The Effect of Practice Tasks on L2 Writing Development:
A CAF Perspective

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Introduction

Dissertation study Q:

- What practice tasks can help students write longer/more complex sentences?

Dissertation study A:

- Sentence-combining
- Complexity / Accuracy trade off

This study Q:

- Practice effect on Accuracy & Fluency?
- Relationship b/w Complexity, Accuracy & Fluency?

Previous Studies:

- One construct (not three)

- Trade-off (Ellis, 1994)

- Nuanced relationship (e.g., Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Spoelman & Verspoor 2010)

Gap

- Practice tasks→ Three constructs

- Student perspectives.

Research Focus

Changes in CAF measures over time

Differences in CAF measures between groups

Relationship between CAF variables

Student views on tasks and writing development

Mixed Methods: Explanatory/Concurrent

QUAN

QUAL

Interpret
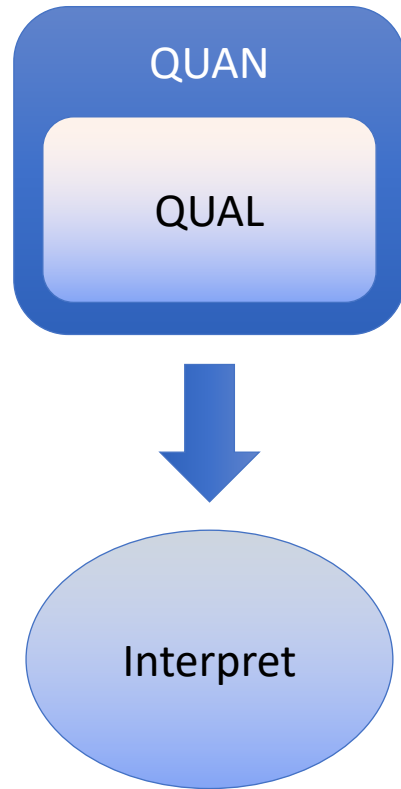
QUAN
- N = 43
    - Private University
    - TOEIC = 403

QUAL
- N = 5 Interviews

Three types of writing practice

1) Translation (TR)

注意深く歩いている黒猫がいる。

→There is a black cat (that is) walking carefully.

2) Sentence-combining (SC)

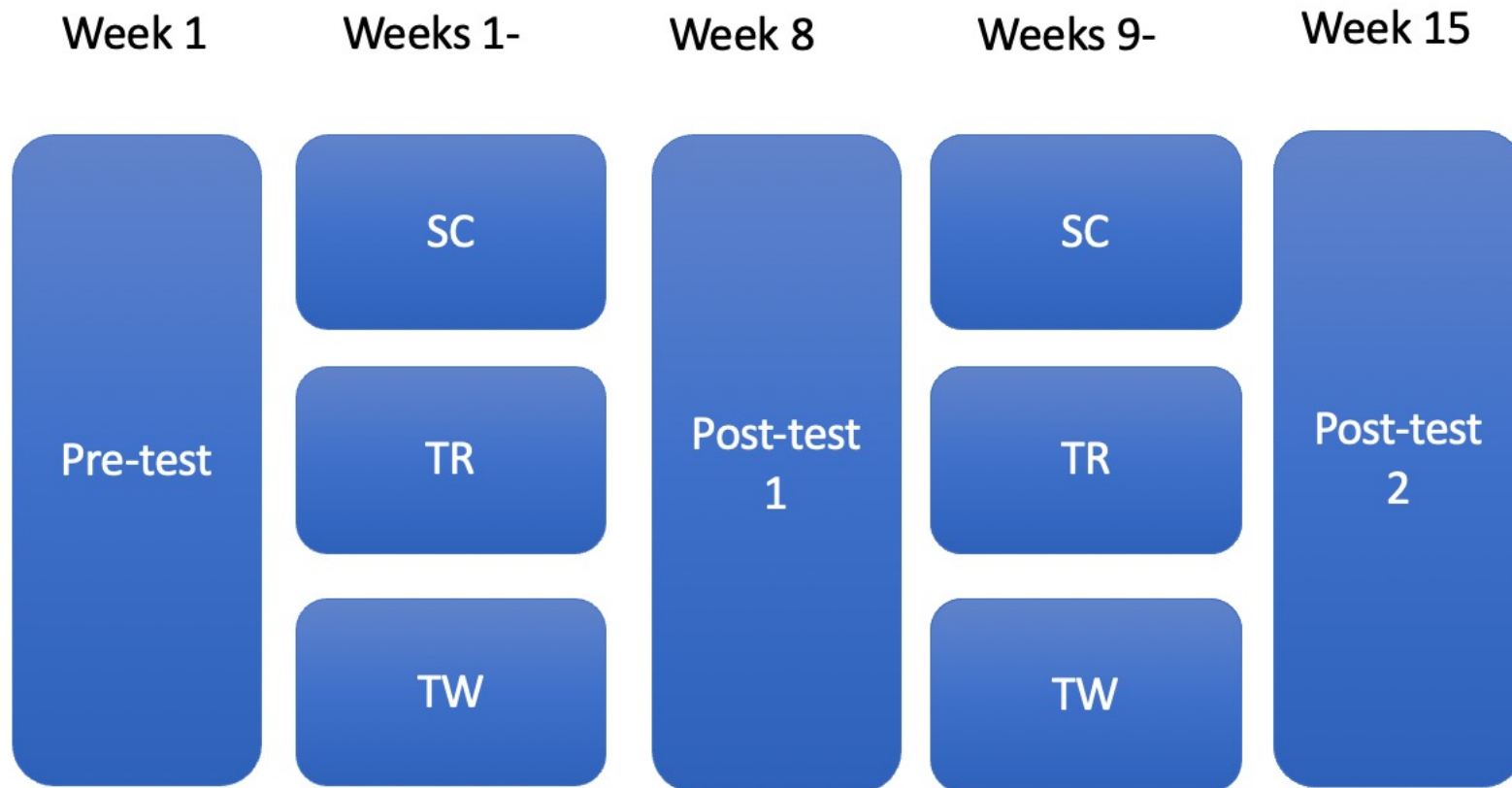There is a cat. It is black. It is walking. Its walking is careful.

