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The Doctorate in Second Language Acquisition: An Institutional History

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Abstract

This article surveys nine graduate programs that confer doctoral degrees in Second Language Acquisition, the first of which was founded in 1988, 25 years ago. I examine warrants for the establishment of PhD programs in second language acquisition, the array of institutional bases on which they rest, and their curricula. I also point out distinctive features of particular programs, and report some of the ways in which this relatively new option for graduate education in the field of second language acquisition can be assessed. The goal is to reflect on what the existence and content of PhD programs in second language acquisition contributes to the discipline overall.

Keywords: doctoral programs in Second Language Acquisition; graduate education in Linguistics / Applied Linguistics; history of graduate education

1. Introduction

Doctoral programs that offer the degree of PhD specifically in 'Second Language Acquisition' or 'Second Language Studies' are one option open to students preparing for a career in the study of second language (L2) phenomena, and one context where academic research on second language acquisition takes place. In this article, I analyze the foundation, institutional basis, curricular content, and distinguishing features of existing PhD programs in SLA / SLS, and assess what they contribute to the discipline, using the 25-year anniversary of the first program so named as grounds for assuming that this niche in graduate education has achieved an early stage of institutional maturity.

My goal is to examine how these programs have emerged and developed, and what role they play in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). It is not my primary goal to evaluate programs against each other, or to advise applicants anticipating graduate study.¹ Nevertheless, prospective students may find some points of interest in this analysis. Both for their benefit, and to start by locating PhD programs in SLA / SLS within their disciplinary neighborhood, it is important to recognize that the programs I review here do not exhaust opportunities for doctoral education in L2 studies. Students may pursue a PhD or DPhil in Linguistics at an institution that has the resources to support sub-specialization in L2 studies. They may work toward a doctorate in Applied Linguistics with a concentration on L2 learning or use. They may study L2 acquisition at the doctoral level through the approach of a School of Education, or a Department of Psychology, Sociology, or

even Anthropology. Some students' interests can be best advanced through PhD programs in foreign languages or cultures (leading to a PhD in, for example, Hispanic Studies, or Chinese, with a focus on language-, and more particularly, L2-related issues). Another path is through doctoral programs in Bilingualism or Teaching English as a Foreign Language, which generally lead to the degree of EdD, or through programs with names like 'Culture, literacy, and language' (e.g. from the University of Texas at San Antonio) or 'Second languages and cultures education' (e.g. the University of Minnesota) that lead to the PhD labeled with those names. In some contexts, students may combine enrollment in one of these programs with pursuit of 'certification' in second language studies, with the nature and content of certification defined locally by the certifying institution. And since 1988, another option—my focus here—has been a doctoral program that puts L2 phenomena at the precise center of focus, by offering a PhD in Second Language Acquisition, or alternatively, Second Language Studies.²

Therefore, earning a doctoral degree specifically identified as a PhD in SLA is not necessarily the ideal preparation, or even the most direct preparation, for a young scholar who wants to work in the field of L2 studies. It is only one particular niche. In anticipating graduate education, a student needs to weigh not only the array of possible outcomes (e.g. the professional consequences of obtaining a doctorate in SLA as opposed to a doctorate in Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, Education, German, etc.), but also the environment, broadly conceived, in which he or she would work toward that outcome. What may count even more than outcome or environment is the research topics and orientations of prospective faculty

mentors, which often have a lasting impact on a graduate student's intellectual development. This is especially true where, as is common in Europe, a student pursues a PhD through individual doctoral study as opposed to through a structured program. In this case the key task is to match the prospective student's and prospective mentor's intellectual interests. The mentor's orientation may align only approximately with the orientation of the academic unit to which he or she is affiliated, and which would eventually award a degree to the student; achieving a match between student and mentor is of greater consequence than achieving a match between the student's interests and the name of the degree earned.

For these reasons, then, although the choice of a particular path toward a particular target degree strongly influences a young scholar's career, there is no universally acknowledged best choice. Rather, many factors bear on the selection of a context for graduate study, with each context exhibiting a constellation of features that are partially idiosyncratic and partially shared across other contexts. Moreover, enrollment in graduate education is rarely purely a matter of choice, since personal, financial, geographical, and even legal constraints come into play, as do the decisions of admissions committees.

With this wider panorama of the scope of graduate study of the acquisition of second languages in mind, I will focus specifically on the nine existing programs that lead up to the conferral of the PhD in SLA. My sources of data include texts posted on the websites of the nine programs in question; personal communications with faculty, administrators, and graduates; documents created by and about the nine programs, such as proposals produced in the course of establishing a new program

or revising an existing one; departmental annual reports; student handbooks; and self-study texts generated in preparation for periodic external review.

2. Definition of 'PhD program in SLA'

The nine programs I focus on are affiliated with the following institutions, listed in order of their foundation: University of Hawai'i at Manoa; University of Arizona; Carnegie Mellon University; University of South Florida; University of Iowa; University of Wisconsin at Madison; Indiana University; Michigan State University; and University of Maryland at College Park. Table 1 summarizes some of their features.³

< Insert Table 1 about here >

The basic criterion for distinguishing these nine as a group from among the many other institutions where one can study second language acquisition at the doctoral level is that they confer the degree of PhD in SLA. This definition excludes programs such as (for example) the Program in Second Language Acquisition and Teacher Education ('SLATE') at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. SLATE is a self-defined 'interdisciplinary clearinghouse' (<http://www.slate.illinois.edu/students/>) housed within the School of Literatures, Cultures, and Linguistics. It offers not a degree, but a 'Certificate of Advanced Study in SLATE', which doctoral candidates pursuing a PhD within various academic units of the university may add to their credentials once they meet the program's

requirements. Although the SLATE program clearly educates students about L2 studies, since it is not responsible for issuing a degree, it falls outside the scope of this article.

