Proposal for SLLC Travel Award

- Conference
  - Name: Second Language Research Forum (SLRF) 2013
  - Location: Brigham Young University, Utah
  - Date: Oct. 30-Nov. 2, 2013

- Brief description of presentation
  - Title: Can you feel in L2 as automatically as in L1? Automatic Representation of Emotional Word Meaning

  - Summary:

    The present study examined the extent to which bilinguals can automatically access emotions during L2 emotional word processing. L1 Korean-L2 English speakers showed different patterns in emotional word meaning representation according to tasks and their L2 proficiency levels. The findings suggest that L2 speakers can consciously represent L2 emotional word meaning if they are proficient in L2 but may not feel it as automatically as native speakers.

- Statement of the project and its significance to my research agenda

  It has been assumed that second language (L2) speakers often know an emotional L2 word but do not feel it with the same intensity as first language (L1) speakers do (e.g., Pavlenko, 2005). However, previous studies examining emotional word meaning have shown conflicting findings: while some found more automatic access to emotions when emotional words appeared in bilinguals’ L1 than in L2 (e.g., Winskel, 2013), others reported the reverse finding (e.g., Ayçiçeği & Harris, 2004). This contradictory finding may result from giving less consideration
Sun Young Ahn  
Second Language Acquisition

to participants’ L2 proficiency and tasks. Given that L2 proficiency may play a crucial role in bilingual lexical representation and processing, and that each task allows a different depth of processing, it is important to manipulate these factors when investigating L2 speakers’ emotional word processing in L2.

The present study aimed to compare the extent to which semantic representation is automatically activated by emotional words in L2 English speakers’ minds according to their L2 proficiency in the comparison of native English speakers. In the present study, their L2 proficiency was assessed by an object test (Bachman, 1982) rather than by self-rating, and they were divided into two groups: more or less proficient L2 groups. They performed an on-line task (an emotional Stroop task) and an off-line task (a surprised recall task). In the emotional Stroop task, which taps automatic processing, neither more nor less proficient L2 groups showed similar patterns to L1 speakers. On the other hand, in the recall task that allows conscious processing, more proficient L2 groups but not less proficient L2 groups showed similar patterns to L1 speakers. These results imply that L2 speakers may have limited access to emotions through L2 emotional words at the level of automatic processing and that L2 proficiency may help them process L2 emotional words as fast as L1 speakers at the level of conscious processing.

In the sense that my research agenda for a dissertation is an automatic meaning representation during L2 processing, this finding is expected to provide more direct evidence regarding to what extent L2 speakers can activate emotional word meaning in L2 as automatically as L1 speakers.