→ There is a black cat (that is) walking carefully.

3) Timed Writing (TW)

10-minute writing on self selected topics

Design

Week 1	Weeks 1-	Week 8	Weeks 9-	Week 15
Pre-test	SC / TR / TW	Post-test 1	SC / TR / TW	Post-test 2

SC (n = 18); TR (n = 16); TW (n = 9)

Methods

- Tests
  - 3x
  - Two narrative topics
    - *Birthday, Summer Vacation, First Day of School, Best Trip*
  - 15 minutes per topic

- Treatments
  - 2x/Week
  - Tasks covering a range of syntactic structures
    - Coordinate & adverbial structures, noun modifiers, noun substitutes, free modifiers (Cooper 1973; Lawlor 1983)

CAF Measurements: Complexity

Definition: "*The **range of forms** that surface in language production and the **degree of sophistication** of such forms*"

(Ortega, 2003, p. 492)

Measurements: 1) Mean Length of Sentence (MLS) = overall length

2) Clauses per T-unit (C/T) = subordination

3) T-units per sentence (T/S) = coordination

CAF Measurements: Accuracy

Definition: "the ability to **be free from errors** while using language to communicate" (Wolfe-Quintero, et al., 1998, p. 33)

Measurement: Error-free Clause Ratio (EFCR)

CAF Measurements: Fluency

Definition: "***the number of words*** or structural units a writer is able to include in their writing within ***a paritcular period of time***"

(Wolfe-Quintero, et al., 1998, p. 14)

Measurement: Words per 15 minutes (W/15M)

Quantitative Results: Translation Group (Time)

	Measure	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
	MLS	9.06	10.34	10.00
Complexity	C/T	1.22	1.37	1.31
	T/S	1.05	1.11	1.10
Accuracy	EFCR	.69	.61	.54
Fluency	W/15M	71.47	85.00	115.87

MLS = No sig differences

C/T = Sig differences b/w T1 & T2 (d = .66)

T/S = No sig differences

EFCR = Sig differences b/w T1&T3 (d = .91)

W/15M = Sig differences b/w T1&T2 (d = .56), T2&T3 (d = 1.08), T1&T3 (d = 1.65)

Quantitative Results: Sentence-combining Group (Time)

	Measure	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Complexity	MLS	8.08	10.85	11.10
	C/T	1.19	1.37	1.33
	T/S	1.02	1.14	1.17
Accuracy	EFCR	.66	.61	.60
Fluency	W/15M	72.41	63.75	67.65

