Read about your fellow TESOLers’ cross-cultural misunderstandings in this issue!
Long time no see!

Stop by to say hello during our TESOL social on February 12!

Come for good conversation and snacks with even better company!

Stay Connected with AU TESOL!

UPCOMING EVENTS

TESOL Social
Join us in the TESOL office (MGC, 300) to snack and chat with current AU TESOL students, professors, and alumni!
Thursday, February 12
4:00pm-5:15pm

TESOL Program Lunch at the TESOL International Convention
Join fellow AU TESOLers for lunch during the convention!
Thursday, March 26
12:00pm-1:30pm
Location TBD

End of Semester Potluck
Celebrate the end of the semester and our May grads with AU TESOL students, faculty, and staff.
Thursday, April 30
4:30pm-5:30pm
MGC 247
While volunteering in Mexico, each volunteer rotated cleaning jobs at our house. One day I was chatting with those who were cleaning up, including one volunteer who was braving the bathroom. I made a sarcastic comment to him at which he got very offended. He told me you should never be anything but nice to a friend. I felt terrible, as I was being sarcastic all in good fun as I am with my friends in the US. I apologized and explained. I was very careful to limit my sarcasm after that.

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<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Spring Opening Reception and Meet-and-Greet</td>
<td>Thursday, January 15 4:30-5:15</td>
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<td>with State Department Visitors</td>
<td>MGC 203/205</td>
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<td>Portfolio Session</td>
<td>Thursday, January 22, 8:10-9:30</td>
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<td>Pronunciation Workshop</td>
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<td>Butler Boardroom</td>
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<td>Program Social</td>
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<td>TESOL Program Office</td>
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<td>Categorical Pizza</td>
<td>Tuesday, March 31, 8:10-9:30</td>
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<td>End of Semester Potluck and Graduation Celebration</td>
<td>Thursday, April 30, 4:30-5:30</td>
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Student, Alumni, & Faculty
Updates

AUTESOL at the TESOL International Convention
March 25-28, 2015, Toronto, Canada


Afsaneh Kamangar (MA TESOL 2010): "Language Learning in the Home: ELL Parent and Adolescent Interactions." Saturday, March 28, 12:30pm, Roundtable Session area, Convention Center. Afsaneh is currently a doctoral candidate at the George Washington University. She is earning her degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on adult ELLs.

Andrew Screen (MIP TESOL 2011) and Jennifer Lubkin (MA TESOL 2008): "Teacher and Student Perspectives on Learning in Flipped Grammar Course." Thursday, March 26, 11:30am, 703, Convention Center.

Dr. Robin Barr with Karen Taylor and Shirley Thompson:
- Pre-Convention Institute: "Phonological Awareness for ESL/EFL Educators: Sound Practices." Wednesday, March 25, 8:00am – 12:00pm.
- "Phonological Awareness: What Your Brain Doesn’t Want You to Know." Thursday, March 26, 2:00pm - 3:45pm, 803B, Convention Center.

Publications:

Dr. Naomi Baron’s new book, *Words Onscreen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital World*, officially comes out on February 6. Meanwhile, an article she wrote for the Washington Post and an interview she did for The New Republic have been getting considerable attention. The Post piece has been reprinted in about a dozen newspapers, and The New Republic interview is circulating internationally in newspapers and blogs. An interview with Dr. Baron will be appearing in the February issue of Washingtonian Magazine.


Best of luck to all of our students, alumni, and faculty members on their upcoming presentations, conferences, and workshops!
Russia
[ˈrʌʃə]
For an American studying abroad in Russia, becoming introduced to life in a Russian dormitory was quite confusing. A few days after arriving, I woke up to find an older Russian woman standing in my room. I understood that she was asking for something, but I didn't know the word she kept repeating. Finally, she just told me, "Get out of bed!" and proceeded to replace my bed sheets. It turned out that the dorm had maids who maintained students' rooms. Needless to say, that was definitely one of the weirdest ways I have ever been woken up.

Josh Gates
TESOL Certificate

Jill Chiasson (MA TESOL 2014) will present her research paper "Negotiating a Plurilingual Self: A Qualitative Case Study" at the Georgetown University Graduate Student Conference on February 28, 2015. In addition to preparing for the arrival of her second child in April, she is working part-time with EduVista Consulting, focusing on research, curriculum and materials design.