However, the fact that an institution confers the degree 'PhD in SLA', is a necessary, but not sufficient, criterion for inclusion. An additional criterion is that the program's central object of interest is the general phenomenon of L2 learning and use, sometimes (but not always) combined with an interest in L2 pedagogy. On these grounds I excluded programs such as that of Rutgers University's Department of Spanish and Portuguese, which awards a PhD in Bilingualism and Second Language Acquisition. The Rutgers program prepares graduate students for careers in the study of SLA, but in a context where Spanish is either the native or target language, as opposed to doctoral programs that address SLA without prejudice toward any specific language.⁴ On the same basis, I excluded the many PhD programs linked specifically to English as an L2, such as Purdue University's program in Second Language Studies / ESL, housed in the English Department. Likewise, doctoral programs whose first concern is with issues of instruction, curriculum, or educational policy with respect to second languages, rather than the general phenomenon of L2 learning and use, also fall outside the scope of inquiry here (on grounds of their central focus on education—as in the case of University of Toronto / Ontario Institute for Studies in Education's PhD program in Second Language Education—or on the grounds of their content and on the grounds that they confer degrees other than the PhD in SLA—as in the case of the University of Minnesota's PhD in Curriculum and Instruction).⁵

These are criteria I imposed in selecting programs to review. A second, significant, common denominator among them was not imposed on their selection but rather arose *ex post facto*, namely, that all nine are located within the United States. Graduate education in SLA takes place in many locales, prominently including Europe, Canada, Australia, and Asia. However, national educational policies, cultural practices, and local conventions constrain how receptive universities are to establishing new doctoral programs; what the content of such programs can be; and how they are named. The focus here is on institutionalization of the PhD in SLA. Due to the convergence of whatever historical, political, intellectual, and institutional factors, to the best of my knowledge that has so far taken place in the United States.

One matter bearing on the identification of programs to include in this review deserves closer attention. The name given to the degree conferred may seem to be a superficial instrument for characterizing a doctoral program: does earning a PhD in Linguistics or Applied Linguistics with a dissertation on SLA necessarily train a scholar differently compared to earning a PhD in SLA with a similar dissertation? There may indeed be no strict, predictable, difference in kind. Nevertheless, the names of degrees, like the names of programs and departments, are far from trivial—they are strategically chosen, defended, and modified as tokens in a complex web of meanings. Certainly the long-contested definition of ‘Applied Linguistics’ (Davies & Elder, 2004) is not equivalent to the definition of ‘SLA’, so that labeling a degree or program with one of these terms over the other carries weight (Kramsch, 2000). The history of the oldest program discussed here, that of the

University of Hawai'i, illustrates some of these complexities. It was first hosted by a Department of English as a Second Language, established in 1969. The department initiated a doctoral program in SLA in 1988, admitted its first class of students in 1989, and awarded the first recorded PhD in SLA in 1994 (to Peter Robinson, now of Aoyama Gakuin University; <http://www.hawaii.edu/sls>). In 1999 the faculty endorsed the new name 'Department of Second Language Studies' to replace 'Department of English as a Second Language' (*SLS Newsletter* XXX, Winter 1999–2000; http://www.hawaii.edu/sls/sls/?page_id=133). Then in 2008 the name of the degree offered by the Department of Second Language Studies was aligned with the name of the department, to become 'PhD in Second Language Studies' (*Newsletter* XXXIV, Fall 2008). In the context of this article, it is the 1988 launching of the PhD program in SLA that is most significant, since that shift acknowledged the legitimacy of study of the general phenomena of second language acquisition at the doctoral level. Insofar as the field wants to identify the anniversary of its modern institutionalization, the 1988 opening of the University of Hawai'i PhD program in SLA provides a convenient date.

The 2008 shift of the name of the degree offered by the University of Hawai'i from 'SLA' to 'SLS' is also significant. However, what I am calling 'PhD programs in SLA' subsumes both SLA and SLS. Some programs that meet the criterion of holding the general phenomenon of L2 learning or use as their central object of interest conjoin the name of their degrees to the distinct but related subfield of L2 teaching, as in the University of Arizona's 'PhD in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching'. Since none of these nine programs ignores L2 teaching, I accept a program's

decision about whether or not to acknowledge teaching in the name of their graduate degree as an internal matter still under the umbrella of a 'PhD in SLA', as long as educational concerns do not seem to eclipse SLA in the content of the program.

3. Warrants for the foundation of PhD programs in SLA

Since the oldest of the nine programs under analysis goes back to 1988, the passage of only 25 years makes it feasible to try to recover the original arguments put forth in favor of their creation. Several programs made available to me the texts of petitions for their own foundation, addressed to deans or administrative committees.⁶ The arguments they marshaled in favor of the PhD in SLA are remarkable in the uniformity of both their positive claims, and for what they omit. The prime reason put forward for the establishment of a degree program in SLA is the availability of academic positions for prospective graduates. That there are good employment prospects for PhDs in SLA is commonly substantiated with reference to job listings compiled by the Modern Language Association, the American Association of Applied Linguistics, and (more recently) notices posted online on the LinguistList. The kinds of jobs most commonly mentioned as appropriate and available to PhDs in SLA are academic posts in the field of SLA or its affiliated disciplines; language program coordinators; government service; and foreign-language teaching at the post-secondary level.

Another, related, warrant for the establishment of a degree program in SLA is the existence (or, equally, the absence) of parallel programs in comparable

institutions, or the fact that such programs are being set up, placing an institution without such a program at a competitive disadvantage. Other less prominent arguments include evidence that there is student demand for instruction in SLA unmet within the existing curriculum, and invocations of the responsibility of a university to develop expertise that addresses local communities' language-based problems, or problems of linguistic communication at the national level.

These are the most common warrants for the establishment of PhD programs in SLA. There are a few arguments that came up occasionally: some proposals mentioned evidence that faculty research is stymied or that faculty accomplishments do not achieve appropriate recognition for lack of opportunities to collaborate with graduate students. A few proposals adverted to the contributions of SLA to cognitive science and to understanding of the nature of the human mind.

In written proposals I was privileged to read, or in the first-person narratives I elicited from scholars who themselves were involved in founding such programs, certain imaginable arguments for the establishment of a PhD program in SLA show up not at all, or only very faintly. Plausible but unattested arguments include that the foundation of a doctoral program in SLA would bring significant academic prestige or income to the supporting institution, or that doing so would allow the institution to take a stance on, or even lead, important on-going public or scholarly debates. It is also noteworthy how muted claims are about the contributions of SLA to advancing the language sciences. The matter was mentioned in passing in a few documents, but was never made the cornerstone of arguments for the creation of a PhD program in SLA.

