



EUROPEAN SCIENCE FOUNDATION

Scientific Report of
ESF sponsored Exploratory Workshop
Bridging the gap between research on second-language acquisition
and research on language testing

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Location: Faculty of Humanities, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

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Scientific content

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) contains proposals for formulating functional learning targets for language teaching. This framework will strongly affect foreign language instruction throughout Europe, as it intends to increase transparency in language-proficiency certification systems for the purpose of citizens continuing their educational or professional careers in other European countries. The Common European Framework (CEFR) adopts a multifaceted approach to the concept of language proficiency. For instance, it distinguishes (1) a great number of “competencies”, (2) six “common reference levels”, and (3) several “qualitative aspects” of performance, all claimed to form a single dimension.

In almost all European countries, language testing practice is being restructured in order to reflect the six CEFR levels of proficiency. An increasing number of language testing experts, however, have raised serious concerns with respect to the use of the CEFR for language testing purposes, arguing that the CEFR, in its current form, lacks specificity and consistency in its definitions and is insufficiently supported by empirical research to allow immediate implementation. The CEFR model raises a number of theoretical and empirical questions concerning the componential structure of language proficiency at various CEFR levels. For example, which combinations of components are possible or impossible at which levels? What exactly is native and near-native competence? What is the relationship between levels of functional, communicative competence and levels of purely linguistic competence? Are the CEFR levels of competence related to what research in second language acquisition over the last thirty years has revealed about so called 'acquisition orders' in so called 'interlanguages'?

In seven European countries (Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom), fundamental research into these questions is in progress or about to start. The projects try to bridge the gap between the SLA and CEFR perspectives, linking research on stages of L2 acquisition with research on language testing, focusing on the entire developmental trajectory, from the lowest till the highest levels of L2 proficiency.

Aim of the workshop. The researchers in these seven projects had never held a meeting to present and discuss their projects. The aim of the three-day ESF workshop was to bring them together for the first time in order to establish a European network and bring about cross-border collaboration.

Participants of the workshop were first of all researchers involved in the seven projects.

- Finland, University of Jyväskylä: Ari Huhta, Maisa Martin;
- France, University of Paris III, Sorbonne nouvelle: Daniel Véronique;
- Germany: Günter Nold, University of Dortmund;
- Italy, University of Sassari and University of Verona: Gabriele Pallotti and Camilla Bettoni, respectively; (Prof. Bettoni could not be present at the Workshop but remains active in the network);
- Netherlands, University of Amsterdam: Jan Hulstijn, Rob Schoonen, Arjen Florijn, Nivja de Jong, Margarita Steinel, Folkert Kuiken, Ineke Vedder;
- Sweden, Stockholm University: Kenneth Hyltenstam, Inge Bartning;
- UK, Lancaster University: Charles Alderson, Florentia Franceschina, Jay Banerjee.

We also invited three project-external experts to critically review our current research and to give us feedback on our proposals for future work. The invited experts are:

- Dr. Glenn Fulcher, University of Dundee (UK), expert in language testing. (Dr. Fulcher could not be present at the Workshop but will be active in the network);
- Prof. Rod Ellis, The University of Auckland, New Zealand, expert in second-language acquisition.

➤ Prof. Sylviane Granger, Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium, expert in electronic learner corpora.

Statistical information

Number of participants invited: 21

Number of participants present: 19

Participants by gender (participants not present in brackets):

Men: 11 (+1)

Women: 8 (+1)

Participants by age (participants not present in brackets):

25-35 years old	2
35-50 years old	7 (+1)
50-65 years old	10 (+1)

Participants by country (participants not present in brackets)

Belgium	1
France	1
Finland	2
Germany	1
Italy	1 (+1)
Netherlands (host)	7
New Zealand	1
Sweden	2
United Kingdom	3 (+1)
Total	19 (+2)

Programme

The workshop programme consisted of sessions on Thursday, 23 February (3:00 till 6.45 p.m.), Friday 24 February (9:00 – 12:30 a.m. and 1.30 – 6.30 p.m.), and Saturday 25 February (9:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.). As planned, the programme was made up of four types of sessions:

