Second Language Attrition

Brief Summary:

Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig and I have developed a model for longitudinal assessment of second language attrition, in order to identify which aspects of linguistic knowledge and performance are more vulnerable during periods of disuse. The diagrams reproduced on the following pages illustrate: (i) the proposed model and (ii) possible applications of this model to different populations.


We have recently developed our conceptual framework to include an expanded notion of the lexicon as a vast repository of phrases, idioms and conventional expressions, such that procedural knowledge of syntax is embedded in lexical memory (Bardovi-Harlig & Stringer, under review). The next stage of our attrition work will be to focus on empirical research, contributing to the field by adding new evidence.
Factors of personal characteristics, language knowledge and use

Variables
- age
- aptitude
- motivation
- explicit knowledge
- literacy
- oral competence
- sociopragmatics
- use
- attainment

Factors of input
- duration/nature of initial instruction
- duration/nature of immersion
- duration/nature of reduced input

Stages of attrition study
- Period 1: Predeparture/instruction
  - Formal assessment 1
  - Background questionnaire 1
- Period 2: Host country
  - Formal assessment 2
  - Background questionnaire 2
- Period 3: Reduced input
  - Formal assessment 3+
  - Background questionnaire 3

Figure 1. General model of variables and requisite schedule of assessment in tracking populations of L2 returnees
### Population 1: International graduate students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time periods</th>
<th>Period 1: Instruction in home country</th>
<th>Period 2: Host institution</th>
<th>Period 3: Reduced input</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within-subject groupings</td>
<td>high proficiency</td>
<td>high contact with NS</td>
<td>no input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>intermediate proficiency</td>
<td>low contact with NS</td>
<td>occasional input</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Population 2: Intensive pre-departure instruction group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time periods</th>
<th>Period 1: Intensive course</th>
<th>Period 2: Host country</th>
<th>Period 3: Reduced input</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within-subject groupings</td>
<td>high performance</td>
<td>formal instruction</td>
<td>no input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>low performance</td>
<td>no formal instruction</td>
<td>occasional input</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Population 3: University students enrolled in language classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time periods</th>
<th>Period 1: Instruction during semester</th>
<th>Period 2: Summer vacation</th>
<th>Period 3: Return to school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within-subject groupings</td>
<td>2 semesters completed</td>
<td>no input</td>
<td>continuing study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4+ semesters completed</td>
<td>occasional input</td>
<td>cessation of study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Population 4: Children without prior L2 experience enrolled in public elementary schools in host country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time periods</th>
<th>Period 1: Host country</th>
<th>Period 2: Reduced input on return</th>
<th>Period 3: Relearning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within-subject groupings</td>
<td>Immersion/instruction</td>
<td>no input</td>
<td>relearning in home country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immersion/no instruction</td>
<td>occasional input</td>
<td>return to host country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Timing of assessment

- Formal assessment 1
- Background questionnaire 1
- Formal assessment 2
- Background questionnaire 2
- Formal assessment 3+
- Background questionnaire 3

Figure 2. Examples of tracking possible subject groupings over group-specific time periods.