Language learners’ lexical and phraseological choices in written texts on various CEFR levels

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In SLA, written language has gained considerable attention in the past years (see e.g. Manchon & Matsuda 2015). Similarly, vocabulary studies have looked at L2 learners especially to identify learner’s vocabulary sizes and knowledge. In this paper we combine the two approaches and concentrate on the use of vocabulary by L2 learners of Swedish, English and Finnish on CEFR levels from A2 to B2.

In their study, Norrby and Håkansson (2007) found that learners could be categorised into three learner profiles: The Risk-taker, The Careful and Thorough, and The Recycler. Risk-takers tend to use complex structures and have a nominal style in their production. The learner type Careful and Thorough produces only familiar structures that are appropriate for the current grammatical proficiency level, resulting in mainly error-free production. The Recyclers reuse familiar structures in their production. They may have a high nominal quotient but the nouns and NPs used are basic and simple.

In the present study, the lexical/phraseological choices made by L2 learners of Swedish, English and Finnish are studied. The data comes from Topling project that looked at the development of second language writing skills from one CEFR level to another. The focus of analysis is on the learner profiles in different languages and at different levels of proficiency. The data consists of persuasive texts written in English, Finnish and Swedish as learner language (N= 90 texts), and it was analysed qualitatively. Phraseological or formulaic elements used in the text were identified and further analysed for their complexity, frequency and variety.

The preliminary results reveal that texts that have been rated on the same level in different languages portray different learner profiles regarding vocabulary. We discuss the usability to assessing texts to assess learners’ vocabulary skills as well as the consequences of various learner profiles for teaching.

Keywords: L2 Swedish, lexical choices, L2 Finnish, L2 English, written language.