1. Presentations of seven research projects followed by discussions. The projects are listed in Appendix 1. Some are small and funded with university money; others are bigger, and funded by national research councils or other funding agencies. Some projects have just been completed, others have just started. Two projects were presented on Thursday. The remaining five projects were presented on Friday. Discussions of the projects centred on possible links with other projects in terms of theory and method.
2. Discussions of theoretical and methodological issues, many of which were raised in a discussion paper written by Hulstijn & Schoonen (“Topics and questions to be addressed in the meeting”). This text, plus written comments by Alderson and Pallotti, had been posted on the workshop’s Blackboard Community site in January, well ahead of the workshop. These discussions took place on all three workshop days.
3. Discussion of the idea of forming a common database of language learner data, or "corpus". This discussion, which took place on Friday, began with a presentation by Granger on her work with electronic learner corpora.
4. Discussion of proposals for a new joint research project, to be conducted in several European countries, and discussion of opportunities for funding of such a cross-border investigation, together with ways of strengthening collaboration between the seven national projects and possible enlargement of the collaborative network. Discussion of these topics took place on Friday and Saturday. The first session began with a guest presentation by Anna Groeninx (Liaison Office of the University of Amsterdam), who informed us of the following funding possibilities: “A new framework strategy for Multilingualism”, published by the European Commission in November 2005; Area 8.5 in EU’s upcoming FP7; the Marie Curie programme within FP7; and the “Ideas” programme of the European Research Council. Information about the linking of language tests to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and various other scaling tools, task complexity descriptions, and videos related to the CEFR, the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), DIALANG (www.dialang.org) and the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe was given on Saturday by Alderson.

Programme: Thursday, 23 February 2006

15.00 – 15.30		Opening session (Jan Hulstijn & Rob Schoonen; no representative of ESF was present)
15.30 – 16.30		Discussion of two of the seven projects
	15:30 – 16:00	“High-level proficiency in second language use” (Hyltenstam & Bartning)
	16:00 – 16:30	“Interlanguage variation across domains, activities and tasks” (Bettoni & Pallotti)
16.30 – 16.45		Break
16.45 – 18.30		Discussion of developmental stages in SLA, proficiency levels in LT, and issues of linking these (questions 1-7 of Hulstijn & Schoonen’s text, distributed in advance)
19:00		Dinner at the Amsterdamse Academisch Club, Oudezijds Achterburgwal 235

Programme: Friday, 24 February 2006

8.30 – 9.00		Arrival
9:00 – 12:30		Discussion of the five remaining projects
	9:00 – 9:40	Documenting features of written language production typical at different IELTS band score levels (Lancaster group)
	9:40 – 10:20	The emergence of structural skills in the acquisition of Finnish as a second language (Martin)
	10:20 - 11:00	Language contact and language acquisition (French as a second language) (Équipe Langues en contact et acquisition –ELCA) (Véronique)
	11:00 – 11:10	coffee break
	11:10 – 11:50	Unravelling second-language proficiency (Amsterdam group)
	11:50 - 12:30	Deutsch Englisch Schülerleistungen International (Nold)
12:30 – 13:30		lunch break
13:30 – 14:30		Presentation by Anna Groeninx (Liaison Office, UvA) on funding possibilities.
14:30 – 15:30		Forming a common database of language-test data. Presentation by Granger followed by discussion.
15:30 – 16:00		coffee break
16:00 – 18:00		Discussions on possibilities for cross-border collaboration
19:00		Dinner at “Namtin” (Chinese), Jodenbreestraat 11.

Programme: Saturday, 25 February 2006

9:30 – 13:00		Continuation of discussion of Friday afternoon’s topics, this time including, rounde off by recapitulating all points of agreement and future actions
13:00		Farewell, snacks and beverages

Summary of issues raised in the discussions on future collaboration

In the ESF Workshop the discussion focused on the feasibility and detail of a project which would attempt to “bridge the gap between research on second-language acquisition (SLA) and language testing (LT)” In this section, the rationale, research questions, and preliminary planning are outlined. Concrete actions are listed in the next section.

