L2 English Academic Speaking Development: Insights from a Multilingual University Context in North Macedonia

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Abstract

Little is known about the development of second language (L2) capacities in L2 users located in multilingual environments where more than one language is a viable communication tool and users can decide which to use for which purpose. Adopting a socially-grounded perspective on L2 learning, this study explores L2 academic English development in a multilingual university context in North Macedonia through a longitudinal study of 10 students’ L2 performance in the academic register ‘oral presentation’. L2 performance data were sampled on three naturally occurring classroom occasions during the students’ first, second and final year of undergraduate study. The presentations were analysed for students’ use of recurrent multiword sequences as a measure of development of routinized discourse production. This analysis was complemented by an analysis of the students’ language use habits and socialization patterns. The analyses revealed some positive L2 English development between first and second but stagnant development between second and final year L2 performance for the investigated categories (tokens, types, structure, discourse function). This language use pattern coincided with students’ orientation towards L1-based socializing by the final year. These results call for a reconsideration of academic L2 English instruction in multilingual environments outside native English-speaking settings, where L2 development seems to be susceptible to L2 users’ overall language use habits.

Keywords: Academic speaking; Higher Education; multi-word sequences; International English; advanced L2 capacities