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Editorial: In Celebration of Brian MacWhinney's Five-Decade Contributions to Psychology, Computational Linguistics, and Modern Languages

Zhisheng (Edward) Wen^{1*}, Hassan Mohebbi²

¹University of Macau, Macau SAR, China

²European Knowledge Development Institute, Turkey

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¹Introduction

It is with great pleasure that we announce this latest edition of this special issue of LTRQ to celebrate the landmark achievements of Professor Brian MacWhinney. Brian MacWhinney is Teresa Heinz Professor of Psychology, Computational Linguistics, and Modern Languages at Carnegie Mellon University. Over a distinguished academic career spanning more than 50 years, Brian has made significant contributions not just to the three areas listed under his professor title, but far beyond.

Along his long list of groundbreaking achievements that have had lasting impacts across the multiple fields, the CHILDES (Child Language Data Exchange System) Project he co-founded with Catherine E. Snow back in 1984 stands out as a pioneering and trailblazing initiative for the computational study of child language transcript data. Since its inception, this

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: wenzhisheng@hotmail.com

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data exchange and sharing system has now extended to 13 additional research areas, including L2 learning and code-switching, featuring dozens of languages under the auspicious of the TalkBank Project. The CHILDES system has benefited scholars from diverse disciplines, including psychology, language and neuroscience, including those working in the areas of bilingualism and language disorders.

Following the establishment of the CHILDES system, we are gradually entering the digital and AI-driven era in recent years. Brian's recent work has subsequently expanded to empirical studies of online learning of second language vocabulary and grammar, neural network modeling of lexical development, fMRI studies of children with focal brain lesions, and ERP studies of between-language competition, culminating in his influential framework of the Unified Competition Model (MacWhinney, 2005). This encompassing framework has enabled scholars from both language and psychology fields to analyze first and second language learning as facets of a single, unified system. Meanwhile, Brian has also explored the role of grammatical constructions in the marking of perspective shifting and the construction of mental models in scientific reasoning. Some of his most influential edited books include *The Handbook of Language Emergence* (Wiley, 2015) and *Competing Motivations in Grammar and Usage* (Oxford, 2014).

As the guest editors of this Special Issue, we set out to celebrate the influential work of Brian MacWhinney and his immense contributions to cognitive psychology and language learning research. We extended invitations to all potential contributors who have either been former colleagues, collaborators, or postdoctoral fellows/students of Brian. We are pleased to report that our calls have received a very positive and encouraging response, allowing us to assemble an impressive lineup of scholars from around the world to contribute these theoretical and empirical papers. Their contributions aim to explore both theoretical issues and empirical investigations from multiple theoretical perspectives and research paradigms spanning the broad domains of language and psychology, including psycholinguistics and second language research. All of these papers have been directly or indirectly influenced by Brian's theoretical models and research insights. To better organize these papers, we have structured this Special Issue into three distinct parts based on the specific sub-themes they are addressing.

Organization and Summaries of the Papers

The Special Issue begins with the **Foreword** written by **Catherine E. Snow** who co-founded the CHILDES system with MacWhinney in 1984 and provides a historical account of it, thus reflecting the academic achievements and personal character of Brian. Then following this **Editorial (Wen & Mohebbi)**, the Special Issue continues with an interview with Brian conducted by the two guest editors (**MacWhinney, Wen, & Mohebbi**). The interview aims to solicit answers from MacWhinney directly, based on a prepared list of questions regarding some significant milestones and landmarks of his distinguished 50-year career, tracing his journey from a research student, to a teaching and research faculty member, a prolific book author and editor, and up to his current projects and future plans (even after his 'retirement').

After these introductory papers, **Part I** of the Special Issue contains three papers that focus on the CHILDES system and its associated tools. The first paper by **Kempe, Brooks, and Gillis** provides a detailed account of the world's very first open science data exchange and sharing system, namely, the CHILDES system co-founded (with Catherine E. Snow) forty

years ago and maintained by Brian until now. This paper chronicles the history, developmental milestones, and key features of the CHILDES system. The second paper by **Nan Bernstein Ratner** moves on to discuss a subsidiary component of CHILDES, namely, the TalkBank feature, which allows researchers to assess and treat speech and language disorders, thus augmenting clinical insights with computing information. The last paper in this section by MacWhinney's two close collaborators, **Fromm and Kowalski**, highlights the new language analysis tool (aka Collaborative Commentary) recently added to the TalkBank system. This innovative tool capitalizes on the rich resources from the TalkBank databases to share commentaries addressing important research and teaching objectives. In doing so, the paper underscores the very spirit of 'collaboration' that has been epitomized throughout Brian's long-term career.