Rationale

Throughout Europe, the CEFR has become a major point of reference for language in education, with the potential of bringing common standards and transparency, across Europe, to the formulation of objectives of foreign-language learning curricula and the certification of foreign-language proficiency skills. The CEFR, however, is incomplete. It does not provide detailed guidance to learners, teachers, curriculum designers, and test developers with respect to the linguistic and pragmatic features of language behaviour (performance) at each of the six CEFR levels. It must be borne in mind that the scales of the CEFR are to a large extent based on the intuitions of language teachers about descriptors derived from a number of existing widely used scales of language proficiency. What the CEFR does not indicate is whether learner performance at the six functional levels listed in chapter 4 of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) actually does exhibit the linguistic characteristics listed in chapter 5, and, more specifically, which linguistic features are typical of each of the levels. Answers to these questions are essential if the CEFR is to be successfully implemented across Europe. Furthermore, as the CEFR is intended to be relevant to all and any language, it does not provide information for specific target languages, much less for specific target-source language combinations¹. In short, the CEFR is not yet capable of successful implementation; additional research, linking functional and linguistic information, is urgently needed for all European languages.

Overarching research question

The following research question was seen as central to a collaborative enterprise: *Which (para)linguistic features of learner performance are typical at each of the six CEFR levels?* Initial investigation of this question can be conducted in two ways: (1) learner performance data that have been elicited and analyzed in previous SLA research can be additionally rated with functional rating scales based on the scales presented in chapter 4 of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001); (2) responses of learners who took language proficiency tests which are related to the CEFR (i.e., data already collected by language testers) can also be rated with functional CEFR-based scales and analyzed linguistically. However, for a more thorough investigation of this research question, new international studies need to be conducted using a *common* research design, tasks, procedures, and analyses (see below).

More specific research questions and issues

During the workshop the following points were mentioned as research questions and issues of *potential* relevance. The priority of each point needs to be determined in a subsequent meeting.

1. What are the linguistic profiles of every CEFR level for the two productive language skills (speaking and writing) and what are the linguistic features spoken or written text typical of the two receptive skills (listening and writing) at every CEFR level?

¹ In the present context, a target language is a language learned as a nonnative language after the acquisition of a source language. A source language is a language learned in childhood, be it in a monolingual or multilingual environment.

2. To what extent are there common or different profile features across the seven target languages of the proposed project (Finnish, French, Italian, German, Dutch, English and Swedish)? Do the profiles differ along language-family lines (Finnish versus the two Romance languages Italian and French, and the three Germanic languages German, Dutch and English)? To what extent are there different profiles depending on learners' source language?
3. What are the limits of learners' performance at each of the CEFR levels? It is important not only to investigate what learners typically *do* at each of the CEFR levels (which requires elicitation of performance in rather "open" task formats), but also what learners *can* and *cannot do* (which requires the administration of tasks of a "closed" format, with and without time pressure, and the measurement of both accuracy and reaction times). In other words, in order to find features typical of each CEFR level, we need to explore borderline features and to identify features shared by two or more levels and construct appropriate scales.
4. Which linguistic features emerging from our profiling research can serve as successful tools in the diagnosis of learners' proficiency levels and of weaknesses that require additional attention and training? The investigation of this research question is of considerable practical importance for all stakeholders (learners, teachers, curriculum and test designers and other language educationists). One desired outcome of the proposed project would be the development of diagnostic tools as well as information which could be included in learners' language portfolios.²
5. Which paralinguistic features are characteristic of learners' verbal behaviour at each of the six CEFR levels? Verbal behaviour is more than the reception and production of purely linguistic information. In spoken interaction (conversations), for instance, facial expression, movement of hands and arms and body posture form important elements of one's behaviour.
6. Are there commonalities and differences between the linguistic profiles of foreign-language learners (who learn the target language in the formal setting of a school curriculum or a language course) and those of second-language learners (who learn the target language without formal instruction)? This question is not only of theoretical but also of practical importance. For example, a feature such as (un)successful use of subject-verb agreement might have a different predictive value for foreign language learners than for second language learners. Even though there are unlikely to be many substantial differences, the question needs to be investigated.

