"...and then the students wäre very fett": Task performance and '(not)-doing-being-an-expert' in a TBLL setting

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Task-based language learning as an approach that focuses on the acquisition of target structures through the performance of carefully designed tasks has inspired a large body of research. While many studies focus on the evaluation of task outcomes as a relatively linear function of task design (Ellis et al., 2019), interest in how and for what reasons individual students perform differently in a given task has gained traction (e.g., Seedhouse 2005). These studies are based on the insight that students co-construct tasks in interaction (Hellermann & Pekarek Doehler, 2010). In line with the aims of the workshop, our contribution subscribes to this strand of research.

We draw on group interactions that were recorded in the context of an interdisciplinary project (Pili-Moss et al., 2022) to examine students' use of the target structure. We employ a CA-for-SLA approach (Markee & Kunitz, 2015) for a microanalysis of the target-task interaction of three focus groups. These insights are coupled with selected language and cognitive test data that further illuminate our analysis from multiple perspectives.

First, our analysis reveals patterns of target structure approximation as well as avoidance, providing insight into the intra- and interindividual resources students use to tackle the communicative challenge set by the task. Second, we use selected peer interactions to reconstruct how students appropriate the task for themselves, and – in our sample more importantly – how the individual group members position themselves toward the goal of gaining expertise in the target language (Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2008). Our data indicate that learners who go beyond performing the 'student job' (Breidenstein, 2006) by engaging in doing-being-an-(aspiring)-expert (Reichert & Liebscher, 2012) tend to approximate the target structure more closely and that this is thus a relevant factor for task performance. This analysis contributes new perspectives on the intra- and interindividual complexity of language acquisition processes.

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