It is worthwhile reflecting on both the attested and unattested arguments for the establishment of doctoral programs in SLA. In general, attested arguments have a practical, inward-looking, complexion: program graduates will be able to get jobs doing valuable work, including (for those who go on to academic positions in L2 studies) the work of replicating the parent program itself; and participants in the program will be equipped to help solve substantive language-educational problems locally and nationally. The imaginable, but relatively unattested, warrants for founding a PhD program are more ambitious and challenging: that graduate-level research into SLA may bring to light otherwise inaccessible data about human cognition, or may open new insights into the structure of language, of communication, or of human social organization. Perhaps these convictions are held privately by founders of PhD programs in SLA, but seem immodest or indefensible in the face of the current state of development of L2 studies. Or perhaps laying claim to these goals would be imprudent in addressing a readership of deans, provosts, or university regents disposed to challenge them as overreaching. But insofar as the creation of a new doctoral program is an opportunity to think big—that is, to anticipate what a discipline *could* accomplish in addition to what it already *does* accomplish, and to push back the boundaries of an academic field—it is salient that the authors of petitions for the establishment of graduate programs adopt relatively modest, utilitarian, representations of SLA.

In short, although it is possible to conceive of SLA in more visionary terms, in warrants put forward for the establishment of doctoral programs in SLA (at least in the context of petitioning administrative gatekeepers), the convention has been to

prioritize the applied facets of the discipline, arguing that such programs will help meet material needs and solve material problems.

4. Institutional status of PhD programs in SLA

In contrast to a certain conformity in the self-represented initial goals of doctoral programs in SLA (at least as presented to deans and administrators), their institutional status is diverse. Inspected at very close range, each program exhibits a unique relationship with its superordinate institution. However, two broad categories can be generalized out of the structural relationships that hold between the nine doctoral programs in SLA and their home institutions.

One such pattern consists of a degree program seated in an independent academic unit. The University of Hawai'i's doctoral program in SLA exemplifies this pattern. The department that grants the degree has been re-named, and its intellectual focus has shifted over the years, but it has remained an autonomous academic unit with the doctoral program seemingly located at the center of its agenda. Indiana University, likewise, confers a PhD in SLA from within an intact Department of Second Language Studies. In an additional parallel with the Hawai'i program, the Indiana program was founded by re-structuring and re-naming an earlier Department of TESOL / Applied Linguistics. Carnegie Mellon University's PhD program in SLA is also administered from within an academic department, in this case a Department of Modern Languages. But at Carnegie Mellon, the program was proposed and set up without disturbing the continuity of the department in which it is housed. Furthermore, unlike the case of Hawai'i and Indiana, Carnegie

Mellon's program seems to be only one important concern of the department, not its central preoccupation.⁷

If the Hawai'i and Indiana programs represent the most department-bound of these programs, with Carnegie Mellon's program situated a bit farther away from the center of its department, the University of Maryland and Michigan State exemplify additional steps on the same continuum. Maryland's Program in SLA is embedded semi-independently within a School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, which forms a wide-scope department-like unit within the College of Arts and Humanities. The program's six core faculty members have formal appointments within the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. But unlike any of the other units subsumed under the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures—which offer either Bachelor's level courses or Bachelor's and graduate courses—Maryland's SLA program offers only graduate-level education (at the PhD, MA, and certificate level; <http://sllc.umd.edu/academics/programs>). This structural fact likely has the effect of aligning the SLA faculty more toward the program itself, rather than toward the School in which it is embedded. At Michigan State University, the Program in Second Language Studies has a similar institutional status in that 9 of the program's 10 core faculty members, as well as 13 of 15 affiliated faculty members, have appointments in a single, heterogeneous, academic unit, the Department of Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian, and African Languages. However, the relationship of the program to the department seems more attenuated at Michigan State, as reflected in the mutual absence of links between the websites of the program and the department (as of November 2012). It

is salient that the Director of the program in SLA at Michigan State reports autonomously to the Dean of the College of Arts and Letters, so that the program, though largely housed in a Department of Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian, and African Languages, maintains an important measure of separateness from it.

In these various ways, five of the nine doctoral programs reviewed here can be described as based in academic departments. The relationship of the PhD program to the superordinate department varies from full formal inclusion, where the doctoral program seems to be at the center of the department's agenda (Hawai'i; Indiana), to a relationship in which the program functions as a degree-granting limb attached to the body of a department whose scope extends beyond SLA (Carnegie Mellon), to a looser relationship between a program and a department, where a department conveniently houses the program's faculty while respecting some degree of autonomy for the program (Maryland; Michigan State).

A second broad pattern of institutionalization of the PhD in SLA contrasts with department-based programs in that it involves varieties of interdisciplinarity.⁸ In this case, teaching, research, and administration are carried out cooperatively by a working group of faculty members affiliated with (and who are hired, tenured, and promoted by) different academic units, with the program itself not exhaustively associated with any of those units. As in the case of department-based programs, there are degrees and kinds of interdisciplinarity. The University of Arizona's Program in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching exemplifies interdisciplinarity in the extreme, in that it identifies 80 scholars as affiliated faculty members, distributed across 19 academic units within 4 of the Colleges that make

up the university (identified in Table 1). The University of Wisconsin at Madison's program is also interdisciplinary, with 21 core faculty members affiliated with 9 different departments, with the added twist that the program itself is subsumed under an extra-departmental Language Institute within the College of Letters and Sciences, which supports diverse language-related initiatives. This compares with the institutional status of the University of Iowa's PhD program in SLA, the faculty of which is similarly broad spread. The Iowa program is affiliated with the interdisciplinary unit Foreign Language Acquisition Research and Education (FLARE) housed within an extra-departmental institutional structure of International Programs. While the faculty of the PhD program is drawn from scholars across the university, and while it is sheltered under the three umbrellas of FLARE (within International Programs), the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the Graduate College, its co-directors formally report to the Graduate College. In this sense, although the program crosses many institutional boundaries, it has some administrative status that shadows that of a department. The University of South Florida's doctoral degree in Second Language Acquisition and Instructional Technology instantiates another, more restrained, variety of interdisciplinarity. The SLA/IT program is supported jointly by the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Education, with all participating faculty having appointments in either one or the other unit; moreover, the program confers the PhD in the name of both the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Education.

