the *Processing Instruction and Individual Differences* project. Leverhulme Trust, Visiting Fellowship Grant (Ref. F00345/F). £18,470.

**Liszka: research dates**

Development of Tense and the Present Perfect in Second Language English. 1998-2005. This research incorporates Liszka's doctoral studies (October 1998 until May 2002) and was funded for two years (1999-2001) by an ESRC Postgraduate Research Grant (Award Number: R00429924496).

2006-current – L2 Acquisition of the Present Simple and Present Progressive in English;

2007-current – Acquisition and Psycholinguistic Processing of Tense and Aspect in L2 English.

(From 2005 to 2007 the research above was supported by a reduction in teaching hours)

**Evidence of the quality of research**

Evidence that the research underpinning the case study is of 2\* or above is justified by:

- international publications arising out of the work- at least two of which are included as output in the UoA28 submission to the REF;
- invited/peer reviewed international conference presentation of the work.

**4. Details of the impact**

Learning a second language is one of the key ways individuals access other cultures and improve their chances in the employment market. Higher linguistic attainment is in direct relation to more opportunities of social integration and economic prosperity. However, many adults have problems learning grammatical features.

This research focuses on the second language acquisition of tense and aspect, areas of grammar which practitioners find particularly difficult to teach and learners find persistently problematic to acquire. The findings, which explain where the problems lie and provide solutions to overcome them, have led the research team to develop and deliver **professional development workshops** for language teachers.

The workshops have three impacts for participants:

1. an enhanced knowledge of the linguistic properties of tense and aspect;
2. an understanding of the reasons underlying learners' difficulties;
3. the consideration of effective pedagogical techniques in grammar teaching.

The workshops are offered with the aim of equipping teachers with practical and theoretical knowledge to boost their self-confidence, and transform tense and aspect instruction into a more meaningful and rewarding experience. In turn this motivates and engages language students to develop their language skills in this area.

The project is currently in the pilot phase: the workshops were first piloted at the University of Greenwich with in-house language teachers and their feedback provided the opportunity to improve, eg to make sure that more everyday language was used for some of the technical

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

vocabulary. To date the workshop has been facilitated at two language schools in London (May and June 2013). The first workshop was unavoidably delivered on two dates, with five participants attending the first part and eight attending the second part. The second workshop had five participants.

Two types of feedback are gathered. The first is a questionnaire completed by participants immediately after the workshop. The second is feedback requested from line managers after two weeks. An example comment is: "They (the teachers) got a lot out of it in terms of their professional development as teachers, in deepening their understanding of L2 acquisition, their individual learners and the concept of fossilised errors." The feedback offered the following evidence of the three impacts:

**1. Expanding teacher knowledge of tense and aspect**

The first impact of our research has been that teachers have become more confident and knowledgeable practitioners, by giving them a deeper understanding of the properties underlying tense and aspect forms. Of the thirteen participants, twelve claim to have found it very useful to have increased their knowledge of the underlying properties of tense and aspect.

**2. Understanding students' persistent difficulties with tense and aspect**

The second impact has been that twelve out of the thirteen teachers found it extremely helpful to explore why L2 learners find tense and aspect so difficult to acquire. One teacher commented that "teachers tend to ignore the reasons why students find it so difficult to acquire tense and aspect *due to a lack of insight*". They now understand that there will be different rates of progress amongst learners from different L1 backgrounds within a class, as well as different levels of attainment, and they can act upon this accordingly in the classroom.

**3. Learning effective pedagogy**

The third impact has been to enhance participants' understanding of effective pedagogical techniques in grammar instruction. Nine out of ten participants found it very useful. They particularly welcomed the practical applications and examples, as exemplified by "much to test in the classroom, with some practical advice on task development".

Participants reported that they had incorporated the newly learnt knowledge and strategies into their lesson plans and teaching practice, providing a long-term effect of the impact of the activity. Finally, according to the feedback, seventeen out of eighteen participants would definitely recommend the workshop, with one teacher commenting "It was extremely useful. The workshop raised valid points; therefore all teachers should attend one." Both Directors of Studies have also asked the team to facilitate further workshops.

The learning and teaching principles apply to other areas of grammar, eg gender concord and determiners, so new workshops covering these aspects are being developed as well as rolling out the tense and aspect workshop.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

Beneficiary contact at language schools:

**Two workshops, Friday 24 May 2013 and 14 June 2013:**

A corroborative statement is provided by the Director of Studies, Language Teaching Centres London.

**28 May 2013:**

The corroborative contact is the Director of Studies, East London School of English.