² A diagnostic test gives information on a learner's strengths and weaknesses with respect to subskills and language. The results of a diagnostic test form the basis for remedial action. A proficiency test provides information about a learner's level of general proficiency and may be used for higher education, employment or mobility. A language portfolio is a document in which those who are learning or have learned a language - whether at school or outside school - can record and reflect on their language learning and cultural experiences. The portfolio contains a language passport which its owner regularly updates. A grid is provided where his/her language competences can be described according to common criteria accepted throughout Europe and which can be complementary to certificates of proficiency. The document also contains a detailed language biography describing the owner's experiences in each language recorded which is designed to guide the learner in planning and assessing progress. Finally, there is a dossier where examples of personal work can be kept to illustrate one's language competences.

Further theoretical reflections

The investigations referred to above require a thorough theoretical orientation on the relationship between language proficiency and the tasks with which we measure language proficiency. This requires more reflection on the construct of *language proficiency*, on the construct of *task* (including sociopragmatic features), and on *task conditions*. The need for such reflection became clear at the ESF Workshop in February 2006 in Amsterdam. Decisions also need to be made with respect to elicitation tasks, rating scales for the assessment of the CEFR-based levels of language proficiency, procedures for the scoring of linguistic features, and statistical analyses. Agreement on all these issues will need to be reached in subsequent meetings.

Theories of the human language faculty and of second language acquisition are clearly essential sources for preliminary predictions with respect to which linguistic features might be typical at which CEFR levels. It is expected that the results of the proposed project will contribute to the improvement of these theories.

Database

Data elicited in research aimed at answering the research questions listed above need to be stored in an electronic database (corpus) available to all researchers. A project proposal will be submitted in due course aiming to build such a learner corpus.

Phasing of the projected research

In a first phase (March – December 2006), the literature will be surveyed to identify potential diagnostic features that have been found to be useful by second language acquisition and language testing research. In Phase 2, existing learner corpora will be examined to see to what extent they can yield useful diagnostic information. However, most if not all learner corpora have not been designed to yield information relevant to the CEFR levels, and therefore it will be essential to develop a new and specially designed mega-corpus relevant to our research questions, and target and source languages. The work in Phase 1 will be conducted with current (limited) resources. The research in Phase 2 and beyond will be dependent on external funding.

Decisions and actions

On the final day of the ESF Workshop, the following decisions and actions were agreed upon.

1. Production of preliminary profiles. To the extent possible between March and the beginning of December 2006, each language group will review the literature on the acquisition of its own language (as a second or foreign language) with the aim of identifying linguistic features potentially characteristic of the six CEFR levels (the scales of chapter 4 of the CEFR 2001 document). The target languages and researchers are:

- Finnish (Martin & Huhta)
- English (Banerjee & Franceschina)
- French (Véronique; Bartning; Granger)
- Swedish (Hyltenstam)
- German (Nold will try to find someone in Germany)
- Italian (Pallotti & Bettoni)³
- Dutch (De Jong, Steinel, Florijn, Schoonen, & Hulstijn)

2. In 2006, the collaborative enterprise referred to under 1 above will be limited to the languages and researchers/research groups mentioned. In later phases other languages and researchers might be added gradually. However, it is important to avoid too rapid growth, with accompanying loss of cohesion and control, until all design considerations have been fully addressed, initial data has been collected and analysed, and experience has developed in setting up and managing, not only the corpus, but also what is potentially a large group of researchers.

3. It is important to have a distinct and recognisable name for the proposed project. All participants in the nascent network were encouraged to suggest possible names and acronyms, not later than March 15. Franceschina and Hulstijn will select the best name.

