

Foreword

This book is the first volume of the new EUROSLA Monograph Series. It presents work by the SLATE network (Second Language Acquisition and Testing in Europe, see <http://www.slategroup.eu>).

The SLATE network shares an interest in combining knowledge of communicative proficiency, as expressed by the can-do scales of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), with research results with respect to the degree of control of various linguistic features in language productions judged to be at a given CEFR level.

The contributions included in this book all share this common goal. Despite this common goal the studies presented in the book differ from each other in many aspects. There are many target languages (L2; Dutch, English, Finnish, French, Italian, Norwegian, Spanish) and more than 20 source languages (L1). Learners are mostly adults but also young people and children. Learning environments include both formal and informal contexts. Some studies span all CEFR levels from A1 – C2, some concentrate on comparing two adjacent levels. The grammatical descriptions, underlying the definitions of the linguistic features chosen for the studies, comprise both rule-based and usage-based approaches. Parameters of development include vocabulary size, various grammatical features, as well as pragmatic or textual characteristics. Some use the CAF triad (Complexity, Accuracy, Fluency) as the way to track linguistic development, some focus on other areas.

The main focus of the present book, despite of this variety of data and approaches, is on levels of linguistic proficiency as generally understood in testing research, and developmental stages as often posited in SLA research. European languages are in very different positions as to having established stages of second language acquisition. Innumerous studies have addressed the acquisition of English, and there is a fair amount of information on French, while less widely spoken languages like Finnish and Norwegian are only now being examined from this angle. This provides researchers with different starting points, with their advantages and disadvantages. When the overall order of acquisition of various grammatical structures is more or less known, as is the case for English, the study of the development of structures across the CEFR levels can

be based on previous studies. There are thus good reasons to make predictions about which features might prove to be good indicators of development – criterial or diagnostic features, depending on the point of view of the researcher. When there is no such previous knowledge, the choice of the features to be examined must be based on the intuitions of experienced language teachers or on the knowledge of development of other languages, even if these theories have not been tested against the language in question.

In such a vast area of research, only a few issues can be touched upon in one volume. The main foci of the studies described in the various chapters are briefly presented below, to familiarize the reader with what is to follow. The SLATE network and its aims are described in the Introductory Chapter by Charles Alderson (Lancaster University), Jan Hulstijn and Rob Schoonen (University of Amsterdam). The introduction is followed by eight chapters presenting results from different SLATE-related projects across Europe. In the final section the first conveners of SLATE, Charles Alderson and Jan Hulstijn, evaluate the SLATE work to date, as presented in this book. All the contributors are briefly introduced in the end of the book.

In the first chapter Riikka Alanen, Ari Huhta and Mirja Tarnanen (University of Jyväskylä) discuss a number of issues relevant to task design and assessment attempting to combine the goals and practices of task-based SLA research, on the one hand, and language testing, on the other. The authors illustrate this by discussing theoretical and methodological decisions underlying the Finnish research project *Cefling*, set up to study the linguistic features of the proficiency levels described by the CEFR scales. In the *Cefling* project, written L2 data (roughly 2400 texts) have been collected from 7th – 9th graders studying Finnish and English as L2 at school. The overall aim of the chapter is to discuss the issues involved in developing tasks and assessment procedures, as well as the construction of L2 corpora that fit the requirements that SLA and language testing research place on language tasks. The chapter also offers an illustrative analysis of task variability performance and a discussion of how quantitative and qualitative analysis of task performance can help researchers to evaluate task design.

Maisa Martin, Sanna Mustonen, Nina Reiman, and Marja Seilonen (University of Jyväskylä) also report results from the Finnish *Cefling* project. The underlying theoretical principle of the *Cefling* project is a usage-based and a cognitively oriented view on language learning. The aim of the chapter is two-fold: to show how the development of particular linguistic structures can be tracked across CEFR levels and to find evidence of potential co-development of different domains. The structures under investigation are locative cases, and transitive and passive constructions in L2 Finnish. Language proficiency was meas-

ured by using three parameters: frequency, accuracy, and distribution across the six CEFR levels. The corpus on which the study is based, which represent the written production of adult learners (informal messages, formal messages and argumentative texts), was derived from the National Proficiency Certificates exams for L2 Finnish,

Folkert Kuiken, Ineke Vedder (University of Amsterdam), and Roger Gilabert (University of Barcelona) investigate the relationship between communicative aspects of L2 writing, as defined in the descriptor scales of the CEFR, and the linguistic complexity of L2 performance. The main goal of the *CALC* study (Communicative adequacy and linguistic complexity in L2 writing) is to provide evidence of learner performance, both in functional and linguistic terms (grammar, lexis, accuracy) at a particular CEFR level (A2-B1). A second aim is to contribute to the description of interlanguage by analyzing the use of particular linguistic features that typically characterize L2 performance at a given proficiency level. The investigation was based on a corpus of 200 short essays written by L2 learners of Italian, Dutch, and Spanish. Communicative adequacy was assessed by means of the ratings of individual raters on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 6. Linguistic complexity was measured both by means of the overall scores of a Likert scale and by means of general measures.

