Multidimensional construct of lexical sophistication: the case of non-language majors in the context of ELFSA (English as a Lingua Franca Study Abroad)

Abstract

This paper contributes to the body of research in SA context by applying a new approach to the concept of lexical sophistication (LS) as an important subconstruct of lexical complexity (Bulté & Housen, 2012) or lexical richness (Read, 2000). The study of LS has recently been expanded to include new indicators (Kyle et al., 2018) not previously included in SA studies of lexical competence (e.g., range, n-gram association strength, psycholinguistic characteristics of words, semantic networks). Innovations in the study of LS also provide new measures for describing familiar concepts related to LS, such as frequency or presence of academic vocabulary.

This study documents language development in the context of ELFSA, which focuses on non-language majors studying and living in a country where English is not an official language, a population considered under-researched and in need of further attention (Köylü,2021). The main goal is to investigate whether and how LS changes in the EFL (English as a foreign language) of Croatian non-language majors during a semester abroad. The analysis is based on both written and spoken corpora, which allows for a comparison of the two modes. The results show a statistically significant increase in eight and a decrease in one measure of LS in oral production. In written production, results reached statistical significance on six LS measures, three positive and three negative. Finally, comparison of the differences between the pre-test and post-test scores for the two modes revealed nine statistically significant results, six of which indicated greater progress in oral production and three in written production.

Qualitative data collected through interviews and diaries provide possible explanations for the quantitatively observed trends.

References:

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