4. Each group will continue to seek funding for its research from whatever local and national funding agencies are appropriate.

5. The intention is to submit a project proposal within FP7. However, at present, there is considerable uncertainty with respect to the detailed nature of FP7, particularly of the various work programmes. These are thought to be likely to be published in September / October of 2006, and the first call for proposals is likely to be around February 2007. However, given the degree of uncertainty with respect to the overall budget, as well as to the detail of research priorities and procedures for applying for funding, all participants were asked to inform themselves via their local institutions and to share whatever information they are able to glean. Consulting with national ministries, research institutions and politicians is also recommended if at all possible.

6. The next meeting will take place in Amsterdam on December 1-2 2006. Hulstijn will seek (partial) funding for this meeting from NWO's Council for the Humanities (the "Language acquisition and multilingualism" programme). Given current understanding of timing, the beginning of December 2006 is likely to be an appropriate time for developing plans for a joint proposal to FP7.

7. From the research questions and issues mentioned in the previous section it is obvious that a number of meetings will be needed. Hulstijn will make inquiries as to which ESF programmes offer opportunities for additional meetings and for obtaining funding for the projected research. ESF's "Network" programme does not exist anymore. However, the COST programme, originally limited to science and technology, will from 2006 onwards be open to researchers in all domains. Decisions on details are expected to be made on 30 March

³ Dr. Camilla Bardel, senior researcher of Italian as a foreign language at the University of Stockholm, who is part of the big Stockholm project of Hyltenstam et al., has requested to join Pallotti and Bettoni.

2006, and information about the upcoming Call for proposals will be posted on the web [<http://www.cost.esf.org/index.php>](http://www.cost.esf.org/index.php).

8. ESF also offers an (indirect) way to obtain funding for new research. ESF's EUROCORES programme offers one possibility. Hulstijn will consider submitting a EUROCORES proposal, seeking advice on how the proposal submitted unsuccessfully in 2005 might be improved. The submission deadline is June 1st, 2006.

9. Participants will continue their exchange of ideas and documents via the Blackboard Community website, created by Hulstijn & Schoonen in January 2006 and maintained since then.

Appendix 1

List of invitees

Belgium

Dr. Sylviane Granger, Centre for English Corpus Linguistics, Université catholique de Louvain

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Italy

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Appendix 2

Summary description of the seven projects

Germany

Project title: DESI (Deutsch Englisch Schülerleistungen/German English Student Assessment International)

Institution: DIPF in Frankfurt, Consortium of eight researchers from six German universities

Principle investigators: Eckhard Klieme, Wolfgang Eichler, Andreas Helmke, Rainer H. Lehmann, Günter Nold, Hans-Günter Rolff, Konrad Schröder, Günther Thomé, Heiner Willenberg

Start and end of project: 2001-2006

Funding: KMK (the national board of the ministers of education in Germany)

Short project description:

DESI is a large-scale research project whose aim it is in Germany to assess and diagnose the educational system in German mother tongue education and in English as the first foreign language (in most cases). In addition, it is intended to assess the English late partial immersion program (German version of CLIL) in relation to the regular mainstream English classroom.

The research is done by a consortium of eight researchers with a background in educational psychology, empirical pedagogy and applied linguistics (German and English language education) from the universities of Augsburg, Berlin (Humboldt U.), Dortmund, Hamburg, Koblenz-Landau, Oldenburg. The speaker of the consortium is the head of DIPF (German Institute for International Educational Research) in Frankfurt.

DESI assesses the whole range of spoken and written language competences and, in addition, strategic competences (language awareness) as well as intercultural sensitivity in the school subjects German and English at the beginning and the end of grade 9 in all types of schools and in line with the curricula of the different states and the national standards in education. The sample consists of 11.000 students from 440 schools and it includes a subsample of 1250 students enrolled in a German CLIL program. The special situation of students whose mother tongue is not German is also considered.