Therefore, the nine doctoral programs in SLA can be divided into either department-based or interdisciplinary programs, with neither pattern dominating.

There is no *a priori* reason to favor one pattern of institutionalization over the other. Each aims to find its own balance between the desirable but sometimes antithetical ideals of coherence and breadth, working around the ruggedly idiosyncratic profiles of established institutional structures.⁹ The fact that PhD programs in SLA hold a range of more or less autonomous positions within their local academic environments is, however, an essential fact about the institutionalization of the doctorate in SLA. From the perspective of administrators, prospective students, or prospective junior faculty members, it is important to understand the history and status of a particular program as a means of assessing its strengths and limits. From the perspective of the historiography of the discipline, it is important to note that of the two oldest programs, one (Hawai'i) is the paradigmatic example of departmental-based programs, while the other (Arizona) a paradigmatic example of interdisciplinary programs. Therefore it is not obvious that one or the other of these two options is necessarily the historical bedrock of doctoral education in SLA.

The diversity of institutional bases for PhD programs in SLA is also historiographically significant in that it signals the tentative or reluctant acceptance that formalization of the study of SLA has sometimes met with (Gass 1993; VanPatten 1999). In the course of the establishment of one of the nine programs, its founders were confronted with the charge, leveled from inside its home institution, that 'There is no field of SLA'. In a sense, that charge is valid insofar as it means 'There is no recognized template for institutionalization of doctoral study of SLA': the varied and innovative bases on which PhD programs in SLA have been founded testify to a certain contingency in the initial reception of the field. However, with

PhD programs in SLA now 25 years old, there are now abundant grounds on which that charge could be rebutted—among them, the very fact that doctoral programs in SLA have survived and have continued to attract support since 1988.

5. Curricular content

Consistent with the general standards of doctoral education in North America, all nine of these PhD programs in SLA require two or more years of variably prescribed coursework; successful execution of preliminary exams or written exercises; design and completion of a major piece of original research; its submission in writing; and its oral defense. Students are also responsible to meet variously elaborate foreign language requirements.

This framework for pursuit of the PhD is conventional. What else is largely shared across programs is a basic outline of the required courses. A point of unanimity is that all require coursework in research methods, with most programs requiring additional coursework in either quantitative or qualitative statistics, or both.¹⁰ Most also require one or two courses on second language acquisition, labeled diversely. Another topic that often, if not uniformly, appears among required courses is L2 teaching or instructional technology.

Beyond these common curricular basics, most programs offer an array of courses from which students select a subset that defines a major specialization. Arizona and Wisconsin additionally require students to select a second series of courses constituting a minor specialization. Some programs (Indiana; Wisconsin; Maryland) have mechanisms in place to ensure that students get some breadth of

exposure to diverse subfields in SLA in addition to depth in their chosen specialization. Hawai'i, Arizona, Carnegie Mellon, Wisconsin, and Maryland organize their courses under three or four rubrics as an aid to identifying the boundaries of specializations. These rubrics typically separate sets of courses under the following categories: L2 analysis; L2 learning (sometimes: 'and processing'); L2 use (or 'social and cultural issues in SLA'); L2 pedagogy (or 'pedagogical theory', or 'instructional issues in SLA', with 'L2 assessment' sometimes a separate rubric). Of the four remaining programs, Indiana and Michigan State do not organize their curricula into categories. Neither does the University of South Florida, presumably since the program's orientation to instructional technology presupposes students' specialization at the outset of graduate study. The University of Iowa's program takes a unique path in separating the curriculum into three categories that seem to foreshadow students' career goals (Linguistics; Language Program Direction; Technology).

Setting aside the Indiana, Michigan State, South Florida and Iowa programs, the rubrics into which the other five programs divide their curricula demonstrate something of what can be learned from institutional-historical facts. These rubrics are telling with respect to the field's assumptions about how to resolve complex L2 phenomena into manageable units for the purpose of graduate study. Since the University of Hawai'i hosts the oldest PhD program in SLA, and has likely influenced the development of younger programs, it is worth looking at more closely. The Hawai'i curriculum categorizes courses into L2 analysis (a cover term labeling courses on the intricacies of L2 structure, and L1 / L2 comparison at the structural

level); L2 learning (how learners' second languages change over the course of acquisition); L2 use (social and cultural dimensions of SLA); and L2 pedagogy (practical study of how to facilitate acquisition of L2 skills). Notice that these categories do not fall along obvious fault lines within the object of study. For example, learning and teaching would seem to be natural partners, and the study of something like L2 semantics might be treated formally under L2 analysis or in communicative context under L2 use. Rather, categorization of courses under these four rubrics seems to reproduce the disciplinary boundaries separating scholarly traditions that have inquired into L2 phenomena: linguistics; psychology; sociology; education. To do so makes sense with respect to faculty members' own graduate training and the tenor of published literature, which mostly remains within disciplinary tracks. But it is worth noting that these divisions may undermine attempts to construct a truly interdisciplinary study of SLA, as opposed to a simply multidisciplinary one (Fish 1989; Nowacek 2009). Multidisciplinary scholarship compiles or juxtaposes the insights of various disciplines. Authentically interdisciplinary scholarship is more institutionally threatening: it uses the tools and insights of various disciplines to call attention to the places where those disciplines intersect, clash, leave gaps, impose spurious boundaries, or impede understanding. The curricular design of PhD programs in SLA, no matter how many departmental or collegial lines they cross in assembling their faculties, seem to be conceived as essentially multidisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary.

6. Distinctive features of particular programs

To fill in this portrait of what doctoral programs in SLA look like overall at age 25, it is worthwhile to examine their individual profiles as well. Each of the nine programs has its distinctive emphases and features, as faculty and administrators tailor their programs to fit their local environments. Taken together, these program-particular features enlarge the corporate scope of PhD programs in SLA.

