



L2 development in an intensive Study Abroad EAP context



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ABSTRACT

The current study's main aim was to examine development of L2 proficiency over a short period of time by adopting an analytic framework that balances out the strengths and limitations of the existing Complexity, Accuracy, Lexis and Fluency (CALF) framework of linguistic measurement. CALF indices and discourse markers were used to analyse development of proficiency among participants on an intensive EAP course in a Study Abroad context. To investigate the differential rates of development in two different task types, gains in various aspects of proficiency were examined. The results suggest that some CALF measures adequately demonstrate L2 development over a one-month period. Discourse markers provide evidence of L2 development beyond CALF, and add a new dimension to investigating and measuring L2 development. The differences in L2 development indicated in monologic and dialogic performances imply that specific measures of analysis are more suitable to characterize development in different task types.

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1. Introduction

Since its emergence in the 1980s, task-based language teaching (TBLT) research has made a considerable contribution to the field of SLA by investigating the impact of task and task design on L2 performance, and by theorising the relationship between task performance and psycholinguistic processes involved in language production and comprehension (Ahmadian, 2012; Foster & Tavakoli, 2009; Kormos, 2006; Robinson, 2015; Skehan, 2015). Another major contribution of TBLT research to SLA has been the successful development of an analytic framework for operationalising and measuring syntactic complexity, accuracy, lexical complexity and fluency (CALF) in L2 performance. Research in this area has provided ample and robust evidence that CALF can usefully measure L2 performance (Ellis, 2009; Housen, Kuiken, & Vedder, 2012; Skehan, 2009), and reliably predict L2 proficiency (de Jong, Stein, Florijn, Schoonen & Hulstijn, 2012; Révész, Ekiert, & Torgersen, 2016). While the findings of TBLT research have been central to our understanding of SLA processes and to providing a more in-depth awareness of processing demands associated with L2 learning, TBLT has been critiqued for predominantly focusing on task performance without adequately investing in research in L2 development (Lambert & Kormos, 2014; Pallotti, 2009). TBLT research has so far shed little light on L2 development as it has largely drawn on cross-sectional studies with data often collected under less ecologically valid conditions (Eckerth, 2009). Few systematic efforts have been made to examine the way L2 development progresses in instructional settings during a period of task-based instruction, to explore the differential effects of task on L2 development, or the kind of timescale within which development can be evident (for a full discussion see Ortega & Byrnes, 2008). Notwithstanding the significant contribution of TBLT to SLA, little attention has been paid to

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investigating the development of CALF over time in different task types and conditions frequently used in typical L2 classrooms. Similarly, examining the development of learner communicative ability has remained a relatively under-researched area in TBLT studies. These are particularly important as despite an increase in the number of students on short and intensive Study Abroad L2 courses (Hernandez, 2016), our knowledge of measuring L2 development in terms of CALF over a short period of time is limited. The study reported in this paper, therefore, sets out to help develop a better understanding of the extent to which L2 proficiency develops over a short period of time in a Study Abroad context. The novel contribution of the current study lies in its developmental perspective, i.e. development of L2 over a period of time, and its adaptation of a framework that can provide a 'fuller' picture of L2 development than has been demonstrated in previous TBLT studies.

