New developments in the study of L2 writing complexity: An editorial

A growing number of publications are highlighting the promising interfaces between the traditionally separate research areas of Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Writing (see Manchón & Tardy, 2012). Researchers are pointing out the specific aspects of writing that facilitate L2 development, in particular its slower pace and permanent record (vs. speaking), which are conducive to more learner self-reflection and greater linguistic complexity and precision (Verspoor, Schmid, & Xu, 2012; Williams, 2012). Separately, the burgeoning field of research on L2 complexity has yielded both programmatic studies that have re-examined and re-defined the notion of L2 complexity (Bulté & Housen, 2012; Ortega, 2012; Pallotti, 2015), as well as numerous empirical studies that investigate L2 complexity, often in conjunction with related dimensions of accuracy and fluency (e.g., Connor-Linton & Polio, 2014; Housen & Kuiken, 2009; Housen, Kuiken, & Vedder, 2012). This special issue brings several of these research strands together to focus on second language writing complexity.

This special issue is an extension of the colloquium *New Developments in the Study of L2 Complexity* organized by the guest editor during the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) 2013 conference in Dallas. The colloquium featured oral paper presentations by some of the contributors to this issue, including a summative commentary by Lourdes Ortega. Although the colloquium addressed L2 complexity in general, it happened that all presenters used L2 learner writing as their research data. The colloquium organizer then capitalized on this serendipity and developed a special issue proposal that focused specifically on L2 *writing* complexity. In the course of bringing this project to fruition, the body of contributors has somewhat changed: not all colloquium presenters contributed an article while additional authors were invited and agreed to participate. Furthermore, even the original contributions have changed, primarily due to a substantial refocusing on the specific issues of L2 writing. The resulting special issue presents a balanced compilation of studies written by both seasoned and younger scholars from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives, thus providing a broad account of new developments in the field of L2 writing complexity.

This special issue consists of five feature articles and an extended commentary by Lourdes Ortega. Two articles explore writing complexity in L2 English academic essays using multidimensional linguistic complexity measures. While Mazgutova and Kormos do so from a developmental perspective and investigate changes in lexical and syntactic complexity of learner writing as a result of an intensive month-long ESL course, Lu and Ai employ a large-scale cross-sectional approach and compare syntactic complexity of essays written by learners with different L1 backgrounds. Vyatkina, Hirschmann, and Golcher report on a longitudinal study of syntactic complexity with dense data collection waves and focus on incipient L2 proficiency levels. Ryshina-Pankova's contribution is similar to Vyatkina et al. in its focus on L2 German and to all of the abovementioned contributions in its focus on L2 essay writing. However, she takes a radically different approach to L2 writing complexity by foregrounding linguistic function rather than form from a Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective. Finally, the study by Adams, Newton, and Nik is unique in that it targets computer-mediated communication, namely text chat as a mode of L2 writing, and explores the relationship between task complexity and linguistic complexity as well as accuracy. In the concluding commentary, Ortega synthesizes all contributions, tallies their accomplishments, and sketches future research directions. Together,

the pieces in this issue provoke new questions for future research on L2 writing complexity that, we hope, will further bring together the fields of Second Language Writing and Second Language Acquisition.

Acknowledgments

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