It is also the aim to investigate major causes of the different levels of achievement by means of quantitative and qualitative research that is based on data with cognitive, affective-motivational, and social variables and it also includes a video study of teaching behaviour in the English classroom. The respective variables are collected in the classroom and outside, and students, parents and teachers are involved. On the basis of the research findings it is intended to implement changes in the German system of language education.

Finally, it will be the a major objective of DESI to link the test battery of the English component to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) in order to relate the findings of DESI to a criterion-referenced framework und also to implement curricular changes in education in line with the CEFR.

Finland

Project title: The Emergence of Structural Skills in the Acquisition of Finnish as a Second Language

Institution: Department of Languages, P.O.B. 35, 40014 University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

Principle investigators: Maisa Martin

Start and end of project: 2002

Funding: Finnish Academy (2002-2003) and University of Jyväskylä (since 2003)

Short project description:

The study endeavours to shed light on the acquisition of grammatical structures in relation to the communicatively based CEFR levels. The starting points are twofold: The already functionally rated data from the National Certificate of Language Proficiency (NCLP) tests in several languages, including Finnish, are available for studying the actual occurrence of linguistic structures. The formal entrance into the overall research problem is provided by the Processability Theory (PT), developed by Manfred Pienemann (1998), which claims to be able to predict a cognitively and linguistically based acquisition order in any language. The universal nature of the PT makes it possible to study any language in the NCLP corpus, but the Finnish data are of special interest due to the typological difference (but cultural and social closeness) of the Finnish language when compared with the Germanic languages on which the PT was developed. Particularly the morphophonological richness of Finnish seems to challenge the PT in tentative studies (Martin 2002, 2003, 2004). An existing attempt to relate the CEFR levels with structures of Finnish both for receptive and productive skills (Lehtonen 2004) is also available for establishing hypotheses for the future study. In addition to structures, the relationship between other linguistic (and possibly communicative) features of learner performance with the CEFR levels will also be studied with the help of the Finnish NCLP data.

France

Project title: The acquisition of the grammar of French as L2

Institution: ELCA (Équipe Langues en contact et Acquisition), a member of DILTEC, Université Paris III-Sorbonne Nouvelle

Principle investigators: Daniel Véronique & Sabine Lopez Irankhah Ziabar

Start and end of project: 2004-2008

Funding:

Short project description:

After the completion of two Ph. D. theses on the acquisition of temporality in French L2 by German and Chinese learner in guided settings and the completion of a survey of research on the acquisition of grammar in French L2, the focus of the project is to further knowledge of the developmental sequences in the acquisition French and to relate these findings to the CEFR levels. The Ph. D. thesis of S. Lopez will be devoted to an analysis of oral and written material collected through the TCF test for French L2, rated according to the Common European Framework. It is expected that exploration of this corpus will lead to further data collection to supplement data produced through the TCF test.

Italy

Project title: Interlanguage variation across domains, activities and tasks
Institution: University of Verona, University of Sassari
Principal investigators: Camilla Bettoni & Gabriele Pallotti
Start and end of project: 2004-2007
Funding: Italian Ministry of Education, Universities of Verona and Sassari

Short project description:

The project's aim is to provide as complete as possible a description of an interlanguage at a given moment, by recording a sizeable speech sample (about two hours per subject) produced in a number of tasks. It will thus be possible to profile accurately the learners' linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competencies, and to analyze how the interlanguage varies systematically across contextual dimensions as defined by the CEFR. Learners in fact produce language in the public and the personal domains, with acquaintances and strangers, with peers and out-groups, monologically and dialogically, on the phone and face-to-face, performing a variety of activities, such as requesting information, discussing, reporting, giving instructions. They are also involved in some of the more 'traditional' elicitation tasks used in SLA research, like film- and picture story-retelling, and in what is probably the most commonly used procedure for testing oral language, the oral proficiency interview (OPI).

Subjects are six adolescent learners of L2 Italian, plus two native speakers to provide baseline data (more subjects will be included in the future). They are recorded interacting among themselves in pairs and with an adult present on the scene, plus with other peers and adults on the phone. The independent variables are contextual features, with the dependent variables being a range of measures of linguistic and pragmatic behavior. Data analysis is both quantitative and qualitative.

