Individual differences in the acquisition of idiomatic competence in L2 French during a semester abroad – a pilot study

Klara Arvidsson

Stockholm University, Sweden

Study abroad has often been considered an optimal opportunity for L2 learners to develop interactional competence in the L2, whereof one component is the ability to combine words in a conventional way, here labelled “idiomatic competence”. This aspect has shown to be difficult to acquire but some learners succeed better than others (e.g. Dörnyei et al., 2004). Previous research suggest that not only amount of interaction in the L2 and general proficiency level relate to this individual variation, but also psychosocial variables, such as personality and identity. However, most studies focus on L2 English pointing to the need to study other L2:s.

In this contribution, a pre- and post- idiomatic competence gap test based on conversational material is administered to 21 university students in French spending a semester in France. The results will be examined in relation to the learners’ general proficiency level, measured by LexTale FR (Brysbaert, 2013) and course grades, self-reported amount of L2 interaction, multicultural effectiveness assessed through The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire – Short Form (van der Zee et al., 2013) and self-reported identity experience in L2 (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2001-2003).

The presentation addresses the following issues: Is the instrument measuring idiomatic competence meaningful? Are there other ways to quantify learners’ progress regarding idiomatic competence?


Keywords: L2 French, individual differences, interactional competence, idiomatic competence.