BYU Summaries

Ben McMurry

The English Language Center at Brigham Young University has integrated positive psychology and self-regulation into the curriculum. Instead of a supplement to English language learning, lessons were created that focused on Positive Psychology and Self-Regulation as content for language use and instruction. With Positive Psychology, three units were developed focusing on wellbeing, character strengths, and mindfulness. One example of a topic addressed in these lessons is expressing gratitude. Students are exposed to the language used to express gratitude and then asked to use this language to express gratitude. Throughout the instruction process, students learn about the impact of expressing gratitude on overall happiness. With Self-Regulation, mental contrasting with implementation intentions, specifically WOOP (Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan), has been made part of the writing curriculum providing students with opportunities to envision their goals or wishes and articulate the outcome and obstacles along with a plan. Materials used at the ELC are freely available for use and adaptation at <https://edtechbooks.org/PositivePsychologyintheClassroom>. Research associated with these projects have illustrated that this mode of instruction has not interfered with language gains but may actually reduce anxiety in students. Publications are pending and information about these articles will be made available at <https://slarg.byu.edu>.

Grant Eckstein

Eye-tracking technology has been used recently to explore the reading behavior of native and non-native speakers of many languages around the world. However, little research demonstrates whether language proficiency or text difficulty play a role in moderating readers’ eye-movements. Some of this data is reviewed along with the underlying theories and methodologies of eye-tracking. In addition, I present a large-scale study at BYU of eye-movement behaviors based on reading proficiency and text difficulty and articulate the preliminary results. I also explain our plans to use machine learning in order to generate an algorithm that will allow us to use eye-movement data to predict reading proficiency in a foreign language.

Steve Richardson

This presentation provides a brief history and overview of machine translation  (MT) and its use as a translation industry best-practice. Specific examples are given of its use at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the sponsoring institution of Brigham Young University. The presentation concludes with two exciting advances in MT: massively multilingual MT, which can translate between any two of hundreds of languages, and speech-to-speech MT, which is being actively developed and used in applications such as automatic video dubbing.

Jeff Green and Ellen Knell

How quickly do L2 learners learn new words?  We replicate a study by McLaughlin et al. (2004. Neural correlates of second-language word learning: Minimal instruction produces rapid change. *Nature Neuroscience, 7*) that used electroencephalography (EEG) to detect early evidence of learning from the brain’s responses to words and non-words.  In addition to replicating the findings in L2 French, we also investigate early character learning in L2 Chinese.  Preliminary results suggest that the L2 French learners learn information about French words more quickly than L2 Mandarin learners do about Chinese characters.  However, the L2 Mandarin learners do show evidence of treating Chinese characters as meaningful in a way that isn’t seen in non-learners.  Our final results will provide evidence on the early learning trajectory of characters, which may have implications for debates on when Chinese characters should be introduced in the L2 classroom.  Our study also gives additional evidence that brain-based measures can provide insights into L2 learning that behavioral measures miss.

Jennifer Bown and Nieves Knapp

In this presentation, we discuss how debate overlaps with level 3 functions. We also describe an advanced Russian and an advanced Spanish course using debate to improve speaking proficiency.  We discuss assignments and assessments that can work in such courses, as well as alternatives to formal debate.