

Developing practices and resources for social interaction: evidence from longitudinal CA-SLA

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The human ability for social interaction is unique among the species. While some interactional practices are present even before birth (think of mommy and not-yet-born baby playfully ‘taking turns’), our interactional competence develops throughout life. But how is that competence affected when we move into a second language (L2)? What are the basic constituents of L2 interactional competence and what are the basic features of its development over time? Is interactional competence simply ‘transferred’ from the L1 to the L2, or is it recalibrated?

In this paper I discuss findings from a set of longitudinal studies that we conducted at the University of Neuchâtel on L2 interactional development as regards the most central organizational principles of social interaction: turn-taking organization, sequence organization, repair organization, and preference organization. Based on the cumulative evidence emanating from these studies, and taking stock of other existing research, I argue for an understanding of L2 interactional development as involving a diversification of people’s ‘methods’ (i.e., systematic procedures: Garfinkel 1967) for action, and, concomitantly, an increased ability for context-sensitive conduct (i.e., the ability to tailor talk/conduct to the local circumstantial details of the ongoing interaction). I show how grammatical resources participate in this process, and suggest that the development of L2 grammar-for-interaction is an integral part of L2 interactional competence.