Cognitive creativity as an individual difference and its relationship with L2 communication strategy use

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Looking back at previous decades of SLA research, the importance of learner individual differences has become well-established. Variables such as motivation, anxiety, willingness to communicate, and working memory have been explored and shown to have clear influence on L2 learning and use (Ortega, 2009). A few studies have considered cognitive creativity as another individual difference in SLA (Albert & Kormos, 2004; Otto, 1998). Looking forward, cognitive creativity is an individual difference with promising early research results and many opportunities for further exploration. Several recent studies have shown evidence of relationships between cognitive creativity and various aspects of L2 production such as the use of questions, coordination (McDonough, Crawford, & Mackey, 2015), and conjunctions (Mackey, Park, Akiyama, & Pipes, 2014). The current study expands on these findings and builds on another well-established research framework by investigating the relationship between cognitive creativity and use of L2 communication strategies among L2 English university students in Turkey.

Thirty L1 Turkish participants completed the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking, which provides an overall creativity index as well as sub-scores for fluency, originality, elaboration, and resistance to closure based on a series of figural tasks (Torrance, 2008). They also completed two L2 production tasks. First, an oral task required participants to elicit the name of an everyday item from an interlocutor by describing a simple drawing of the object. Second, a written task required participants to write a story based on a series of pictures. Oral and written data were analyzed for use of circumlocution, avoidance, approximation, and message abandonment. Results will be presented in terms of evidence of relationships between creativity traits (e.g. elaboration, resistance to closure) and use of specific communication strategies (e.g. circumlocution, avoidance), as well as interesting differences between oral and written production communication strategy use.

Keywords: communication strategy, individual differences, cognitive creativity.