MARIJE MICHEL

Marije Michel (PhD Applied Linguistics from the University of Amsterdam) is Chair of Language Learning at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. Her teaching and research focus is on socio-cognitive aspects of second language acquisition and task-based language pedagogy. In her recent work, she has used eye-tracking and key-stroke logging to investigate second language writing processes and alignment in digitally mediated communication. Marije Michel is treasurer of the executive committee of the European Second Language Association (EuroSLA).

The relationship of proficiency to pausing and eye-gaze behaviours in L2 writing

Andrea Révész & Marije Michel

The past two decades have seen an increasing interest in investigating the processes in which second language (L2) writers engage. Relatively little is known, however, about how proficiency relates to pausing and viewing behaviours and associated cognitive processes during writing. It also remains unexplored how stage of writing (beginning, middle, end) may moderate these links. To help fill these gaps, in this study we investigated the extent to which writing proficiency predicts L2 writers' speed fluency, pausing, and eye-gaze behaviours and the cognitive processes that underlie pausing. Additionally, we explored whether these relationships are influenced by stage of writing. The participants were 60 Chinese second language users of English, with proficiency levels ranging from CEFR B1 to C1 levels. They all completed two independent and two integrated TOEFL iBT writing tasks over two sessions, with the tasks being counterbalanced across participants. While composing, we recorded participants' keystrokes and eye-gaze behaviours. Participants also took part in a stimulated recall session based on the last writing task they had completed. A series of mixed-effects regression models found that proficiency was the strongest predictor of speed fluency. The stimulated recall analysis revealed considerably less variation in cognitive activities among lower- than higher-proficiency writers across writing stages. We will discuss the implications of these findings for models of L2 writing and writing instruction.