The Hawai'i program capitalizes on its location in a highly multilingual and multicultural setting. The university makes available an unusually wide range of opportunities for language study and analysis, including of creole and pidgin languages, while the surrounding community offers a similarly rich context for studying language learners. Students and faculty in the Hawai'i program also participate in the research of the oldest National Language Resource Center, funded continuously by the U.S. Department of Education since 1990.¹¹ The University of Arizona's program in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching (SLAT) has the distinction of comprising by far the largest doctoral program in SLA, both in the number of enrolled students and the number of affiliated faculty.¹² It exhibits the characteristics of a large, industrious, graduate educational enterprise, including a fully articulated plan for passage through the program (http://slat.arizona.edu/sites/slat/files/page/20122013slathandbook08222012_0.pdf); a three-tiered advising system; student involvement in the publication of *Arizona Working Papers in SLAT*; and an annual multi-strand SLAT Roundtable conference, featuring papers, posters, and plenary talks. The University of South Florida's program stands out for its integration of training in SLA with training in instructional technology. One result is that it probably enrolls students who share

more professional goals in common than is typical of other doctoral programs in SLA. The structure of South Florida's curriculum builds on that coherence by assigning each entering class of students to a 'cohort', which then proceeds through the core courses as an integrated unit, fostering collaboration and a teamwork approach to problem-solving.

An outstanding characteristic of Carnegie Mellon's PhD in SLA is that all entering students must arrive prepared to teach a language at the college level. They are assigned to teach that language from the first semester onwards, and are encouraged to integrate classroom research into their doctoral studies. Carnegie Mellon also urges students to incorporate study abroad into their graduate education. The strategic placement of Wisconsin's PhD program in SLA inside the university's Language Institute invests the program with a sense that language study is an institution-wide priority. Unlike Hawai'i, Wisconsin isn't at the geographical crossroads of many languages. However, the Language Institute's many lecture series, research projects, study-abroad programs, summer language institutes, international resource centers, community outreach initiatives, and foreign language-related services directed at students, international faculty, public school teachers, local businesses, and so forth embed the PhD program in a context that obviously values foreign language study and cross-linguistic communication.

Curricular innovations also differentiate these nine programs. The University of Iowa highlights a required first-year course, *Second Language Acquisition Research and Theory I and II*. In this two-semester immersion in L2 theory and research design, entering students each carry out an original empirical

study of SLA under close supervision, from initial, theory-grounded, research question through to submission of the finished work for presentation. (One ideal venue for presentation, for work originating in the course described or more advanced student research, is the annual two-day SLA Graduate Student Symposium, hosted since 2008 on alternate years by the students of the Iowa and the Wisconsin PhD programs [De Costa, Bernales, & Merrill 2011, p. 546].) Indiana University's program, like that in Iowa, imposes a distinctive plan of study. Although Indiana doesn't formally divide its courses into content rubrics, students need to meet specific breadth requirements. Having done so, they proceed to identify both a research specialization, such as 'L2 phonology' or 'L2 classroom research', and independently identify a target language specialization (L2 English, L2 French, L2 German, or L2 Spanish)—so that students define, and then assume responsibility for, the intersection of a body of L2 data with a specific topic of research in L2 studies.

A strong, if not unique, feature of Michigan State's doctoral program is its pre-professional emphasis. The *Graduate Handbook* (2012, p. 3; <http://sls.msu.edu/students/>) states outright that 'Graduates are expected to become specialists who will actively contribute to the general fields of Applied Linguistics, SLA, and language teaching—disseminating findings to future generations of graduate students and scholars'. This expectation is built into the Michigan State program's structure, for example in its frequent provision of conference travel funds to graduate students, and in the fact that among the two qualifying papers of publishable quality required for admission to candidacy, one

must actually be accepted for presentation at an appropriate professional venue, and one defended orally. Finally, the University of Maryland's program is distinctive on several grounds. It declares its strong cognitive science orientation, and highlights research on L2s other than English. The program maintains a minimalist curriculum of 8 required courses (as opposed to the typical 12) on the grounds that it seeks to engage students in original research as expeditiously as possible. Students, faculty, and graduates of the Maryland program have also made the most of opportunities to participate in the research of the National Foreign Language Center, and the U.S. Department of Defense-related Center for Advanced Study of Language, both affiliated with the Maryland program; conversely, employees of these institutions contribute their expertise to the community of doctoral students by serving as advisors, dissertation committee members, and even by teaching graduate courses.

These features of the nine programs are variously unique to them, and variously formative to the experiences of individual students and faculty. Viewed panoramically, they display a range of ways the needs of graduate students in SLA have been conceived, analyzed, and creatively addressed. Together they buttress the case against 'There is no field of SLA'.

7. Assessing the contributions of PhD Programs in SLA to the discipline

What evidence is there that, as a group, the nine PhD programs reviewed here are effective in achieving their mission of advancing expertise in SLA? One measure of efficacy would be to compare the reputations of these programs against comparable

doctoral programs. Another measure would be to compare the scholarly output of faculty, students, and graduates affiliated with PhD programs in SLA relative to the output of their peers with other affiliations. Both measures are indirect and inexact, but nevertheless communicate something about what doctoral programs in SLA add to options for graduate education.

In the United States, the National Research Council periodically assesses and ranks doctoral programs. The rankings published in 1995, based on data collected in 1993, included none of the programs reviewed here, because none met the NRC's criterion of having awarded at least five PhDs in the previous five years. The rankings published in 2010 (Ostriker, Kuh, & Voytuk, 2010), based on data collected between 2005 and 2006, expanded coverage to more than 5,000 programs within 62 disciplines. The approach shifted in 2010 in that the NRC abandoned ordinal rankings in favor of multiple assessments of quality, efficacy, and reputation. The 2010 study includes five of the nine programs reviewed here: those of the University of Hawai'i, Carnegie Mellon, South Florida, Iowa, and Indiana.¹³

The NRC results, therefore, provide one view of how a subset of doctoral programs in SLA stand relative to their peers, which in 2010 was taken to be 52 doctoral programs in Linguistics in the United States. The data digest 20 measures taken of a PhD program's character, including research activity of the faculty; citations of faculty publications in academic journals; faculty awards and grants; composition of the faculty by rank; financial support for students; mean time to degree; admitted students' mean GRE scores; multiple measures of student life-related issues; evidence of ethnic and gender-based diversity among students and

faculty; and other factors. Some of this information (e.g. GRE scores), the NCR simply reports point blank. Others of these measures are conflated to create complex (and controversial; see below) summary assessments that the NRC uses to place each program within multiple ranges of rankings compared to its peers, weighting the data they gathered according to the opinions of faculty members about what counts as the ideal characteristics of graduate education within a particular discipline.

