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Adult upper secondary school level students' lexical inferencing

Investigating the effects of collaboration, global L2 proficiency and patterns of interaction

Nylander, Elin; Gyllstad, Henrik

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00



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RESULTS

- No statistically significant effects of Lexical Inferencing task type (individual vs pair) and Order of task were observed using omnibus data
- Significant correlations were found between the participants' global L2 English proficiency scores and their Individual Lexical Inferencing task scores as well as their Pair Lexical Inferencing task scores
- A division into HIGH, MID and LOW global L2 proficiency groups, and a comparison of the mean scores on the Individual Lexical Inferencing task and the Pair Lexical Inferencing task showed that the HIGH group improved their score on the Pair task, whereas the MID and LOW groups performed worse on the Pair task (see Figure 1). However, only the MID group difference was statistically significant.
- Pairs with a 'collaborative' approach performed better than pairs that were characterized by 'expert/novice' or 'dominant/passive' interaction patterns (Storch, 2002)

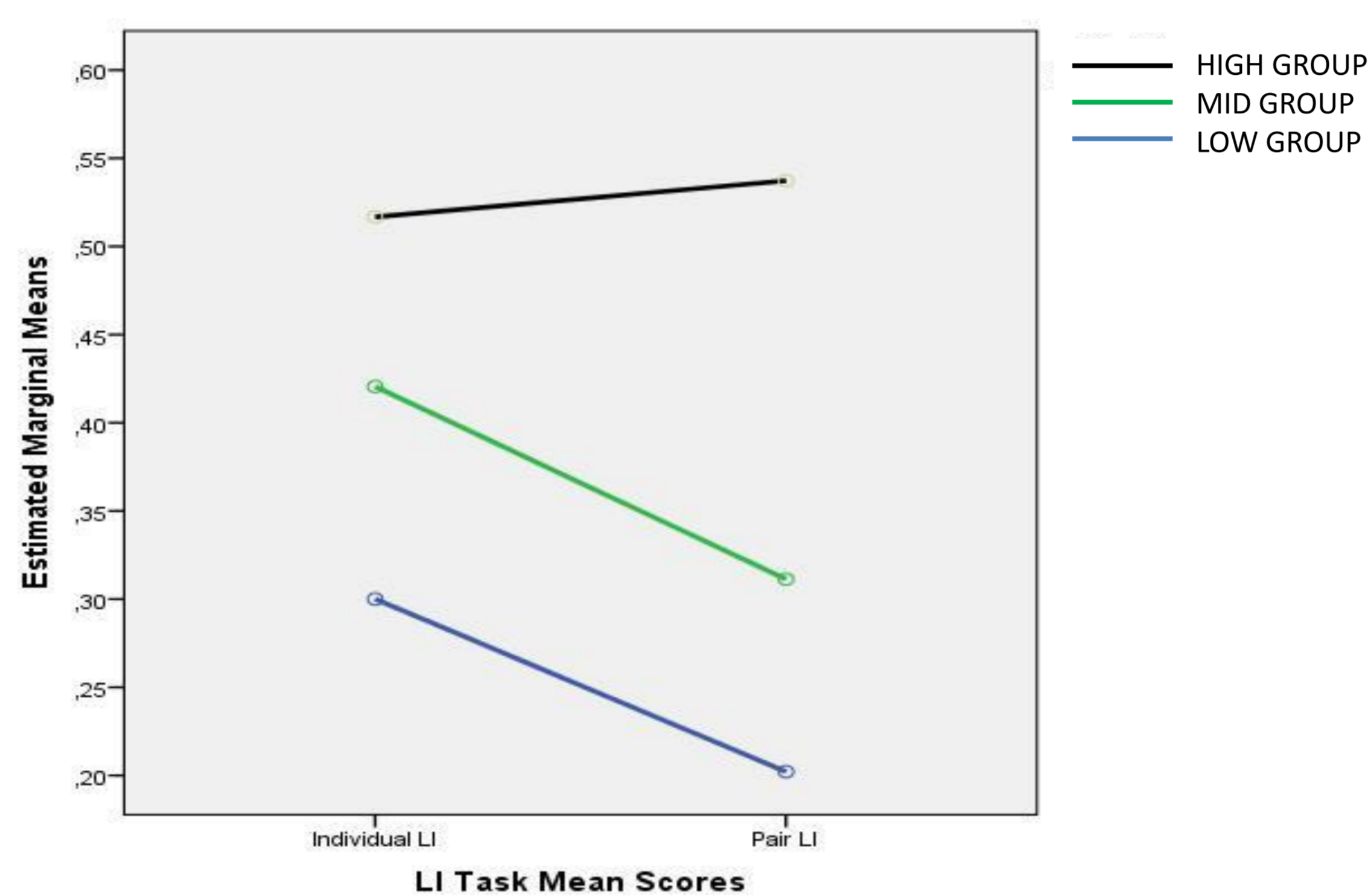


Figure 1. LI tasks mean scores for the three proficiency groups

Background

The study investigated L2 learners' lexical inferencing (LI), i.e., the ability to guess the meaning of unknown words in a running text using different types of knowledge and textual cues (Haastrup, 1991). Example LI think-aloud from the data set:

(Student reads from the text) ' She thinks that it is **lunacy** that people do not talk more about things like anxiety and depression'. I'm thinking about *lunatic*. That means *maniac*. [...] And if you, like, translate the sentence in which it appears, then it's like... Like it's crazy that we don't talk about more like anxiety and depression. So, [it means] crazy.

In Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL) and Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT) frameworks, collaboration is seen as a central feature, with many chances of interaction and meaning negotiation amongst learners (Ellis, 2003).

There is little work on collaboration during LI tasks. Even fewer studies compare individual and paired LI (Nylander, 2019). In addition, in TBLL studies, proficiency levels of participants' are not always properly mapped.

Study Aims

The study seeks to explore (a) the effect of collaboration on LI success, (b) how global L2 proficiency relates to LI success, and (c) how the patterns of interaction exhibited during paired lexical inferencing affect LI success.

References

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Methods and Materials

Participants:

Upper secondary school level ESL students ($N = 22$) from an intact class in Sweden, taught by the teacher-researcher. Mean age: 23.0 (SD: 3.5).

Materials:

L2 proficiency was determined through a series of 5 task-based proficiency measures illustrated below. Then, the 2 LI tasks were administered: Individual (ILI) and Paired (PLI).



Figure 2. The 5 English proficiency tasks and the 2 LI tasks.

Lexical inferencing (LI) tasks:

All participants took part in two think-aloud LI tasks: one individual and one in pairs. In each, a short 250 word text containing 12 carefully selected target words was used. A repeated measures design was used with order of LI task counterbalanced. A Mixed Design ANOVA was used for analysis.

Conclusions

- The results corroborate earlier studies indicating that high proficiency learners are more successful than lower proficiency learners when inferring lexis.
- The lack of statistically significant positive effect of collaboration is somewhat surprising, but may depend on the task format and learners' ability to collaborate efficiently (Leeser, 2004).
- Further studies are needed of individual and paired LI performance. The research could be conducted by researching practitioners (cf. Erlam & Ellis, 2018)

Elin Nylander, Lund University, elinnylander4@gmail.com
Henrik Gyllstad, Lund University, henrik.gyllstad@englund.lu.se