

Exploring conceptions of language with teachers of Chinese and Italian

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This project explores conceptions of language with eight teachers of Chinese and Italian: four primary educators and four secondary educators. The aim of the research is to explore the range of conceptions of language held by language teachers, and how these conceptions relate to conceptions of learning and cognition. It appears that much of the conceptualizing about language by teachers flows from folk pedagogy, to use a term borrowed from Bruner (1996). That is, teachers build up conceptualizations of language based on their own past experiences and practices. Bruner points out that ‘educational practices in classrooms . . . premised on a set of folk beliefs about learners’ mind . . . badly want some “deconstructing” if their implications are to be appreciated’ (1996: 49). This is the aim of the current research. While there is a growing body of research which explores students’ conceptions of language, a similar line of research is lacking on teachers’ conceptions (Mitchell and Hooper, 1991: 40).

Three methods will be used to investigate teachers’ conceptions. First, a brief questionnaire consisting of background information and open-ended questions will be administered. This will be analysed by a working group of academics to identify categories of conceptions. Secondly, a lesson or an excerpt of a lesson in which the teacher introduces a new concept will be audio-recorded. This will then be transcribed and used to elicit from the teacher moments in the lesson that are illustrative of their personal conceptions of language, language and learning, language and cognition, and so on. A retrospective interview with the principal researcher will follow considering the lesson and questionnaire responses. This will also be recorded and transcribed and form a further set of data which will also be checked for accuracy by participant teachers. Finally, an innovative aspect of the project

involves the integration of web-based focus groups as a further means of exploring conceptions of language and language learning with the group of eight teachers involved. At this stage, readings, bibliographical references and input from other researchers in the field will be added to encourage interaction and discussion.

This project articulates into a larger project exploring teacher conceptions of language initiated by the Research Centre for Languages and Cultures Education.

References

- Bruner, J.** 1996: *The culture of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mitchell, R.** and **Hooper, J.** 1991: Teachers' views of language knowledge. In James, C. and Garrett, P., editors, *Language awareness in the classroom*, London: Longman, 40–50.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Please send a brief report (150–300 words) on current research projects to:

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