

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Greenwich		
Unit of Assessment: 27 - English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Bridging the gap between linguistic theory and practice for teachers of EAL pupils to improve their second language acquisition		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: January 2012 - December 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Sarah Ann Liszka	Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics & Language Acquisition	09/01/12 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: June 2019 - December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Research by Liszka at the University of Greenwich focuses on the second language acquisition of grammatical properties which are persistently problematic areas to master (e.g. tense, aspect, articles). This has led to the development and delivery of workshops for 118 secondary school teachers (Key Stages 3-5) with EAL (English as an Additional Language) pupils from 48 schools and five local councils across the UK. The workshops enabled teachers to gain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an enhanced knowledge of linguistic properties underlying English grammar; • an understanding of the reasons underlying learners' difficulties; • an introduction to pedagogical techniques to help improve the second language development of English grammar. 		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Second language acquisition (SLA) is learning a second language after a first language is already established. In the UK, for example, this often happens when a child who speaks a language other than English goes to school for the first time: UK Government figures from 2018 show that 1.6 million (19%) of 8.1 million pupils in state-funded schools in England were recorded as EAL pupils, so this is a widespread issue. Learning and using a second language proficiently is a crucial skill for individuals to successfully integrate into other cultures and improve their life chances. However, when the age of onset for the new language is around or after puberty, evidence suggests that many learners have problems acquiring selective grammatical features, which can persist even at very high levels of proficiency (3.1, 3.2). This impedes their linguistic attainment and may ultimately hinder their success in domains such as education and the employment market.</p> <p>Since 2012, Liszka has been conducting research at the University of Greenwich that has focussed on SLA by investigating the role of the first language and age-related effects on acquisition. More specifically, she has contributed to four main issues in the field of SLA:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the influence of first language (L1) transfer of grammatical properties to the second language (L2); 2. the nature of ultimate attainment; 3. the locus of persistent selective fossilisation (i.e., persistent difficulties in acquiring and using particular grammatical forms), in advanced second language grammars; 4. the question of whether or not a critical period for second language acquisition exists. <p>Within tense and aspect studies, where tense locates an event in time (past, present, future) and aspect typically marks an event as durative, complete or repeated, Liszka has found that native-</p>		

like attainment is rarely achieved where L1-L2 pairings differ. For example, post-pubescent L1 Chinese learners of L2 English, whose L1 does not encode grammatical tense, appear to have persistent difficulties developing and producing the past simple tense in English (e.g. I **walked** to work), even at high levels of proficiency. A second example is the acquisition of the present perfect (e.g. I **have walked** to work), where difficulties persist at high levels of proficiency across learners from many L1 backgrounds. A final example is the acquisition of the distinction between simple forms (e.g. I **walk** to work) and progressive forms (I **am walking** to work), which again appears to pose difficulties for L1 speakers whose language does not grammatically differentiate these forms (e.g. French, German). Another example of an area of persistent grammatical difficulty typically found in L1 speakers of, for example, the Slavic languages, Turkish and Japanese, is the use of determiners, especially articles (a/an, the).

To tackle the issue of why these persistent difficulties arise, and in turn help teachers to understand their pupils' 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 L2. To this end, theoretical and empirical work undertaken by **Liszka** has shed light on the acquisition pathways of different grammatical forms. She has tested hypotheses concerning the reasons for the lack of complete attainment in SLA, with learners from a variety of L1 backgrounds, using quantitative on-line and off-line measures, incorporating oral and written experiments, examining implicit and explicit grammatical knowledge.

The findings suggest:

- (a) grammatical properties are transferred from the L1 and continue to influence L2 development, even at very high levels of proficiency (**3.1** , **3.2**);
- (b) where the L1-L2 pairing shares a certain property, learners acquire that property in a native-like way (**3.1**, **3.2**);
- (c) where the L1-L2 pairing does not share a certain property, learners continue to have persistent difficulty acquiring that property (**3.1**, **3.2**);
- (d) these persistent difficulties appear to be linked with the age learning begins, suggesting a critical period around or after puberty, affecting the acquisition of parameterised grammatical features that are not shared by the L1-L2 pairing (**3.1**).

Understanding the implications of these findings is important for teachers in the classroom in order to improve EAL learners ability to reach their full potential in public examinations, such as GCSE English Language. This, in turn, will have an impact on their life opportunities, especially in the areas of employment or further study.

