

Capturing L2 accuracy developmental patterns: Insights from an error-tagged EFL learner corpus

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Studies that tap into the dynamics of L2 developmental patterns have recently been identified as the *parent pauvre* of second language acquisition research (Lee 2001, Ortega & Iberri-Shea 2005, Ortega & Byrnes 2010). Additionally, calls for a new methodology in capturing L2 developmental trends have been making themselves heard (Myles 2010), with attention being drawn to the potential contribution of learner corpora.

The present article addresses the issue of L2 accuracy developmental trajectories and shows how they can be captured via an error-tagged version of an EFL learner corpus. The data used in this study were extracted from the *International Corpus of Learner English* (Granger et al. 2009) and consist of a total of 223 learner essays. Each script was (a) manually and exhaustively annotated for errors following the Louvain error tagging taxonomy (Dagneaux et al. 2008) which includes c. 50 different error types and (b) individually rated by two testing experts according to the Common European Framework (CEF; Council of Europe 2001) descriptors for linguistic accuracy, viz. each text was assigned a B1 (lower-intermediate), B2 (upper-intermediate), C1 (advanced) or C2 (near-native) score. The aim of the present analysis is to trace the development of the different error types along the B1-C2 proficiency continuum. The methodology used to count the errors at each level, viz. *potential occasion analysis*, has rarely been used in learner corpus research or SLA and involves counting the errors of each type out of a more refined denominator than the total tokens per text (e.g. the auxiliary verb errors are counted as a percentage of the total number of auxiliaries identified on the basis of the part-of-speech tagged version of the corpus). The potential occasion analysis scores were then submitted to two main types of statistical analyses, namely a one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) and a trend analysis, which enabled the identification of a series of developmental patterns. Hence, it was for instance found that certain error types progressed significantly across the entire proficiency continuum (i.e. $B1 > B2 > C1 > C2$) while others showed marked improvement between the B- and the C-levels only (i.e. $[B1/B2] > [C1/C2]$). Although our study is quasi-longitudinal rather than purely longitudinal (i.e. it considers different learners at various proficiency levels rather than the same learners across time), it nevertheless has a number of implications for SLA developmental research, one of which is to provide a macro-approach to the development of accuracy patterns. As proved by a meta-analysis of c. 45 SLA developmental studies that I carried out, SLA has been very active conducting micro-analyses of individual L2 features (e.g. the development of relative pronouns (Byrnes & Sinicrope 2010) or articles (Liu & Gleason 2002)). This article takes a different approach and sheds light on the behaviour of numerous accuracy components.

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