Connie Gelb (MA TESOL 2012) is an adjunct instructor at George Washington University and has been teaching English for Academic Purposes to graduate students and undergraduates since 2013.

Margaret Gibbons Mathieu (MA TESOL 2014) has been teaching in an intensive English program at Stratford University in Falls Church, VA since September 2014. Stratford University has a rapidly expanding ESL program, which is considered an integral part of the University's mission to reach underserved groups in developing nations by providing opportunities to prepare for careers in fields like health sciences, nursing, culinary arts and information technology. This semester Margaret is leading a group of thirteen Level One ESL students, teaching grammar, conversation, pronunciation and computer literacy.

Katie Leitch (MA TESOL 2013) is currently working as a Curriculum Development Project Manager at Diplomatic Language Services in Arlington, VA. On a previous contract, she worked with a team of Tagalog language developers to create a 12-week initial acquisition course for Naval Special Warfare Command. She also developed and delivered teacher training courses to orient language instructors to the curriculum. Currently she is managing the integration of culture specific and culture general information into Arabic, Indonesian, French, and Tagalog language courses for the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command.

John Mark King (MA TESOL 2003) began working as a Regional English Language Officer for the U.S. Department of State. He is currently assigned to the Washington DC office.

Dr. Robin Barr gave a talk "Using Psycholinguistics to Teach Pronunciation" at the Fulbright FLTA Conference on December 13, 2014 and a keynote address "The American Language - Connecting English Teachers with U.S. History and Culture" for the State Department International Visitor Leadership Program on January 12, 2015 in Washington, DC. With Karen Taylor and Shirley Thompson, she will present a three-day workshop at The Sound Awareness 2015 Retreat on June 25-27, 2015 in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Prof. Sarah Young completed data collection for her dissertation on metalinguistic awareness in low-literate adult English language learners. She is currently working on analyzing the data and plans to finish her PhD later this year at Georgetown University.

Please keep us updated on what you are doing!
We love hearing from Program alumni and current students.
Upcoming Events

Pronunciation Workshop
Dr. Robin Barr
Saturday, February 28, 9:00am-2:00pm
Mary Graydon Center, 4-5
Saturday, April 4, 9:00am-2:00pm
6th floor Butler Boardroom, Butler Pavilion

Dr. Barr takes you on a journey beyond vowels and consonants — into syllables, rhythm, intonation, stress, linking, and even — the Brain! Learn the suprasegmental tricks with rubber bands, kazoos, and songs that you can use to help your students become more comprehensible, even if they still have trouble distinguishing ship and sheep, or rake and lake. The workshop features entertaining, low-cost activities that you can use right away in your next class.

Categorical Pizza
Dr. Robin Barr
Tuesday, March 31, 8:10pm-9:30pm
MGC 247

Dr. Barr explains the fundamentals of Categorical Perception- the way that the language areas of our brains assign sounds to one distinct phonological category or another - and how it relates to pronunciation instruction.

Robin Barr holds a PhD in Linguistics from Harvard with concentrations in both Indo-European and psycholinguistics. Her research on morphology involves the relationship between language learning and language change, and she is always happy to hear of new irregular verbs or refinements for wug-tests.
Upcoming Events

Intensive Summer Workshop
“Exploring the Practices of Second Language Teacher Education”

Dr. Karen Johnson and Dr. Paula Golombek
June 26-28, 9:00am-5:00pm

This workshop will explore a range of innovative teacher education practices designed to foster L2 teacher learning and professional development. Through modeling and/or participating in these practices, language teachers and teacher educators will explore the teacher as a learner of teaching, trace the development of teachers’ identities, analyze the complexities of teachers’ concept development, recognize the complex social, cultural, political, and institutional factors that affect language teaching and students’ language learning, and evaluate the role of disciplinary knowledge in the development of teaching expertise. Each practice will be evaluated for its theoretical and pedagogical contributions to L2 teacher professional development.

Karen E. Johnson is Kirby Professor of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics at the Pennsylvania State University in the USA. In the MA TESL and the Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics degree programs, she teaches courses in Applied Linguistics, Teaching English as a Second Language, Communication in Second Language Classrooms, and Theory and Research in Language Teacher Education. Her research interests include narrative inquiry as professional development, teacher learning in second language teacher education, and sociocultural research and perspectives on teacher professional development. She recently co-edited Research on Second Language Teacher Education: A Sociocultural Perspective on Professional Development (Routledge, 2011).