Comparing the results for the five PhD programs in SLA that the NRC reviewed in 2010, four of them cluster together across many of the 20 variables. For the two key variables that come closest to summarizing how the NRC data depict the overall quality of the programs (the 'R [regression]-ranking' and 'S [survey]-ranking' variables), the rankings for Hawai'i, South Florida, Iowa, and Indiana are bunched together in the bottom two quartiles, that is to say, they get relatively unfavorable scores compared to the mean for PhD programs in Linguistics overall.¹⁴ The one anomaly in the group of five is Carnegie Mellon's PhD program in SLA, which has generally more favorable rankings than its four sister programs. For example, the NRC's 'S-ranking' assesses the extent to which a program's attributes match the attributes that faculty members identify as most important, expressed as a range of values covering the middle 90% of ratings (thus discounting the extreme highs and lows among raters' assessments). Carnegie Mellon's program's S-ranking is reported as '6-16', indicating that many raters highly valued the attributes of the program relative to the attributes of the total pool of 52 peer programs in Linguistics.¹⁵ This compares advantageously with S-rankings for Hawai'i, South

Florida, Iowa, and Indiana, which mostly range over the 30s and 40s. However, all five of the PhD programs in SLA assessed by the NRC achieve good to very good rankings with respect to a variable that conflates measures of student support and student outcomes, with most rankings from the single digits to the low 30s, essentially in the top two quartiles. Carnegie Mellon again leads the pack with a ranking of '1-3', indicating a very positive assessment of student support and outcomes in their PhD in SLA program relative to other U.S.-based doctoral program in Linguistics.

Rankings of this nature are, however, notoriously fraught. The NRC itself is at pains to point out the limitations of its data, and the difficulties of interpreting them (Ostriker, Kuh, & Voytuk, 2010, pp. 49-51). Moreover, external critique of the NRC results abounds, as reviewed by Webster and Skinner (1996). In particular, it is unlikely that the smaller, upstart, programs such as the PhD in SLA will compare favorably against larger, long-established, doctoral programs in Linguistics—especially since, in 2005-6 when the 2010 data were gathered, three of the five programs included were just then graduating their inaugural classes. It is not obvious how to abstract away from this influence on the NRC data, other than to wait for future versions of such rankings to appear once the PhD in SLA becomes more fully established.¹⁶

Turning to a different means of assessing the efficacy of the nine programs under review, I analyzed the presence of affiliates of these programs, both faculty and students, among the authors of articles published by three representative journals in the field, *Modern Language Journal*, *Second Language Research*, and

Studies in Second Language Acquisition. Taking 2005 as a starting point (since that was the year when the youngest of the nine PhD programs was founded), I surveyed the past eight years of issues of all three journals, published from 2005 to 2012 (for *MLJ*, volumes 89–96; for *SLR*, volumes 21–28; for *SSLA*, volumes 27–34). To what extent is the research of scholars affiliated with the nine PhD in SLA programs represented in this sample of published literature?¹⁷

In order to measure the overall contributions of PhD programs in SLA to publications in these journals, I recorded the affiliation of each author of every article at the time of publication of his or her text.¹⁸ Looking first at *Modern Language Journal*, 340 authors reported affiliations with 171 different institutions of higher education. The nine PhD programs under review here make up only 5.3% of this universe of 171 institutions. However, the 33 authors who published in *MLJ* during this interval from eight of the nine programs (excepting South Florida) represent 9.7% of the universe of 340 authors. This means that although PhD programs in SLA are few, their affiliates contributed disproportionately to articles published in *MLJ*.

For *Second Language Research* the figures are similar: within a universe of 121 institutional affiliations for authors who published articles, the nine programs under review constitute only 7.4% (with five attested: Hawai'i, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan State, Wisconsin). However, authors affiliated with PhD in SLA programs appeared 31 times in the list of 262 authors, amounting to 11.8% of the total universe of authors. For *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, out of 104 affiliations, the 9 programs make up 8.7% (with six attested: Carnegie Mellon,

Hawai'i, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan State, Wisconsin). Authors affiliated with PhD in SLA programs appeared 39 times in the list of 274 authors in *SSLA*, amounting to 14.2% of the total universe of authors. Therefore, scholars from PhD programs in SLA are responsible for more than their share of publications in all three journals from 2005 to 2012.

Like the rankings provided by the NRC, these data have their weaknesses. Among them is the fact that one cannot assume that frequency of authorship of an article in *MLJ*, *SLR*, or *SSLA* would necessarily be evenly distributed across all institutions whose affiliates write for these journals. An above-average rate of publication by affiliates of PhD in SLA programs is not surprising; one would expect PhD in SLA programs to be magnets for scholars who write for these journals and their peers. Still, it is worth noting that PhD programs in SLA meet the expectation that their faculty and students would succeed in generating original research on L2 phenomena.¹⁹

8. Conclusion

In 1983, five years before the foundation of the pioneering Hawai'i doctoral program in SLA, di Pietro, Lantolf, and Labarca surveyed the curriculum of 326 graduate programs in foreign languages, presumably all in the United States. They evinced pessimism about the capacity of then-existing doctoral programs to innovate to meet what they perceived as an emerging demand for scholars trained in SLA and language education (1983, p. 369). Ten years later, with PhD programs in SLA on the horizon, Gass (1993, pp. 99–104) optimistically depicted the study of

SLA as established, while conceding that it was under-recognized for its contributions to its sister disciplines and (in some contexts) struggling for academic respect. Another six years after that, VanPatten's (1999) article entitled 'What is second language acquisition and what is it doing in this department?' showed that it was still necessary to explain and advocate for SLA, an activity the need for which has not been exhausted to date.