MLS = Sig differences b/w T1 & T2 (d = .97), T1&T3 (d = .85)
C/T = Sig differences b/w T1 & T2 (d = .87)
T/S = No sig differences; trending T1&T2 (d = .68), T2&T3 (d = .77)
EFCR = No sig differences
W/15M = No sig differences

Quantitative Results: Timed-writing Group (Time)

	Measure	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Complexity	MLS	10.38	12.23	11.86
	C/T	1.42	1.54	1.45
	T/S	1.11	1.12	1.14
Accuracy	EFCR	.64	.64	.58
Fluency	W/15M	120.81	157.79	201.63

MLS = No sig differences
C/T = No sig differences
T/S = No sig differences
EFCR = Sig differences b/w T1&T3 (d = 1.20)
W/15M = Sig differences b/w T1&T2 (d = 1.25), T1&T3 (d = 2.63)

Summary of Quantitative Results: Time Effect

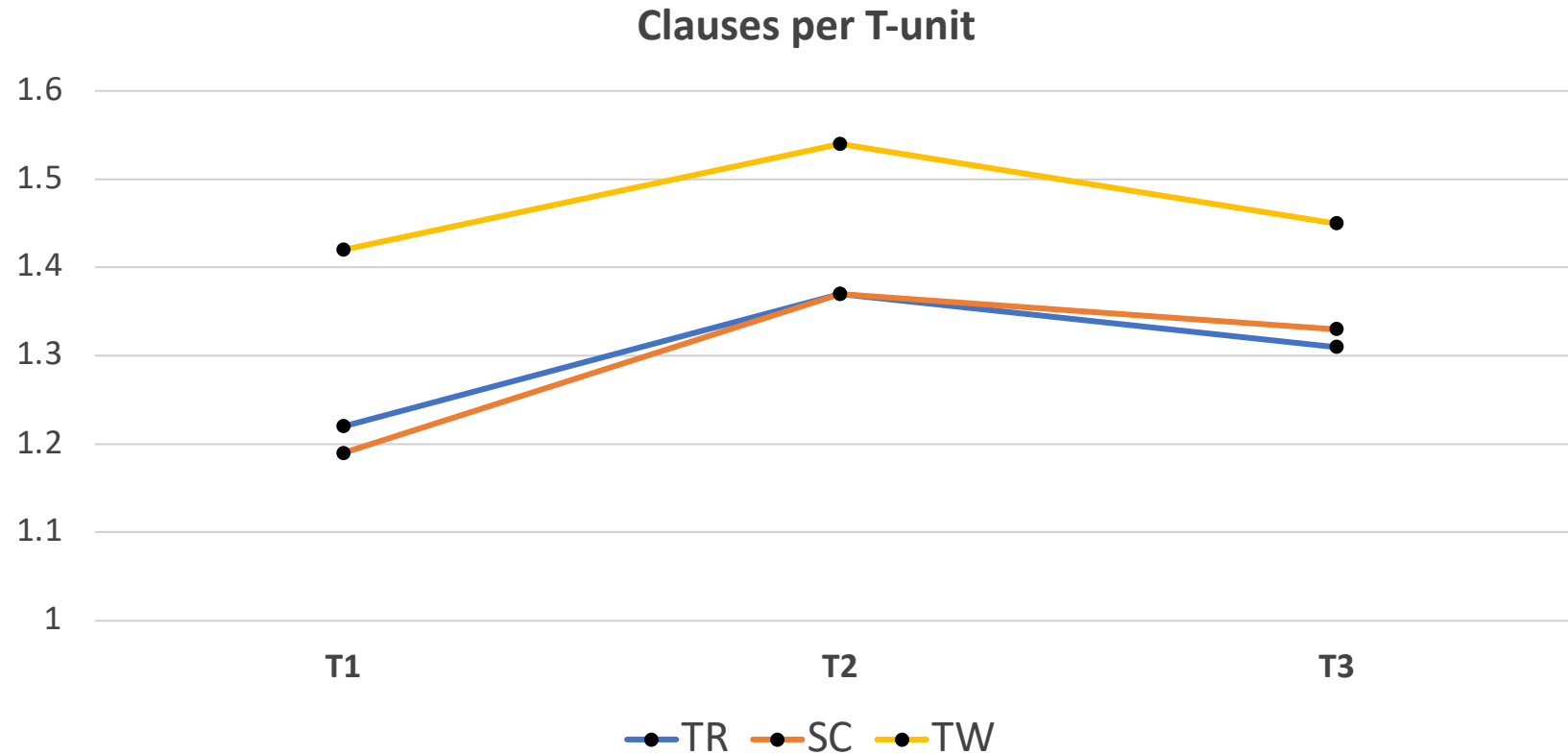|	Measures	Translation	Sentence-combining	Timed-writing
Complexity	Mean Length of Sentence	-	*	-
	Clauses per T-unit	*	*	-
	T-units per sentence	-	-	-
Accuracy	Error-free clause ratio	*	-	*
Fluency	Words per 15 minutes	*	-	*

