Lexical innovation as a marker of creativity – cross-linguistic influence in oral production of L2 German

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Based on a dynamic view of language use (de Bot et al., 2013), we present a qualitative analysis of L2 speech production in an instructed learning context (PING corpus: picture description task; 20 L1 French university students of L2 German – B2 level).

Our aim is to analyse the cognitive flexibility and creative potential of the L2 learner/user by observing the way they deal with production difficulties through lexical retrieval, which we consider as an adaptive and creative process (Cook 2010; Albert & Kormos, 2011; Housen et al. 2012).

Our hierarchical cluster analysis (Ward Method) pointed out significantly 2 distinct groups of learners with different ways of activating their linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge in lexical retrieval. This quantitative analysis showed clearly that, when facing difficulties, a "dynamic", active and creative learner will be more productive, i.e. use all kinds of linguistic, metalinguistic and strategic possibilities to maintain fluency in oral speech production (Krönert et al. 2015). This group controls more (self-repair and on-line metacomments), and shows more productivity and flexibility in the use of the interlanguage: we observed the use of significantly more lexical innovation as well as a strong tendency for using all kinds of cross-linguistic influence (L1 and L3 code-switches).

This qualitative analysis of lexical innovation focuses at the dynamic interplay between all languages involved, with respect to morphosyntactic and phonological criteria involved in lexical production. In reference to our initial hypothesis, considering L2 lexical innovation as a marker of an adaptive and creative behaviour, the more dynamic learners should build significantly more words in L2 German instead of adopting plain code-switching.

In addition, our data could be helpful in clarifying the boundaries between codeswitches and lexical innovations, often revealed as a delicate issue within the interlanguage dynamics.

Keywords: speech production, cross-linguistic influence, lexical innovation.