2. CALF measuring L2 performance and development

TBLT researchers have increasingly relied on measuring L2 proficiency by using CALF. Housen et al. (2012) argue that CALF have become standard measures employed by most researchers in TBLT, and are widely used in SLA research as performance descriptors, indicators of L2 proficiency, and evidence of L2 acquisition. Among several benefits of using the CALF framework, one can refer to its reliability in measuring linguistic performance (Pallotti, 2009; Skehan, 1996, 2015), its potential for allowing researchers to employ a set of "more precise operationalisations of underlying constructs" (Skehan, 2001: 170), and its capacity to represent L2 ability in distinct constructs (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Michel, Kuiken, & Vedder, 2007; Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005). In addition, CALF are useful in helping understand the relationship between linguistic output and key cognitive processes underlying SLA, e.g. noticing, attention allocation and working memory (Robinson, 2011; Skehan, 2014), and lend themselves well to examination and interpretation of the processes involved in language production models, e.g. Levelt (1989) and Kellogg (1996). For example, use of CALF has enabled researchers (Foster & Tavakoli, 2009; Kormos & Denes, 2004; Tavakoli & Foster, 2008) to link a change in syntactic complexity of performance to variability in the cognitive demands that influence the Conceptualizer (where the preverbal message is generated), or to explain an increase in lexical diversity in terms of the processing needs of the Formulator (where the preverbal message is converted into a phonetic plan for speech), in Levelt's (1989) model of speech production.

Using CALF, however, is not without limitations. Some argue that there is not a linear relationship between CALF and communicative adequacy, i.e. L2 performance that is not highly accurate, complex or fluent, can be communicatively adequate if it conveys the intended message or achieves the task outcomes (de Jong et al., 2012; Kuiken & Vedder, 2012; Pallotti, 2009). The argument is based on the premise that it is possible to observe fluent and complex performance that does not fulfil the communicative needs of a given task. It has also been argued that although CALF are valid indicators of linguistic performance (Housen et al., 2012), they may fail to provide evidence of linguistic development. A disproportionately small number of studies have investigated L2 development by use of CALF. Gunnarsson (2012) and Ferrari (2012), examining the development of a few learners' interlanguage in oral task performance over a period of three to four years, reported that although all L2 learners made some progress demonstrated in CALF, the rate of development varied considerably from task to task and learner to learner. Polat and Kim (2014), working with case-study data from an individual learner in a non-instructional setting over a period of a year, showed that the advanced L2 speaker's language development was visible in terms of lexical variety, with little improvement in syntactic complexity and almost no improvement in accuracy. These studies support use of CALF to detect L2 development over longer periods of time. There are a number of studies that have examined development of CALF in Study Abroad contexts over a period of three months (e.g. Leonard & Shea, 2017). However, they do not provide any evidence on whether CALF can trace L2 development over a shorter period of time, e.g. a month.

Finally, CALF are considered limited as they do not provide robust evidence of development in other aspects of performance, e.g. communicative and pragmatic abilities. Ortega (2003: 494) contends that development of learner language includes "syntactic complexification, but it also entails the development of discourse and sociolinguistic repertoires that the language user can adapt appropriately to particular communication demands". In their seminal work evaluating CALF, Norris and Ortega (2009: 574) call for a more "organic practice" in measuring language performance and argue that in order to portray the complex, dynamic, and developmental nature of CALF phenomena, we need "multivariate, longitudinal, and descriptive accounts of constructs in L2 performance". A conclusion to make is that while CALF are effective and instrumental in measuring L2 performance, particularly in a linguistic sense, measures that can demonstrate L2 development in a more communicative sense are needed.

To provide a more overarching picture of L2 development, TBLT research also needs to investigate language performance in different task conditions. While studies in corrective feedback and negotiation of meaning (see Mackey & Gass, 2016; for further details) have mainly relied on dialogic forms of communication, dialogic tasks are less popular in TBLT research. The interest in using monologue for research purposes can perhaps be explained in the light of the degree of control in the linguistic units they elicit, and the ease and feasibility of data collection and coding. The intricacies involved in collecting and analysing dialogic data, on the other hand, has made dialogue an under-research task. Walsh (2013) among others argues that in an information-processing perspective to L2 acquisition, development has largely been investigated in monologic mode, with limited attention to measuring other task conditions that involve interaction between speakers.

By aiming to investigate L2 development beyond CALF, this study is an attempt to examine which other measure(s) can successfully reflect development of L2 communicative ability. Research has offered several perspectives on L2 development, but a point of contention in the debate of which perspective to choose is to identify measures that lend themselves effectively

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