Pinning down L2 oral performance in highly proficient learners.

Ewa Guz

John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

The complexity, fluency and accuracy (CAF) framework views interlanguage as a complex, dynamic system consisting of three interrelated dimensions of learner performance (Larson-Freeman, 2006; Skehan, 2009; Housen, Kuiken & Vedder, 2012). Although a wide repertoire of discourse-derived CAF measures have been proposed (Kormos & Dénes, 2004; Norris & Ortega 2009), recent accounts have emphasized the need of extending the CAF paradigm to accommodate lexical aspects of learner output (Foster & Skehan, 2012, p. 301). Bulté and Housen (2012) for example, have included lexemic and collocational complexity as subcomponents of L2 complexity. Paquot and Granger (2012, p. 130) argue that ”phraseological units (...) may impact positively or negatively on the three dimensions of language proficiency.” However, research into L2 vocabulary acquisition has conceptualised learners’ lexical performance primarily in terms of single word-level dimensions such as lexical diversity, sophistication and density (Read, 2000) leaving the question of capturing the phraseological aspects of L2 speech unresolved. This paper uses a cross-sectional design to investigate the interaction between CAF and the lexical and phraseological make-up of learner speech of highly proficient learners of English (n=55). The oral data are examined for complexity by measures of subordination and length of AS-units (Foster et al., 2000), for accuracy by percentage of error-free clauses and errors phw, and for fluency by speech rate and mean length of runs. L2 fluency measures are corrected to incorporate baseline L1 values obtained from parallel L1 data (Segalowitz, 2010). Single word-level lexical measures include D-value for lexical diversity (Malvern & Richards, 2002), content/function word ratio for lexical density and P-lex lambda for lexical sophistication (Meara & Bell, 2002). Phraseological aspects of learner performance are described in terms of the total of phraseological units phw.

The analysis aims to determine how various subsystems of learner interlanguage interact and indicate possible trade-off effects.

Keywords: accuracy, learner speech, fluency, lexical richness, complexity.