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When evaluating the quality of the output, oral or written in L2 (second language), you do it in the terms of complexity and accuracy (cf. Wolfe-Quintero *et al*., 1998). Improvement in L2 writing could therefore be expressed in an increase of complexity and accuracy. Nevertheless, recent L2 research shows that these evaluating tools are quite difficult to define and ambiguous to use (cf. Housen *et al*. forthcoming).

In a 30 month longitudinal study, we have used ScriptLog (Strömqvist & Malmsten, 1997) and a video-filmed thinking aloud protocol (TAP) to record the written production of 5 Swedish guided learners of L2 French during their last 6 semesters in high school, (i.e. from low/intermediary to intermediary/advanced level of L2 French according to the Bartning & Schlyter (2004) evaluation criteria). The subjects produced 2 texts per each of the 6 recording periods (=12 texts). Three kinds of narrative tasks were used: personal memory telling, summary of a film or a text studied in class, and stories to be told from a series of pictures. The data from these recordings are used to analyze the 'improvement' of each subject in terms of complexity and accuracy. Complexity is evaluated by conventional measures for syntactic complexity (clauses per T-unit), and the findings presented here are based on data from one of the writing tasks – telling a personal memory. According to the Wolfe-Quintero *et al.* study (1998), simple error counting has it problems when measuring improvement in accuracy: 1: there is a risk for subjectiveness when defning an error; and 2/ an error could be the sign of a positive development in the subject. For these reasons, we have here opted for focusing on the use and development of four morphosyntactic phenomena: subject-verb agreement in the group of verbs on *–ir*, *-re* and *–oir* (in singular where the agreement can only be seen in written production but not heard in oral production), negation (*ne V pas*), clitic object

pronouns and the choice between *passé composé* and *imparfait* in the past tense. Based on structure complexity, subject-verb agreement and negation are considered to be simple structures and clitic object pronouns and the choice between *passé* compose and *imparfait* are considered to be complex structures. Data from all texts and tasks were considered for the analyses of accuracy (see Gunnarsson, forthcoming for more details). As this is a corpus study of 5 subjects, there is not enough data to make quantitative statistics, therefore all analyses are qualitative.

Findings

The findings for complexity show very little improvement in the different subjects. Furthermore, when consulting the TAPs, we cannot find any signs of the learners being aware of complexity issues when formulating the text. It is possible that the learners in this study have not yet reached the linguistic level in their L2 French to start to manifest an explicit interest in complexity. On the contrary, the TAPs seems to confirm the claim that L2 writers are more preoccupied with low level linguistic aspects (i.e. spelling, grammar and vocabulary) at the expense of more high level linguistic aspects such as textual and pragmatic aspects which would promote complexity (Barbier, 2004). One could therefore assume that the improvement in text quality would be more significant in accuracy.

When evaluating the improvement in the four morphosyntactic phenomena we chose to study, we first of all notice important individual differences, albeit the differences appear to vary according to the studied morphosyntactic phenomenon. For the simple phenomena subject-verb agreement and negation, there are of course individual differences, but what is interesting to observe is that those who have the most correct production in the first recording continue to have it, albeit the increase of correctness is quite weak in all the subjects.

When it comes to the more complex morphosyntactic phenomena the picture is another. In clitic object pronouns (COPs), the subjects having a less correct production in the simple structures have a more correct AND, more important, a more frequent production of COPs. Moreover these subjects use more COPs in the last recordings. Finally, the choice between *passé composé* and *imparfait* in the past tense occurs to be a good illustration of the multidimensional concept of accuracy. If we only consider correctness of the production, the subjects having a more correct production in the simple structures do have a more correct production in the first recordings compared to the others. This is challenged in the last recordings where one subject of the other group reaches the same level of correctness. Then we also have to take into account the variation between *passé composé* and *imparfait*. It is only when you use both tenses in a text that you get to give both foreground (*passé composé*) and background (*imparfait*), which makes the texts more complex, showing a more mature writer. When variation between the tenses is considered, only the subjects with a less correct production in the simple structures use both past tenses, whereas the others do not. They tend to concentrate on a correct use of *passé composé*, which makes the texts a more uni-dimensional telling of 'what came next' and continue to do it all along the study.

These observations raise once again the question of how to measure improvement in intermediary L2 writing. Syntactic complexity seems to be quite useless as the L2 writers at this level are not concerned with high level linguistic aspects. Which accuracy parameters should be considered? A correct production or a production with more complex grammatical structures? Could it be that some learners concentrate on accuracy in the terms of simple structures which are easier to control when writing while other learners concentrate on complexity, not in terms of *clauses per T-unit*, but in terms of a more complex grammatical structure? If this is the case, what is 'improvement' in L2 French writing?

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