Even granted the continuing need to communicate to the public what is entailed in the study of L2 phenomena, there is satisfaction in the fact that a small number of graduate programs that centrally address SLA have established themselves on diverse institutional bases, are developing distinctive identities, and are making their marks on graduate education. With the institutionalization of the PhD in SLA now past its twenty-fifth anniversary, the nine programs discussed here constitute a valuable option among varieties of doctoral training available to future scholars of SLA. They open up important opportunities for their faculties, their students, and, eventually, their students' students and employers. They also are poised to contribute to meeting important scientific and humanistic challenges, insofar as the study of second language acquisition provides insight into human cognition, social organization, and cross-cultural communication.

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Notes

¹ Prospective students should of course seek out resources tailored to their needs.

Some of the information in Spada (2000) and Antrim (2005) is out of date, but still provides a starting point. Publications such as Peterson's (2013) annual guide to graduate programs in the humanities, and online resources such as that posted on the Linguist List are helpful. For a student's evaluation of graduate programs in SLA / Applied Linguistics, see <http://applelinguist.wordpress.com>.

² The diversity of formal titles for these programs matters, and is discussed below.

But to streamline reference to doctoral programs that confer the PhD in Second Language Acquisition or Second Language Studies (sometimes conjoined with '...and Teaching') as a group, I use the expression 'PhD programs in SLA' as a cover term.

³ To arrive at these nine programs, I applied the defining criteria described below to

an initial pool of candidates identified through an internet search for relevant doctoral programs, cross-checked against lists of institutions included in previous discussions of graduate education in the field, such as Spada (2000), Antrim (2005), and Thompson *et al.* (2012, p. 144).

⁴ Rutgers' focus on Spanish is displayed, for example, in the required coursework

('Spanish syntax'; 'The Spanish language in social contexts'; <http://spanport.rutgers.edu/graduate/65>), and in the makeup of dissertation committees (which must include two faculty members from the Department of Spanish and Portuguese).

- ⁵ Application of these criteria to actual programs sometimes proved difficult. I include programs that seemed to split their attention across SLA and L2 teaching (University of Arizona) or SLA and instructional technology (University of South Florida). I reluctantly exclude programs like that of OISE, which provides thoroughgoing training in SLA, on the grounds that their doctoral program in Second Language Education seems to prioritize education over L2.
- ⁶ Because these texts sometimes contained sensitive or confidential material, most program administrators who shared departmental files with me asked that I not identify my sources or quote from them directly. However I can say that across the nine PhD programs I surveyed, I was offered access to six original texts used to propose the creation of a department or program; one history-of-the-program text, which recapitulated that information several years after the fact; two self-study documents generated in the course of external review of a department / program; two annual reports reflecting on the development of a department / program, containing material of historical value; and five handbooks addressed to admitted students, which included at least a little information about the foundation of the program. I gathered additional data by conducting nine telephone interviews of faculty and administrators, and through voluminous email correspondence.
- ⁷ For example, the other degrees conferred by the Hawai'i and Indiana programs are clearly integral to their doctoral programs: at Hawai'i: BA and MA degrees in Second Language Studies; at Indiana: an MA degree and undergraduate minor in Second Language Studies, and an MA degree and certificate in TESOL and

Applied Linguistics. Carnegie Mellon's Modern Languages Department, on the other hand, confers a much wider range of degrees: BA degrees in European Studies, Chinese Studies, French and Francophone Studies, German Studies, Hispanic Studies, Japanese Studies, Russian Studies, and a certificate in Language and Culture.

⁸ 'Interdisciplinary' is the term used; in some cases it is built into the formal name of the program, as in the University of Arizona's Graduate Interdisciplinary Program in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching. However, I will argue below that it would be a more accurate to depict these programs as 'multidisciplinary'.

⁹ Susan M. Gass (p.c.) reminds me that programs positioned outside of robust institutional infrastructures may be more vulnerable to economic pressure; and moreover that physical proximity (of offices, classrooms, and resources) fosters coherence. Factors like these bear on the success of a program in SLA, whether it has departmental or interdisciplinary status.

¹⁰ Required courses in research methods and statistics is one of the sharpest contrasts between PhD programs in SLA versus PhD programs in Linguistics. For an overview of instruction in statistics in graduate study in SLA, see Sterling, Wolff, and Papi (2012).

¹¹ Arizona and Michigan State also host similar federally-funded National Language Resource Centers that engage in research on L2 learning and the teaching of diverse languages, and that invite the participation of doctoral students in SLA.

- Indiana and Wisconsin are the homes of additional NLRC projects, with the former focused on Central Asian languages, and the latter on African languages.
- ¹² A program's report of its number of participating faculty members, and the distinction between core and additional faculty members, can only be taken as approximate, since institutions define for themselves what counts as participation as opposed to ceremonial appointment.
- ¹³ The two youngest programs, those of Michigan State, and the University of Maryland, were founded in 2005, after the data had been gathered. The program of the University of Wisconsin, whose first class matriculated in 2002, likely did not meet the five-graduate criterion for inclusion by 2003. However, it is unclear why the University of Arizona's program—the largest, and one of the oldest, having been founded 1991—either was not included in the 2012 database, or opted out of participation.
- ¹⁴ In this the four programs' rankings differ little from another doctoral program with which they probably compete, and which is included in the 2010 rankings, namely the Boston University Program in Applied Linguistics, which confers the degree of PhD in Applied Linguistics. One other PhD program that may compete with those under analysis here, at least in its broad content, exhibits a very different profile in the NRC rankings: the doctoral program in Applied Linguistics of the University of California at Los Angeles. The ranges of UCLA's S- and R-rankings all fall in the first quartile, indicating that it is judged as having the attributes of a top graduate program among the 52 doctoral programs in Linguistics nationwide. Ironically, the UCLA program has recently struggled in