3. References to the research

1. **Liszka**, S.A. (2015) The L2 acquisition of the English present simple – present progressive distinction: Verb-raising revisited. In D. Ayoun (ed) *The Acquisition of the Present*, pp. 57-86. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1075/z.196.03lis> [Available from university on request if needed]

- This chapter was in response to an invitation to contribute to an edited volume on present temporal phenomena (an under-researched area in tense and aspect studies). It was double-blind peer-reviewed from a pool of highly established scholars in the field and published by a prestigious academic publisher.

2. Roberts, L. & **Liszka**, S.A. (2019) Grammatical aspect and L2 learners' on-line processing of temporarily ambiguous sentences in English: A self-paced reading study with German, Dutch and French L2 learners. *Second Language Research*. Online-first doi.org/10.1177/0267658319895551. [**REF2 Submission – Identifier 27067**]

- This paper was triple-blind peer-reviewed for this high-impact journal.

4. Details of the impact

A [report](#) from the [Educational Policy Institute](#) (2019) has indicated that in terms of children's arrival time versus attainment, "There is a severe attainment penalty for pupils arriving late into the

English school system.... the time at which the average EAL pupil enters school reliably predicts attainment levels.” The report concludes that “at GCSE, pupils with EAL scored an average **grade of a C** if they arrived between reception (aged 4-5) and Year 7 (aged 11-12). This **decreased to a grade of around a D** if they arrived in Years 8-10 (aged 12-15) – ... and an **E** if they arrived in Year 11 (aged 15-16). These penalties apply to all language groups.”

These findings corroborate the claims of **Liszka’s** underpinning research with respect to linguistic difficulties arising around or after puberty. This is further supported by a [DoE report](#) (2019) showing a similar pattern in its results for EAL pupils who joined an English school after Year 2 (aged 6-7) and tending to decline even more noticeably for pupils who arrived after Year 8 (aged 12-13). Based on these findings, in 2018, **Liszka** developed a continuing professional development (CPD) workshop focussed on the second language acquisition of tense (e.g., past), aspect (e.g., progressive) and the use of articles (a/an/ the/ no article), which are areas of grammar which practitioners find particularly difficult to teach, and post-puberty learners find persistently problematic to acquire. In June 2019, she locally piloted the materials for the half-day (4-hour) CPD workshop with the School Improvement Adviser for Inclusion, Learning and Achievement for the Royal Borough of Greenwich, London, and four teachers from three schools within the Borough (including a Director of English, a Lead Practitioner of English and a Key-stage 3 co-ordinator). It was launched more widely in 2019-2020. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the workshop had to be rescheduled and quickly adapted for online delivery. This entailed an extra layer of work in order to effectively deliver the training, as face-to-face sessions on school premises could no longer be delivered. Of the 124 participants, the workshop directly benefited 118 teachers with EAL pupils **(5.1, 5.2)**.

To measure impact, two questionnaires were administered to 124 participants, incorporating closed-ended and open-ended questions, of which 118 returned the pre- and post- questionnaires **(5.1, 5.2)**. Participants from 48 schools and five local councils across the UK were reached, as well as a small number of international participants from Germany, Indonesia, Pakistan and Thailand. However, with the cancellation of physical workshops due to the pandemic, and moving to online delivery, other potential attendees were lost. Furthermore, there was a particularly large fall in interest/take-up in the workshops from the autumn (September-December), as schools re-opened and the new term began, which was only to be expected given the pressures teachers were under.

The impacts arising from the workshop were:

1) An enhanced knowledge of linguistic properties underlying problematic areas of English grammar. The workshop was devised with the aim of equipping teachers with theoretical and practical knowledge. One teacher said:

- *it has helped me consider English grammar more intentionally and made me more aware of the challenges that L2 learners may face in English acquisition.*

Others added:

- *it has explained some useful insights of Eng(lish) grammar for EAL in a completely new paradigm.*
- *would recommend this workshop to other teachers as it was very informative and interesting. I think it is crucial that all teachers are familiar with key aspects of grammar as it is very beneficial to our students and their progress.*

(5.2, Q12 for quotations)

When asked in the post-questionnaire **(5.2, Q3)** “Have you found it useful to become more familiar with English grammar?” answers suggest a strong impact with 96% (113/118) claiming that they had.