Paula Golombek is Clinical Associate Professor of Linguistics at the University of Florida in the United States. As Coordinator of the Undergraduate Certificate in Teaching English as a Second Language, she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in teaching approaches in TESL, applied English grammar, and applied American English phonetics. She also supervises beginning teachers in their internship experience. Her research interests include narrative inquiry as professional development, teacher learning in second language teacher education, and sociocultural research and perspectives on teacher professional development. She recently co-edited with Karen E. Johnson Research on Second Language Teacher Education: A Sociocultural Perspective on Professional Development (Routledge, 2011).

Cameroon

As a Peace Corps Volunteer in Cameroon, I often had misunderstandings with my friends and colleagues in the village because of our different interpretations of the words "yes" and "no." I would ask people if they would do something, and they would pleasantly say “yes!” However, later on I would be confused because what they had agreed to do didn’t always happen. It took me quite a while to realize that “yes” was often a polite face-saving strategy to avoid giving me an answer that I presumably didn’t want.
Erin Mahoney is a currently enrolled student in the TESOL Graduate Certificate Program: she is in the second semester of study at AU. In this Student Spotlight, Erin discusses her love of travel, volunteering, and how the two have shaped her path as a future TESOL professional.

Why do you prefer volunteering to ordinary tourism?

I made the decision to take my first volunteer trip abroad for a few reasons. One reason was that I had never traveled abroad before, and I liked the idea of traveling with like-minded individuals. The bigger reason is hard to explain. I chose to volunteer because I felt a strong pull to serve others while I was abroad and continue the lifestyle I lead in the US. I have, of course, traveled for the sake of traveling and cultural experience since my first volunteer trip, but I always feel a pull to spend time giving back to others whether it is in my own community or in a different country. When volunteering abroad you are able to experience the country in such a unique and special way; it becomes a part of you and you leave a part of yourself there.

In general, how do you choose volunteer programs?

I have a bookmark folder on my computer with dozens of volunteer organizations in a variety of countries, sometimes I just Google and research with no specific plans in mind. Ultimately, I choose my programs based on a few factors. First, I look at the country and why it will be an interesting place to travel. I research, at least superficially to start, information about the history, the culture, and the people. Second, I look at the language. I am drawn to Spanish speaking countries for some unexplainable reasons. I don’t speak Spanish, aside from a few basics, but I have traveled to ten Spanish speaking countries, volunteering in five of them. Third, I explore the social issues and the population I will be serving and how my volunteer work will impact the community I will travel to: what sort of impact is the work truly making, how will the people in the community benefit long term from the volunteer organizations’ presence. Finally, I rely on reviews and feedback from online forums and word of mouth regarding the quality of the organization, the volunteer work, the allocation of funds, and other logistical details.

So, your first volunteer trip was to...

Brazil. I spent my mornings at a preschool for children living in extreme poverty. The students were fed two meals a day, they learned their letters and colors, and they also learned basic hygiene, such as brushing their teeth. Since I do not speak Portuguese I communicated with the teachers mostly through hand motions, helping with dishes, singing (and learning) songs, helping kids practice making letters or coloring, and playing with them during recess. It was on this trip that I learned you really don't need to share anything but a smile with a child and they will follow you around, clinging to your hand... and almost seven years later you will still remember their faces. In the afternoons I would spend time at a cancer support house for children living with cancer. If a family had to travel a great distance to receive treatment they could stay at this house rather than commuting daily. I remember one specific mother and daughter had traveled over 12 hours by bus to stay there and had left 5 other children at home. At the cancer support house I helped the children do "normal" activities such as playing board games, or making bead bracelets. After this...
trip I felt incredibly inspired by the people I met and decided that international travel and service was something I wanted to make a lasting part of my life.

Did your volunteer experiences lead you to take your current TESOL courses?