The project will thus permit to shed light on the two following fundamental issues for a better integration of SLA research with language testing: what are the linguistic correlates of socio-communicative dimensions as outlined by the CEFR? How does interlanguage production vary across different tasks in general, and in particular across tasks traditionally employed in SLA research (e.g. film retellings, information gap tasks), and in language testing (e.g. OPIs), and tasks closer to real-life (e.g. asking information on the phone, planning a strategy for a game)?

Netherlands

Project title: Unraveling second-language proficiency
Institution: Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication, University of Amsterdam
Principle investigators: Nivja de Jong, Margarita Steinel, Arjen Florijn, Rob Schoonen, & Jan Hulstijn
Start and end of project: 2004-2008
Funding: Council of the Humanities, Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO)

Short project description:

The project consists of three studies. In study 1, 200 learners of Dutch as a second language at the B1 and C1 levels of the CEFR and a control group of 50 native speakers perform speaking tasks in the personal and public domain (context), as well as a number of off-line 'knowledge' tests (architecture) and on-line 'control' tests (processing). With the use of structural equation modelling, the relative weight of vocabulary knowledge, grammatical knowledge and speed of word and sentence

processing will be assessed in speaking performance in personal and public communicative settings. In two small-scale studies, involving 30 Turkish and 30 English learners of Dutch and 15 native controls, in-depth investigations are conducted to link assessment of speaking performance with what is known about stages of interlanguage development and about the influence of the first language on the acquisition of a second language (study 2) and with notions of fluency and automaticity (study 3).

Sweden

Project title: High-level proficiency in second language use
Institution: Faculty of Humanities, Stockholm University
Principle investigators: Kenneth Hyltenstam, Inge Bartning, Lars Fant
Start and end of project: 2006-2009 (2011)
Funding: The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond)

Short project description:

The program, comprising nine studies, intends to investigate advanced, near-native, or even native-like, levels of proficiency in a second language. It aims at taking a decisive step forward in the understanding of the cognitive and psycholinguistic, linguistic-structural, and socio-psychological and societal conditions that, on the one hand, allow language learners to attain such outstanding levels in a second language, and, on the other hand, what constraints prevent them from going all the way and become entirely like first language speakers. The focus on high level proficiencies in a second language is strongly motivated by current developments in second language acquisition theory. The last phase of successful second language acquisition is actually the one that is least well understood, while, at the same time, the searchlight has begun to be directed towards the issues implicated at this level.

United Kingdom

Project title: Documenting features of written language production typical at different IELTS band score levels
Institution: Department of Linguistics and English Language, Lancaster University
Principle investigators: Jayanti Banderjee, Florentia Franceschina and Anne Margaret Smith
Start and end of project: 2005-
Funding:

Short project description:

This research addresses the question of how competence levels, as operationalized in a rating scale, might be related to what is known about L2 developmental stages. Looking specifically at the writing performances generated by Tasks 1 and 2 of the International English Language Testing System's (IELTS) Academic Writing module, the study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the defining characteristics of written language performance at each IELTS band with regards to:
 - a. cohesive devices used
 - b. vocabulary richness
 - c. syntactic complexity
 - d. grammatical accuracy
2. How do these features of written language change from one IELTS level to the next across the 3 – 8 band range?
3. What are the effects of L1 and writing task type on the measures of proficiency explored in question 1?

The writing performances of 275 test-takers from two L1 groups (Chinese and Spanish) were transcribed and then subjected to manual annotation for each of the measures selected. Where automatic or semi-automated tools were available for analysis (particularly in the area of vocabulary richness) these were used. The results suggest all except the syntactic complexity measures investigated here are informative of increasing proficiency level. Vocabulary and grammatical accuracy measures appear to complement each other in interesting ways. L1 and writing tasks seem to have important effects on some of the measures, so they are an important factor to take into account in further research.