New Faculty

Bernard ("Bernie") Issa is an assistant professor of Spanish Linguistics with a specialization in Second Language Acquisition. Issa joined MFLL in fall 2015 after earning a doctorate from the University of Illinois at Chicago. His research focuses on individual difference variablesÑsuch as motivation, working memory, anxiety, or language learning aptitudeÑand how they combine with external factors (learning environment, style of instruction) in language classrooms at different levels. His dissertation research used eye-tracking to take fine-grain measurements of the allocation of attention in beginning second language learners of Spanish, comparing input enhancement and structured input practice to see how these methods affected acquisition of a novel grammatical structure. This project revealed that while both methods do promote language learning, structured input practice, in which a teacher asks questions of a type that require understanding and, later, production of particular grammatical structures, is more effective. These results have clear and important implications for language teaching.

Issa is currently working on a research project to be conducted during the summer study-abroad program in Santander, Spain. Students will be measured both for a set of individual difference variables and for language proficiency before they begin the program. The study will focus on three measures of linguistic ability. Issa will assess students' proficiency again after the program and run statistical tests to see if gains in these areas relate to any of the measures taken on the individual difference variables.

This study will contribute to an area of second language acquisition (SLA) research in which there is no consensus in the field. Professor Issa says there is no "secret ingredient to language learning," so increasing understanding of how individual difference variables and external factors interact to produce language learning is highly valuable. He also plans to extend these studies to consider oral inputÑenhancing certain structures by using emphasis, or changes in pitch and volume, etc.Ñand how it contributes to language learning, as well.

The results of his research studies inform Issa's other major role in the Spanish section where he is the director of the first-year Spanish language program. He supervises lecturers and graduate teaching assistants for Spanish 111, 112, 123, and 150, overseeing the production of syllabi and the creation and grading of tests and other materials. He also trains graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) who are incoming master's degree students who work with him for one semester, observing classes, developing a teaching philosophy, and learning SLA theory. They then team up on a

course with a lecturer in their second semester and begin teaching more of the course as the semester goes on. Professor Issa observes the TAs and offers feedback and evaluations on their progress and performance, thus shaping the next generation of language instructors.

When asked how he was enjoying living in Knoxville, Issa acknowledged that he finds the state legislature's frequent attempts to intervene in cultural issues at the university baffling, but said that otherwise, acclimating to life in Knoxville was going extremely smoothly. He and his familyÑpartner Dustin, a software developer and support analyst; dog Albus; and cat CocoaÑare enjoying the mild East Tennessee weather, which is a major change from Chicago's frigid winters! Outside the classroom, Issa is an enthusiastic tennis player and hiker. He, Dustin, and Albus have been taking advantage of the proximity of Knoxville to the Smoky Mountains and of the numerous local walks and hikes. As Albus' name suggests, Issa is an avid Harry Potter fanÑsomething he shares with many of the UT students whose language learning is shaped by his energy and his expertise.

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