

Undergraduate students' socialization into applied linguistics: An analysis of language-learning autobiographies

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Abstract

This poster reports our ongoing learning and teaching in an undergraduate applied linguistics seminar. The seminar students reflect on their language learning experiences in comparison with those of other learners and relate the experiences to first and second language acquisition theories that they have learned so far. The instructor introduces the seminar content, including its syllabus, assignments, and activities. Based on changes reflected in the students' language learning autobiographies, the instructor further reports her observation of their disciplinary socialization into applied linguistics and their second language writing development.

Keywords

Language-learning autobiography, socialization, second language writing

Introduction

This poster showcases an ongoing investigation of undergraduate students' socialization into the applied linguistics discipline and expectations for their academic writing in English. The guiding question of this study is: In what ways are novice students' socializations into a newly introduced discipline observed through their second language (L2) writing samples?

1 Literature

Language-learning autobiography (LLA) has often been introduced as an effective method for novice students (and teachers) learning to observe their experiences objectively (e.g., Bailey et al., 1996). We briefly review the literature on novice learners' socialization into their discipline and second language writing to locate our ongoing project in our presentation.

2 Methods

2.1 Setting

The study was conducted in a newly opened applied linguistics seminar at the department of international liberal arts of a private university in Tokyo in April 2018. Over four semesters (the students' junior and senior years), the seminar covers language acquisition theories, concepts regarding English as a global language, and second language teaching methodologies. At the same time, it trains the students in second language writing in English and supports their graduation thesis research projects. As listed in Figure 1, the first semester (April to July 2018) covered foundational theories on first language acquisition (FLA) and second language acquisition (SLA), comparisons between first language (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition, and individual differences. The main textbook was Lightbown and Spada (2013)'s *How Languages are Learned*.

2.1.1 Language learning autobiography

One major writing assignment in the semester was a narrative essay called the language-learning autobiography. It required students to reflect on their attitudes and histories as learners/users of languages, including their first word as a child or as a learner, favorite books in their childhood, challenges they have faced expressing themselves in different languages, and the teacher who inspired them to use English. As presented in Figure 1, the students revised their papers four times between April and July, along with attending lectures and discussions on FLA and SLA theories, several writing and library workshops, and activities including peer review, teacher conferences, expert interviews, and presentations.

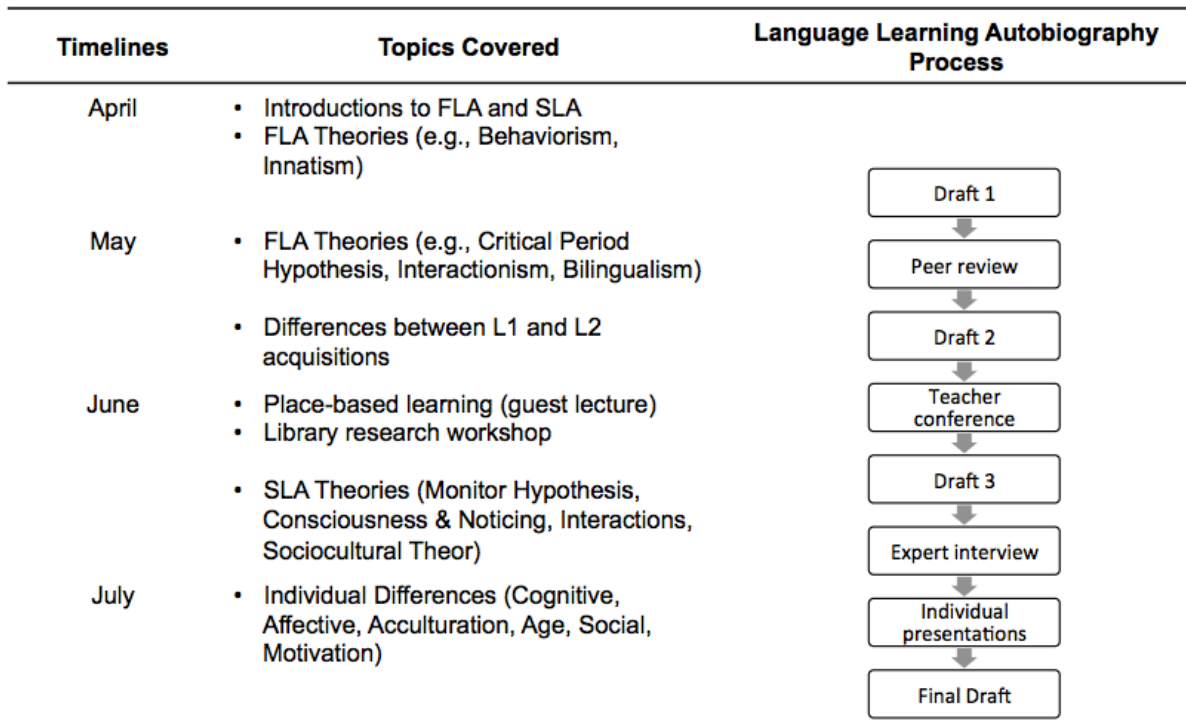


Figure 1: Timelines, Contents and Procedures

2.2 Participants

Five third-year undergraduate students¹ and their seminar instructor are involved in this study. All of the students are learning English and one of the second foreign languages offered in their department (Spanish, French, or Chinese), while some had taken courses such as intercultural communication, interpretation and translation, and general teacher certification courses in their freshman and sophomore years; however, this was the first foray into the applied linguistics discipline for all students.

2.3 Analysis

This semester, the students are concurrently re-analyzing their own development as users of English, Japanese, and other languages and polishing their papers academically. At the end of the semester, they will evaluate their own work critically in comparison with peer and expert learners. These learning experiences aim to help the students raise their own awareness toward languages, analyze their own and others' experiences objectively, deepen their understandings of theories and experiences covered in the seminar, and identify the various research issues that exist in their own lives.

¹ Three of the five students will be present at the conference to report their own findings.

3 Prospective findings

In this presentation, the students will report preliminary findings from their critical analyses of their own language learning experiences and cross analyses of those of their peers, reflect on their revising processes, and discuss learning achievements over this semester. The instructor will summarize changes observed in the students' writing samples. The study concludes by discussing whether, and if so, how, the novice learners' perspectives on language learning have evolved; and how their understandings of academic writing and SLA theories have developed over a semester. The paper also discusses potential benefits and challenges of conducting self and cross-analyses of texts and the implications of the study for future research.

References

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