If Part I is intended to be more practical and clinical in nature, then, **Part II** can be considered as more theoretical and exploratory. This part contains five papers that focus on the instrumental theoretical framework of the 'Unified Competition Model' and its related insights postulated by Brian. Based on the two mechanisms within Brian's framework, namely, that of competition and transfer, the first paper by **Kroll and Dussias** makes a strong case to argue that language processing among bilingual speakers is shaped by competition. The second paper by **Tokowicz, Warren, and Tolentino** continues to provide a comprehensive account of Brian's 'Competition Model' as a conceptual framework for explaining cross-linguistic similarities and implications for L2 morpho-syntax learning. Turning to a slightly different perspective, the third paper by **Wang and Christiansen** outlines the mechanism of chunking that underpins language acquisition, processing and performance. Following these three papers describing general theoretical accounts, the fourth paper (by **Pléh**) and the fifth paper (by **Chen & Perfetti**) delve into more specific languages, namely, -- Hungarian and Chinese -- that Brian has either directly involved in investigations (Hungarian) or indirectly influenced (Chinese).

Part III contains two papers that wrap up the Special Issue. The first is a lengthy **Commentary** from **MacWhinney, Panahi, and Mohebbi** that presents detailed literature and bibliometric analyses of the sub-domains influenced by MacWhinney's theoretical frameworks and empirical insights. The commentary ends with Brian's very own response to these findings and his further thoughts on their implications for language learning and teaching. Then, the final paper of the Special Issue is written by MacWhinney's former mentee (**Ping Li**) and two generations of doctoral students (**Helen Zhao & Zhe Gao**). This paper shares with readers the personal impressions and contacts the authors have had with Brian at different stages of their careers. Overall, these historical accounts (bibliometric and personal) serve as strong testimony to Brian's enormous influences on generations of scholars who have now become, or will soon become, well-established scholars themselves. In this way, the 'Brian legend' lives on.

Table of Contents	Pages
FOREWORD	1-3
<i>Catherine E. Snow</i>	
EDITORIAL: In Celebration of Brian MacWhinney’s Five-Decade Contributions to Psychology, Computational Linguistics, and Modern Languages	4-8
<i>Zhisheng (Edward) Wen and Hassan Mohebbi</i>	
An Interview with Brian MacWhinney on His Lifelong Commitment to Psychology and Language Learning Research	9-14
<i>Brian MacWhinney, Zhisheng (Edward) Wen, Hassan Mohebbi</i>	
Part I. The CHILDES Projects and Tools	
Four Decades of Open Language Science: The CHILDES Project	15-30
<i>Vera Kempe, Patricia J. Brooks, and Steven Gillis</i>	
Augmenting Clinical Insights with Computing: How TalkBank has Impacted Assessment and Treatment of Speech and Language Disorders	31-40
<i>Nan Bernstein Ratner</i>	
Collaborative Commentary: A New and Innovative Tool for Language Commentary and Analysis	41-54
<i>David Fromm and John Kowalski</i>	
Part II. The Competition Model and Second Language Learning	
Beyond Transfer: Language Processing in Bilinguals is Shaped by Competition and Regulation	55-70
<i>Judith F. Kroll and Paola E. Dussias</i>	
The Competition Model and Adult Second Language Learning: Cross-Language Similarity and L2 Morphosyntax Learning	71-83
<i>Natasha Tokowicz, Tessa Warren, and Leida Tolentino</i>	
Chunking in the Second Language: Implications for Language Learning and Teaching	84-106
<i>Serene Y. Wang and Morten H. Christiansen</i>	
Why was Hungarian so Important for Brian?	107-114
<i>Csaba Pléh</i>	
Learning Chinese as a Second Language: Implications of the Character-Word Dual Function Model	115-128
<i>Lin Chen and Charles Perfetti</i>	
Part III. Final Commentaries	
Brian MacWhinney’s 55 Years Research into Language Education and Psychology: A Systematic Review and Brian MacWhinney’s Personal Reflection	129-198
<i>Brian MacWhinney, Ali Panahi, and Hassan Mohebbi</i>	
AFTERWORD	
In Honour of Brian MacWhinney: A Personal Account	199-205
<i>Ping Li, Helen Zhao, and Zhe Gao</i>	

ORCID

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9041-6920>

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3661-1690>

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