Editorial

In accordance with our mission of representing diverse perspectives and research traditions in applied linguistics, this issue presents three studies that approach well-established areas of research in new and illuminating ways.

The application of connectionist approaches to second language acquisition is relatively new. Inspired by an observation by Mike Long regarding the significance of acquisition orders, and based on empirical findings regarding the longitudinal development of past time expression in the acquisition of English as a Second Language, Dean Mellow and Karen Stanley propose a new framework for a connectionist approach to second language acquisition, which they call the Sign-based, Connectionist, Environmentalist, and Compositionist (SCEC) framework. Relying upon the incremental learning of form-function mappings based on the context and characteristics of input, the framework builds upon and extends the Competition Model, an influential connectionist approach to language acquisition. Mellow and Stanley suggest that the SCEC framework can provide insight into developmental sequences within the acquisition of a form such as the simple past tense, can explain the order of acquisition of various past tenses, and can account for the effects of task variation.

While there has been extensive work done on discourse markers from a functional grammar perspective, there have to date been few studies that have compared the use of discourse markers in different contexts. Naoko Taguchi contributes toward filling this gap by examining discourse markers in three spoken registers of American English: family conversations, professor-student office hour transactions, and service encounters. Drawing upon the resources of corpus-based linguistics, Taguchi's quantitative analysis reveals that there are considerable differences in the frequency of occurrence of certain discourse markers across these three registers. To account for these differences, Taguchi conducts a qualitative analysis of her data, considering situational variables such as the relationship between the interlocutors and the purpose of the interaction. She concludes that there is a definite relationship between the distribution patterns of discourse markers and the situational characteristics of various registers and proposes that discourse markers could serve as indicators of register variation.

The study of idioms is another well researched area, but John Liontas argues that the lack of consensus among researchers on how to define the term *idiom* has hampered efforts to apply this research to the teaching of idioms to second language learners. Liontas therefore proposes a new category of idiom, which he calls *vivid phrasal idioms*, which, among other attributes, create a vivid mental image (e.g., *to rain cats and dogs*). As an example of how such a categorization might facilitate research into the second language teaching of idioms, he offers the results of his

own empirical studies with learners of a variety of foreign languages, which suggest that the comprehensibility of a vivid phrasal idiom in a second language can be predicted based on the extent of its closeness to an idiom in the learners' native language. He concludes with a recommendation for a common research agenda for the study of idioms with the goal of designing teaching practices to promote idiomatic competence among second and foreign language learners.

Finally, we are pleased to welcome our newest staff member, Rosamina Lowi, who will be joining us as Assistant Editor. Rosie will be helping us to put together the next issue of IAL and will eventually take over as a co-editor beginning with the June 2003 issue, replacing Debra Friedman. Welcome aboard, Rosie!

Debra Friedman
Emmy Goldknopf