Yes. In the summer of 2014 I traveled to Mexico to volunteer with both local and international volunteers at an arts and culture festival. The international volunteers I worked with were in their early to mid twenties and from South Korea, Taiwan, Spain, France, and Denmark. They all had varying levels of English. As the only native English speaker participating in the project, I was asked a ton of questions about phrasing, differences between similar words, and pronunciation. For example, two of my friends from the program asked me when to use the word "burnt" and when to use the word "burned", as in "I am sunburnt" versus "I am sunburned"...."I got sunburnt" or "I got sunburned." I realized I had no idea which one I even said. I actually think I might use them interchangeably. I told my new friends just that, but I also told them I would send a Facebook message to my friend who is an English teacher and get an answer from her, and they were extremely appreciative of that.

I enjoyed answering their questions and I encouraged them to ask me anytime they wanted. From them I learned that I speak incredibly fast, even when I think I am speaking slowly. It was during this trip that I realized I wanted to teach people English. If someone wants to learn English then I want to have the skills to teach it to them.

In addition to my experience in Mexico, I have had the opportunity to spend a few weeks teaching English to school-aged students in the Dominican Republic. This allowed me to see not only the benefits of exposure to a new language, but also the importance of continued language education to truly learn the language, not just memorize a few words and phrases.

Why is it important to you to be able to help those who want to learn English?

It’s crucial to be able to give people the tools to do anything they want in life, whether it is drawing, reading, carpentry, cooking, sewing, running a marathon, or learning English. I want to help people succeed to their highest potential. While in Mexico I met a man who told me that he used to be an illegal immigrant in the US, but after a while he realized he wasn’t helping himself or the US by being there. One thing he said that really stuck out to me was that he couldn’t even speak English. He now speaks incredible English, and has been able to advance in his sales position due to that knowledge. I met another Mexican who was, in his early twenties, beginning to learn English. He said he went on vacation to Cabo with his friends and they met a lot of different people from all over the world while they were vacationing. Everyone spoke English, including his friends. It was on that trip he realized that he needed to learn. I teach in Fairfax County in a high school art classroom and I have a few students who speak little to no English, but they are living in the US and are attending public school. It is a matter of survival that those students learn English and I want to be able to help them succeed.

What is your favorite memory from your travels?

My favorite travel memories are from my 2012 trip to Bosnia and my 2014 trip to Mexico. While in Bosnia I had the opportunity to participate in a documentary filmmaking project with seven other James Madison University students. We were creating one film about the youths’ perspective on the current divisions that exist in Bosnia and Herzegovina today, and the other about the women, The Mothers of Srebrenica, who survived the genocide in Srebrenica during the Bosnian war. On this trip we had the chance to visit the mass execution sights from the genocide, with The Mothers of Srebrenica, which they are only legally
allowed to visit one day per year. It was incredibly impactful to be invited by the Mothers to participate in this emotional experience. One of the Mothers told our group that if we come back to the United States and tell one person about our experience they would be happy.

During my time spent in Srebrenica I found a 40-day-old puppy wandering the streets with no littermates or mommy dog and I wishfully wondered if I could take her home. I decided that instead of simply talking about making a change I would put my words into action and actually adopt her. I now have a two-and-a-half-year old Bosnian dog named Srebra, named after her home town and also the word for “silver” in Bosnian. But no, she does not speak Bosnian.

Most recently in July of 2014 I traveled to La Piedad, Mexico to volunteer at an arts and culture festival with other international volunteers as well as local Mexicans. The most memorable part of this experience was how we promoted the festival to the local community. Just as in the United States you might see someone standing at a street corner holding a sign advertising something or asking for donations, we stood at street corners and asked drivers if we could write on their cars with window paint to promote the festival! Two things were particularly unique about this: that people allowed us to and that we wrote in our native languages, not in Spanish!

**What places are on your travel wish list?**

The world is on my travel wish list. I want to travel everywhere, but the countries I hope to go to next are South Africa, Thailand, Cambodia, Australia, Cuba, Ecuador, Peru, Germany, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. It is hard to keep my list short!
Alumni Spotlight

Vicki Fanney (Graduate TESOL Certificate, 2014) explores L2 identity, tells about her language immersion experience and gives advice to current AU TESOL students. She is now back in the program pursuing MA in TESOL.

The thing that fascinates me the most about language learning is the way in which the language acquisition process alters a person’s core sense of self. In my experience, learning to express ideas and emotions in a language different from the one I was born into has been a major factor in my becoming who I am as a person today and who I might become years from now. I would like to share some reflections on this theme as they relate to my professional journey since completing the graduate certificate in TESOL at American University in May 2014.