- its relationship with the university administration, resulting in the suspension of admissions for the academic year 2012–3 (http://dailybruin.com/2011/05/25/applied_linguistics_department_closes_admissions_after_failing_to_meet_all_of_academic_senate039s_de/).
- ¹⁵ One way to interpret an S-ranking of ‘6–16’ would be that, clipping off the top 5% and bottom 5% of evaluations, the attributes of the Carnegie Mellon program match the attributes that faculty most highly value for PhD programs in Linguistics, to the extent that would rank Carnegie Mellon somewhere between 6th place and 16th place out of the 52 doctoral programs evaluated.
- ¹⁶ One might also question whether it makes sense to subsume PhD programs in SLA within PhD programs in Linguistics, then to ask faculty raters to compare them as if they are all of one kind. It is salient that the NRC’s criteria exclude from their research all subfields of Education and any ‘applied’ discipline, so that raters were deliberately oriented away from these fields, both of which have ties to SLA—probably mistakenly strong ties in the minds of some raters uninformed about the actual nature of graduate study of SLA.
- ¹⁷ I used three criteria in selecting these journals. First, journals must have been published continuously since at least 2005. (This excluded *Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism*, which first appeared in 2011.) Second, I inspected the editorial statements of candidate journals to identify those that focus exclusively on the study of SLA, so that it would be possible to include every full article appearing in their pages. This eliminated some journals (e.g. *Language Acquisition*, *Applied Psycholinguistics*) that publish research in related subfields in addition to

research on SLA. Second, I sought complementary rather than overlapping coverage across the three journals. Although the readerships of *MLJ*, *SLR*, and *SSLA* certainly intersect, they still (accurately or not from their editors' points of view) have distinct reputations in ways that probably influence authors' decisions about where to submit their work: one (*MLJ*) is associated with departments of modern foreign languages; one (*SLR*) has a specific commitment to cognitive factors in L2 acquisition; and one (*SSLA*) exhibits ecumenical interest in SLA, L2 use, and L2 teaching. The full scope of the study of SLA, obviously, extends beyond these three strategically-chosen journals; to this extent, the analysis presented here samples only a portion of the publication outputs for affiliates of PhD in SLA programs. Note that to increase comparability across the three journals, I excluded from analysis the contents of *MLJ*'s Monograph / Focus issues, initiated in 2007, which may be compiled using different criteria compared to that used for publication in regular issues. Book reviews (but not review articles) and editorial commentary were excluded from analysis in all three journals.

¹⁸ Where an author listed multiple affiliations, I gave credit to every institution listed. Any author publishing multiple articles was entered a commensurate number of independent times into the list of authors.

¹⁹ I re-analyzed the data from the same sample of publications, comparing the representation of institutions to the *graduate* affiliation of each author, that is, the institution where he or she had obtained the degree of PhD (if any). The question here is whether graduates of PhD in SLA programs are contributing

proportionally to scholarship on SLA, regardless of their current affiliations. To establish where authors had completed doctoral work, I consulted their websites and other online resources. For about 15% of authors, it proved impossible to identify their alma maters. However, working with the data at hand, for *MLJ*, PhD in SLA programs comprise 7.8% of the universe of the identifiable authors' alma maters, while authors graduated from those programs make up 11.1% of all authors. For *SLR* the corresponding figures are 10.0% and 11.4%; for *SSLA*, 12.5% and 13.3%. Although these data are only suggestive, they are consistent with the evidence that PhD programs in SLA support more than their institutional share of publications in this sample of journals, measured in terms of the quantity of research produced by both authors' current and graduate affiliations.

Table 1
Institutional status of doctoral programs conferring degrees in Second Language Acquisition¹

Institution	Name of degree-granting unit	Institutional status of degree-granting unit	PhD degree conferred	Date of entry of 1st students	No. enrolled students	No. of core faculty & their affiliation(s)	No. of additional faculty
U Hawai'i at Manoa	Dept of Second Language Studies	Independent dept within Col of Language, Linguistics & Literature	SLS	1989	35	15 All with appointments in Dept of Second Language Studies	5
U Arizona	Program in Second Language Acquisition & Teaching	Interdisciplinary & inter-collegial program	SLA & Teaching	1991	65-75	80 (No distinction between core & additional faculty) Affiliated with 19 academic units: 8 depts within Col of Humanities, 5 within Col of Social & Behavioral Sciences, 4 within Col of Education, 2 within Col of Sciences	
Carnegie Mellon U	Dept of Modern Languages (which houses Prog in SLA)	Independent dept within Col of Humanities & Soc Sci	SLA	1995	12	6 5 with joint appointments in Prog in SLA / Dept of Modern Languages 1 with appointment in Psychology	21, incl'ding 9 at U of Pittsburgh
U South Florida	Program in Second Language Acquisition & Instructional Technology	Interdisciplinary prog across Col of Educ + Col Arts & Sci	SLA/IT	1999	35	9 6 affiliated with Col of Education 3 affiliated with Col of Arts & Sciences	7
U Iowa	Foreign Language Acquisition Research & Education	Interdisciplinary prog within Graduate Col	SLA	2000	25	21 (No distinction between core & additional faculty) Affiliated with 9 academic units: 7 depts within Col of Liberal Arts & Sciences, 2 depts within Col of Educ	
Indiana U	Dept of Second Language Studies	Independent dept within Col of Arts & Sci	SLA	2002	23	9 6 with appointments in Sec Lang Studies 3 with joint appointments in Sec Lang Studies / Col of Arts & Sciences	3

PhD in SLA

Table 1 (continued)

Institution	Name of degree-granting unit	Institutional status of degree-granting unit	PhD degree conferred	Date of entry of 1st students	No. enrolled students)	No. of core faculty & their affiliation(s)	No. of additional faculty
U Wisconsin Madison	Program in Second Language Acquisition	Interdisciplinary prog within university-wide Language Institute	SLA	2002	31	18 15 affiliated with 7 depts within Col of Letters & Science 3 affiliated with School of Education	17
Michigan State U	Second Language Studies Program	Independent prog within Col of Arts & Sciences, hosted by Dept of Linguistics, Germanic, Slavic, Asian & African Languages	SLA	2005	35	10 9 with appointments in Dept of Linguistics, Germanic, Slavic, Asian & African Languages 1 with appt. in Dept of Romance & Classical Studies	17
U Maryland College Park	Program in Second Language Acquisition	Independent prog within dept-like School of Languages, Literatures & Cultures	SLA	2005	22	6 All with appointments in School of Languages, Literatures, & Cultures	21

¹ All data in Table 1 are accurate as of November 2012