

Effects of L2 proficiency on planning scope in L2 production

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To understand how planning and articulation are coordinated during language production, a growing body of literature has explored how far ahead native speakers prepare an utterance before speech onset. While past studies show that additional processing demands on L2 production may decrease L2 utterance fluency (Kahng, 2014; Kormos, 2006), little is known about what consequences they might have for some planning that takes place before articulation. The present study shifts the focus from utterance fluency to planning scope in L2 production, and investigates whether there are individual differences among L2 speakers in how far ahead an utterance is prepared before articulation and whether the variability is accounted for at least in part by L2 proficiency. The participants were median-split into two proficiency groups based on the cloze test scores.

In Experiment 1, L1-Korean learners of L2-English ($n=62$) produced English sentences either with a complex initial phrase or with a simple initial phrase to describe visual displays consisting of three pictured objects (e.g., complex: *The apple and the tiger are above the kite.* vs. simple: *The apple is above the tiger and the kite.*). To assess whether L2 speakers' advance lexical planning scope is restricted to an initial noun or whether it extends beyond the first word, second-picture preview (i.e., whether a second picture (e.g., tiger) is shown in advance) was manipulated independent of initial phrase type. The results showed that speech onset latencies were facilitated as a function of second-picture preview only for lower-proficiency L2 speakers, indicating that advance lexical planning proceeded beyond an initial noun to include the second noun for lower-proficiency L2 speakers while it was restricted to the initial noun for higher-proficiency L2 speakers.

Given the results of error analyses showing that lower-proficiency L2 speakers made more lexical errors than higher-proficiency L2 speakers, Experiment 2 tested whether the difference in lexical planning scope between higher and lower proficiency L2 speakers could reflect the difference in lexical demands. To this end, the accessibility of an initial noun was manipulated, again using a preview technique. L1-Korean learners of L2-English ($n=61$) showed a preview benefit with shorter speech onset latencies in the first-picture preview condition than in the no-preview condition. Consistent with a lexical scope, there was no effect of initial phrase length, nor was there a significant interaction. Crucially, the absence of an effect of L2 proficiency indicated that in situations in which there was little or no difficulty of retrieving an initial noun, L2 planning was lexically incremental even for lower-proficiency L2 speakers. This suggests that the between-speaker difference in L2 planning scope found in Experiment 1 is attributable at least in part to the difference in lexical retrieval difficulties.

Taken together, the proficiency effects found here add to the literature on flexibility in planning scope, lending further support to the claim that one important source of variability in planning scope may be the demands of internal production processes (Konopka, 2012; Wagner et al., 2010).

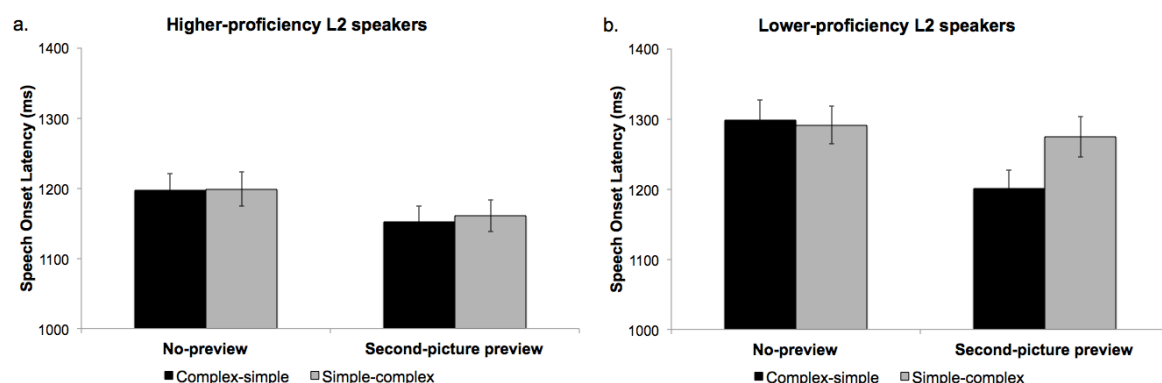


Figure 1. Experiment 1. Speech onset latencies as a function of initial phrase length and second picture preview. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

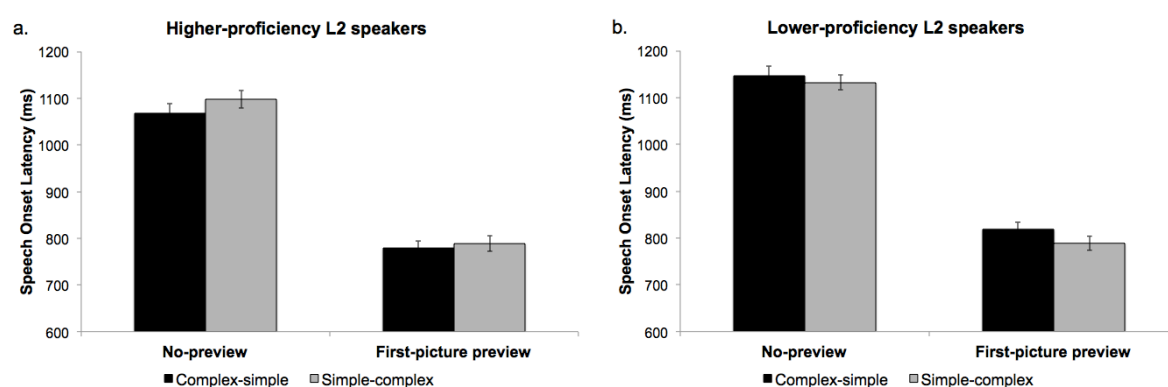


Figure 2. Experiment 2. Speech onset latencies as a function of initial phrase length and first picture preview. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

References

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