To anyone reading this article still engaged in coursework for their graduate certificate or for their MA TESOL, I say: avail yourself of every opportunity you have to query persons from other cultures about their motivations for learning English. You will learn about your own self in the process. Also, use every assignment required in the TESOL curriculum as a way to discover (at least) one new thing about yourself that you didn’t know before. I promise you will notice the effects in your language teaching! And then you will be well prepared to meet your future employer(s).

L2 Destination: France

This past summer, I spent four weeks in France – two weeks in the southwest, le Limousin, and two weeks in the north, in Picardie, near the English Channel. The trip was my first experience using HelpX.net to facilitate cultural exchange in another country. Through this online community you can arrange to live with a host in exchange for daily assistance with mutually agreed-upon tasks. As French is my second language, I wanted a language immersion experience that would allow me to share daily tasks exclusively in French, which the loosely organized, but exceedingly utilitarian, online exchange program HelpX allowed me to do quite effectively. I recommend this platform for connecting with like-minded people in countries you want to explore for more than just a visit to the main tourist sites in a given location.

In the Limousin region, I did not know exactly what types of tasks I would be doing, and they changed from day to day. In Picardie, the work was more structured. Here, I stayed in a large family-run maison d’hôtes, or guesthouse, where I prepared guest rooms and helped with food preparation. The work here was fairly intense, and the opportunities for language development were nonstop. After spending four weeks communicating entirely in French – with the rare exception – when I returned to the US, I felt like a foreigner in my native environment. I have not actually shaken this feeling entirely, and it is a strong motivator to remain as connected as possible with my second language in as many ways as possible.

From an academic perspective, the immersion experience reinforced the knowledge and ideas from the research I had, at the time, just completed in the month of May in Dr. Paik’s Second Language Acquisition course. My research project had interrogated the theories of language learning motivation and L2 identity development, and I could not have timed the trip more perfectly as a method to personally investigate the meaning of this research as an individual language learner.

I kept a French-language journal throughout my travels (and still today) in which the primary goal of self-expression in the target language shares equal importance with the goal of greater self-awareness and self-understanding more generally. In an entry two-thirds of the way through my journey this past summer, I wrote of watching my English-speaking self recede as the linguistic demands of the French context became increasingly complex, and my own personal investment into the common tasks and demands of the host situation became more intensive. In this way, the research by Zoltán Dörnyei and Bonnie Norton on L2 identity that I had just studied prior to this journey became exceptionally salient as both a language learner and a language teacher. This experience
allowed me to observe the way in which attachment to a non-native language can indeed be a driving force for greater integration of one’s “self-system” as Dörnyei put it. While I see this kind of reflection as critical to continually improving one’s L2 competence, I also think it can be a possible mechanism for TESOL instructors to help the learners in their classroom connect internally with their own language-learning motivations. The reason for this is that being aware of one’s own individual internal processes inherently helps her communicate about this dynamic with a student or colleague. This type of connection with students is something I seek to create in my classroom, and it is something I hope to research in a more in-depth way within the academic context in the near future.

L2 Identity Research: La Pratique

Following this pivotal linguistic and cultural adventure, I dove into my second consecutive semester on the faculty of the American Culture and Language Institute at the Alexandria campus of Northern Virginia Community College. My first semester at NVCC was in the spring of 2014, after I received a call from the program director in response to having submitted my CV for consideration. I was prompted to apply by a notice on the periodic WATESOL jobs listing. This position at NVCC was and remains an excellent fit for what I want to be doing professionally in the TESOL field at the present time. As every teacher knows, each season or semester offers its unique gifts of insight and development, and this semester recently completed provided me with opportunities to explore the theories of L2 identity research in very practical ways.

In my beginning speaking and listening course I had the immense pleasure of working with four Turkish students from Gazi University in Ankara. Toward the end of the semester, two of the students agreed to be interviewed using the same research methods I had used to collect the qualitative data for my SLA research project. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to continue this research on L2 identity in second language acquisition.