The chapter by Angeliki Salamoura and Nick Saville (University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations) discusses the findings of the *English Profile Programme*. The goal of the project is to provide a set of 'Reference Level Descriptions' (RLD) for each of the six CEFR levels and to identify the so called 'criterial features' of English.. Criterial features, the use of which may vary according to the level achieved, can serve as a basis for the estimation of a learner's proficiency level. The authors illustrate how hypotheses formulated from theories and models of SLA and a corpus-informed approach can be used to investigate L2 learner data in order to develop the RLD's for English. The analyses are based on data from the *Cambridge Learner Corpus* (CLC), containing subsets of examination tests and representing 130 different L1s. In the chapter an overview is given of a number of criterial features of English for the CEFR levels A2-C2 and some preliminary results of verb co-occurrence frames, relative clauses and verbs expressing spatial information are presented.

Similarly to the contributions by Alanen *et al.*, Martin *et al.* and Kuiken *et al.*, the study of Fanny Forsberg and Inge Bartning (University of Stockholm) aims at matching communicative competence as proposed in the CEFR scales with the development of linguistic proficiency. The main goal of the chapter is the investigation of linguistic features of French L2 (CEFR-levels A1-C1), in terms of morpho-syntax, discourse organisation and the use of formulaic sequences. In earlier research on acquisitional orders in oral L2 French the lin-

guistic phenomena under investigation in the chapter discussed in the book were already found to be 'criterial' for French. In the study written data were collected from 42 Swedish university students of L2 French. The first results show that morpho-syntactic accuracy measures yield significant differences between the CEFR-levels up to B2. Also the use of lexical formulaic sequences increases at higher CEFR-levels, but with significant differences only between A2, B2 and C2.

The chapter by Gabriele Pallotti (University of Reggio Emilia) describes a project aimed at 'bringing interlanguage analysis to school'. In the project 10 kindergarten, 7 primary and 2 middle school classes in Italy were involved, including 120 NNS children and 40 NS children, aged between 5 and 13. A number of elicitation procedures were used, comprising film and picture-story retellings, static pictures description and semi-guided interviews. Also teachers were involved in data collection. The chapter shows some examples of interlanguage analysis and focuses upon different stages of the research process, including data collection, transcription, coding, scoring, and quantitative and qualitative analysis. The author concludes that carrying out a systematic interlanguage analysis as it is done in SLA research is highly time consuming and very impractical in most teaching and testing contexts. If CEFR scales are to be related to acquisitional sequences in teaching and testing contexts, it is necessary to find ways in which the latter can be assessed in a reasonable amount of time and without specialized skills, while preserving the procedure's validity with respect to current SLA theorising and methodology.

Cecilie Carlsen (University of Bergen) reports on an empirical investigation of the use of acquisition of cohesion and coherence in written texts, particularly the use of cohesive devices. The study was based on a corpus of Norwegian L2-texts written by immigrant learners of Norwegian with different language backgrounds. A number of 36 different connectives were selected. Following the predictions of the CEFR concerning the increasing range and higher control of cohesive devices across the six levels, the author hypothesizes that although cohesive devices occur at all CEFR levels, texts at higher levels will contain a broader range and a higher degree of control of cohesive devices than lower level texts. A qualitative analysis of the type of cohesive devices which were used showed that additive connectives were employed correctly by almost all the level groups whereas adversative and causal connectives demonstrated a higher error rate.

The main issue discussed in the chapter of James Milton (University of Swansea) concerns the relationship in L2 between vocabulary size and linguistic proficiency in terms of CEFR levels. The study, building on data from English, French and Greek, proposes tools for diagnosing learners' vocabulary

proficiency level in order to examine the number of words that L2 learners at each CEFR level typically know. As an example of a useful tool instrument for testing vocabulary size, the author discusses Meara's XLex test of passive receptive vocabulary. The XLex test estimates the knowledge of the learner of the most frequent 5000 lemmatised words. By means of this test the results of the study show that progressively higher vocabulary scores are generally associated with progressively higher CEFR, despite a certain degree of individual variation

The target of the present volume, set at the SLATE meeting in Jyvaskyla in summer 2009, was both to disseminate research results and to develop future directions for addressing the SLATE research agenda, described in the Introduction Chapter. Although the majority of the studies reported in this book are still going on, the editors of the book firmly believe that publishing these first stimulating results of the work which has already been done will be useful to provoke discussion and to exchange ideas. Let the work go on!

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