2) An understanding of the reasons underlying learners’ difficulties thanks to the workshop. With respect to understanding learners’ difficulties, participants were introduced to a number of linguistic concepts, such as linguistic parameters and linguistic fossilisation. One teacher said:

- *I felt that **the information about parameters was really important and something that was not touched upon during PGCE sessions on EAL.***

Another said:

- *I would definitely recommend this workshop to other teachers. I would encourage trainee and newly qualified teachers to attend, SENCOs and Teaching Assistants. In particular **I realised how important the concept of fossilisation is in learning an additional language.** I have benefited from a refresher on the basics of sentence structure and key principles of English Grammar. Thank you.*

(5.2, Q12 for quotations)

When asked “How confident are you that you understand the concept of **linguistic parameters?**”, results suggest a strong impact on teacher knowledge and understanding after the workshop: Before the workshop (5.1, Q11), 55% (65/118) of participants gave a confidence level between (0%-30%) and for 13% (15/118) the confidence level was between (70%-100%). Having participated in the workshop, the results show a reverse trend, with 5% (6/118) between (0%-30%) and 74% (88/118) between (70%-100%) (5.2, Q8).

When asked “How confident are you that you understand the concept of **linguistic fossilisation?**”, again results suggest a strong impact on teacher knowledge and understanding after the workshop: Before the workshop (5.1, Q12), 59% (70/118) of participants gave a confidence level between (0%-30%) and for 12% (14/118) the confidence level was between (70%-100%). However, having participated in the workshop, the results again show a reverse trend, with 4% (5/118) between (0%-30%) and 79% (93/118) between (70%-100%) (5.2, Q9).

When asked “How confident are you of your understanding of **the role of fossilisation** in making **properties of grammar difficult to acquire** in second language acquisition?”, results suggest again a strong impact on teacher knowledge and understanding after the workshop: Before the workshop (5.1, Q14), 66% (78/118) of participants gave a confidence level between (0%-30%) and for 8% (9/118) the confidence level was between (70%-100%). However, having participated in the workshop, the results show a reverse trend, with 6% (7/118) between (0%-30%) and 80% (94/118) between (70%-100%) (5.2, Q9a).

3) An introduction to some pedagogical techniques to help improve second language development of English grammar. Turning to the practical aspect of the workshop, the participants were introduced to three types of activity to help their pupils. For example, knowledge of parameterised linguistic properties for first language speakers, such as the difference between ‘I laughed’ and ‘I’ve laughed’, is unconscious and implicit. A consciousness-raising activity would involve EAL pupils discovering for themselves the explicit rules underlying these two forms, with tasks focussing on the specific grammatical features of the present perfect and past simple that distinguish them from each other. In the post- questionnaire, 94% of participants said they would try the three activities covered in the workshop (5.2). In addition, one teacher said:

- *I think the techniques and activities shared are easy to implement and adapt according to your subject and your pupils' levels.*

Others added:

- *I found it really useful for my teaching practice, I learnt so much and I can't wait to apply what I've learnt.*
- *I found it really interesting and have learned new techniques and theory on teaching grammar to EAL children. I'm looking forward to start using this in the classroom!*
- *The workshop was very useful to understand why EAL pupils make mistakes. I intend to use the activities in my class.*

(5.2, Q12 for quotations).

Further evidence on overall impact

A testimony from the Head of Inclusion at Kingsbury High School says:

- *“The CPD delivered was very thought- provoking for all our staff, including our very experienced EAL department. The theory behind the issues that some students face and*

why was seen by all staff to be important to understand better ways in which we can engage EAL learners. Many English teachers attended alongside EAL professionals and they have reported that they have changed practice due to the inset; thinking more about the impact of the work they are setting and how this will be approached by the students and can be supported by staff. These changes appear to be embedded in some practice across the school. Good quality CPD is very useful to all school staff. Not all CPD is effective, it is better when it contextualises areas of concern, supports practice with research, allows attendees time to assimilate the information and leaves attendees with practical advice to try. This CPD did this and was particularly useful in how it provided the evidence and reasons why EAL learners have blocks to their development in English.”

(5.3 for quotation)

Further comments from participants include:

- *It helped me to realise how different the grammar can be in different language and how challenging it can be for some students.*
- *this would be useful to all teacher of EAL students, it could be slightly adapted to other subject areas and would be of use in developing a whole school strategy for EAL learners.*
- *there were some very useful aspects, and this was more helpful than a previous one run by [another school]. (edited for anonymity purposes)*
- *I am sure that this workshop will help teachers to create more inclusive classrooms.*
- *I would recommend this course to every member of school staff.*
- *It's essential for all teachers to attend to support their work.*
- *Very good if you have different EAL students as it is universal to them all and can be very effective in allowing them to understand English better.*
- *Provides a good awareness as to why students struggle with certain areas of English and practical ways to support them.*

(5.2, Q12 for quotations)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Results from the pre-workshop questionnaire
2. Results from the post-workshop questionnaire
3. Testimony from Dr Thomas Mann, Head of Inclusion, Kingsbury High School, Princes Avenue, London NW9