Two students, a physicist and an economist, were part of a larger cohort of Turkish academics participating in a 3-month intensive English learning program at NVCC. I queried them about why they had chosen the US in particular for their English immersion, their reasons for wanting to learn English, and what role they thought English would have in their academic development. Does learning English add dimension to their academic pursuits more broadly? And if so, how? I wanted to find out, also, what role they thought cultural understanding or cultural appreciation had in language learning. Did they find this aspect of language learning important for their purposes? Because these academicians were only just wrapping up their level one intensive, it required patience on all our parts to engage in this kind of question–answer, but it forced the students to stretch the limits of their English competence in the process of the interview. Additionally, it gave them an opportunity to discuss the cultural differences they perceived as significant between Turkish and American or Anglo-Saxon culture, to be more exact. They both felt that they would profit from a longer stay in the US, but they both resolutely rejected specific aspects of American culture that they could not identify with and would not want to adopt into their family or personal lives.

One of the most practical aspects of this interview for me was the finding that the students’ language-learning needs were fairly different going forward. While they’re both academic researchers, one’s needs were more interpersonal than academic. His goals indicate the need for clear communication to collaborate on a personal level about his subject matter, such as to contribute to multi-national research teams and connect on a practical level with international colleagues in the advancement of his field.

For the other student, however, his main goal is to use English for presentation purposes, to correspond from Turkey with international colleagues on
relevant studies, such as case studies, and also to read and comprehend English-language journals relevant to his area of interest, specifically the public finance of education. He did not feel the inherent need to produce his research in English, but he did feel it was important to be able to read the relevant scholarship and apply that scholarship to his own work with reasonable L2 confidence.

The dialog with these two students shifted my overall understanding of English for Academic Purposes and how an individual’s sense of self in the academic environment affects the trajectory of continued L2 development. Both learners were able to clearly communicate academic and professional goals, but their needs, in terms of the necessary language skills required to help them apply their specific talents (i.e., integrate their personal identities more fully through their work) were not the same, even though their stated “purposes” are of an academic nature.

The time I spent with my Turkish colleagues was exceptionally inspiring to me in terms of keeping my SLA research curiosities alive and strong for continued professional development. My own goal for the spring semester at NVCC is developing classroom learning tasks for my intermediate speaking/listening class that will specifically help my students examine their sense of self as a means, to a greater or lesser extent, of envisioning and charting their own English language development. I look forward to hearing from anyone who has thoughts on this topic they would like to share: vfanney@nvcc.edu.

Alumni Spotlight, Continued

Congratulations to our December 2014 Graduates!

MA TESOL
Lama Masri
Margaret Mathieu
Jill Chiasson

Graduate Certificate in TESOL
Amy Blair
Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Barr discusses the book she is currently working on and gives advice to current AU TESOL students.

How long have you been a member of the AU community?

I first taught here in 1996. I moved here from the Boston area in 1995. I had been teaching at Harvard and Northeastern while getting my Ph.D. at Harvard. When my husband got a job with the Federal Judiciary in D.C., we moved to Takoma Park, MD. Wendy Wiswall, a phonologist who now works at the Smithsonian, but had been my colleague at Northeastern, recommended me to Naomi Baron. I started out as an occasional adjunct teaching Principles of Linguistics, but then my role expanded to include more linguistics courses and administrative service. I was appointed Linguist-in-Residence in 2000.

What is your specific field or area of study?

Psycholinguistics and Indo-European languages were my nominal areas of concentration in graduate school, but really I worked in those areas because they were the best source of information about what was going on in speakers’ minds. Language change is just another psycholinguistics laboratory, as is language learning, and Indo-European is the most thoroughly-studied area of historical linguistics. I am interested in morphology in particular.

I am fascinated by ambiguities and liminal subjects—things that straddle the boundaries between two areas; parts of language that speakers have trouble with, or that can’t be explained by simple rules. Morphology is interesting because of the irregularities. How do people learn irregular verbs, for example? To what extent are they memorized? Is there a way of relating memorized words to each other? I remember as a graduate student noticing that the past tense of ‘sneak’ was changing from the regular ‘sneaked’ to the irregular ‘snuck’. How was this possible? Why would speakers do this make their language less regular? There was no theory that would explain why speakers would feel that it was somehow simpler to create a new irregular form ‘snuck’, to go with other irregulars like rung, slunk, shrunk, sung, and the newer dug and stuck.

What is it about AU TESOL that you love the most?

The excitement of introducing linguistics to our students, and learning from them in turn. I’ve taught beginning linguistics for 30 years now, and it’s never the same course twice. I learn something new every term, about both linguistics and teaching.

I think what stands out about my experience here was the opportunity to develop new courses, particularly the team-taught Teaching Pronunciation course, first with Brock Brady, then with Karen Taylor and Shirley Thompson; and then with graduates of the course (Shari Patillo and Cynthia Hatch). There is no other course exactly like it out there! I am still excited about the synergy that happens in co-teaching that course, because of the way we balance theory and practice. I have found it very stimulating to the creative process—I get new ideas in every class, from both my co-teachers and my students, and in fact this is the source of the book I am working on.

What is this book about?

It’s called Teaching Pronunciation: What Your Brain Doesn’t Want You to Know. I’ll be presenting some of this with Karen Taylor and Shirley Thompson in March, 2015, at the TESOL convention in Toronto. Right now I am looking for anecdotes from people who taught pronunciation, or as students experienced some breaks in communication. I am interested in cases when speakers were not understood or were misinter-
preted because of their accent or intonation. Perhaps current AU TESOL students or alums might help me collect such anecdotes.

For example, I remember one Japanese man who lived in America and complained that people yelled at him in stores. When I was listening to him, I realized that he sounded very abrupt because he put equal stress on each syllable. His body language helped create an image of an aggressive man: while speaking, he quickly moved his hands up and down in front of him. Naturally, people thought he was rude and replied in the same “angry way.” Luckily, we were able to help him by making his intonation and gestures smoother, and by lengthening the stressed vowels to match English intonation.

Another question that excites me is why imitation does not help you perceive and produce sounds. We all know that “listen carefully and repeat” is not very helpful when you try to learn foreign sounds. To help students overcome this problem, we should investigate brain processes like ‘mirror neurons’ and find the reason why we can’t hear certain sounds. One of my students is currently working on a project that should shed some light on this issue. She is testing to see if explicit instruction in how to produce an unfamiliar sound, e.g. a high front rounded vowel like the French or Chinese /ü/, makes the sound easier to perceive.

This newsletter’s focus is on cultural misunderstanding. Have you ever experienced a cultural misunderstanding?

The best example in my experience was in France. It had to do with pragmatics. My friends’ daughter and I were shopping in her home town of Belloy, France. I noticed that in every store she had an elaborate greeting ritual and a long talk about different things with a shopkeeper. “It’s nice that you know all the shopkeepers in this town,” I said.

“I don’t know any of them!” she replied.

I had assumed that they were friends because they were talking for a long time. In America we usually don’t engage in a lot of small talk with the shopkeepers, but get right to the point — especially if they are not people we know. I suddenly realized that I was being perceived as rude when I would march up to the counter and ask directly for what I wanted. On the other hand, Americans, especially from the Northeast, consider it rude to waste other people’s time by not getting straight to business!

Also, my French friends were very indirect about planning things, which always mystified me. For example, I could never guess whether they were inviting us somewhere or not. They asked questions like, “Do you have plans for the summer?” or said, “Let us know if you are in the area.” For me, it wasn’t very clear whether it was an invitation or not. At the same time, they could easily invite themselves to visit us. Once my friend’s daughter simply landed on us in the U.S. and stayed 8 weeks. Another time we invited her to stay with us, and she came with her boyfriend and two cousins which also caused some bafflement.

What are your hopes for the future of the AU TESOL Program?

If I had all the money in the world, I would love to have our own AU TESOL Pronunciation Institute, where AU students and teachers could practice their craft and conduct research while serving the local community of English language learners. It would be great to have an in-house pool of tutees with whom students could practice what we preach here.
Faculty Spotlight, Continued

In general, I would like to see more interaction between theory and practice, and more collaboration between teachers and between departments at AU. There is a lot of potential for developing exciting joint projects and new course.

To current AU TESOL students, I say: think about why your students are doing what they are doing. What is causing their mistakes? Young teachers love to stick to their lesson plans, but it’s also important to try and get inside your students’ brains. Think more about the theory and always ask yourself WHY this is happening.

What are your plans for the Spring semester?

I’m about to start teaching a pilot literacy project this term with some of the food service workers here at AU. I also am busily playing the oboe around town with many different organizations.

The Laropa sextet - one of Dr. Barr’s musical groups. Photo credit: Harvey Levine

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