* = significant difference at p< .05

- = no significant difference

Quantitative Results: Between Groups (MLS)
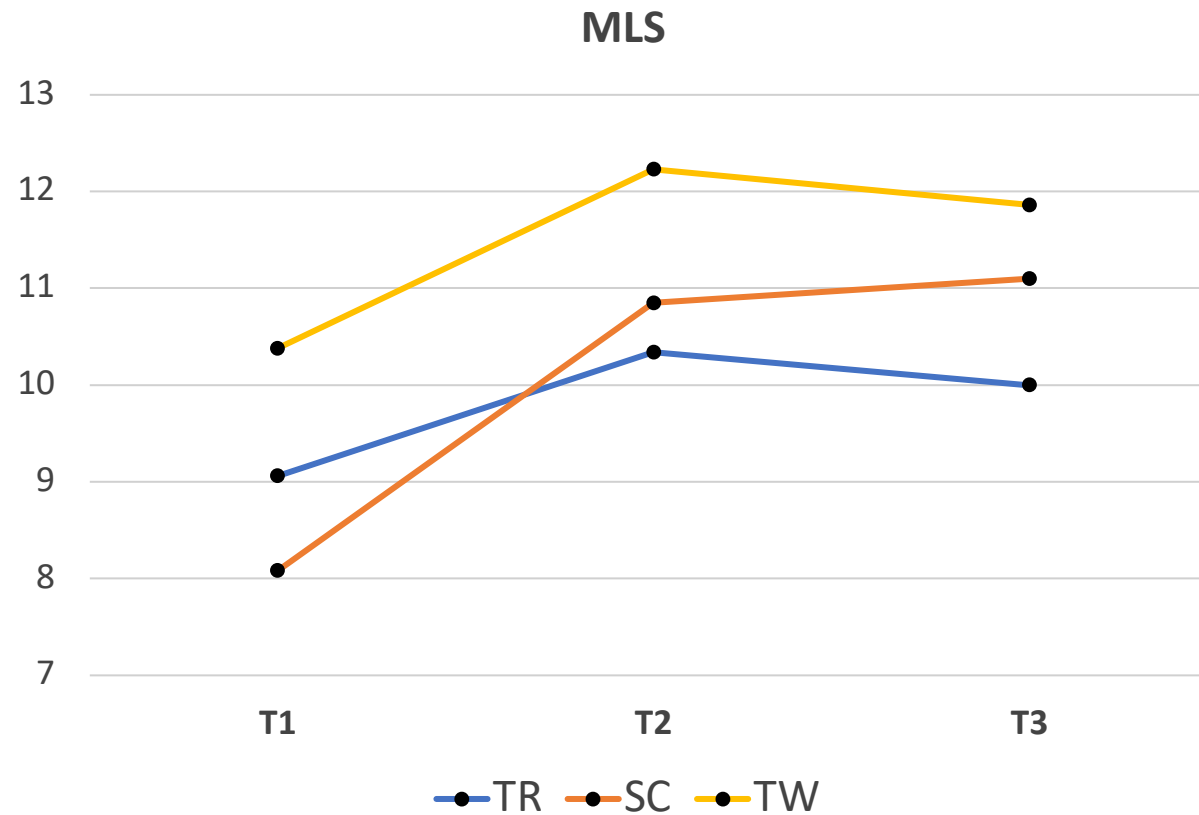
Quantitative Results: Between Groups (C/T)

Clauses per T-unit

Quantitative Results: Between Groups (T/S)

T-units per Sentence
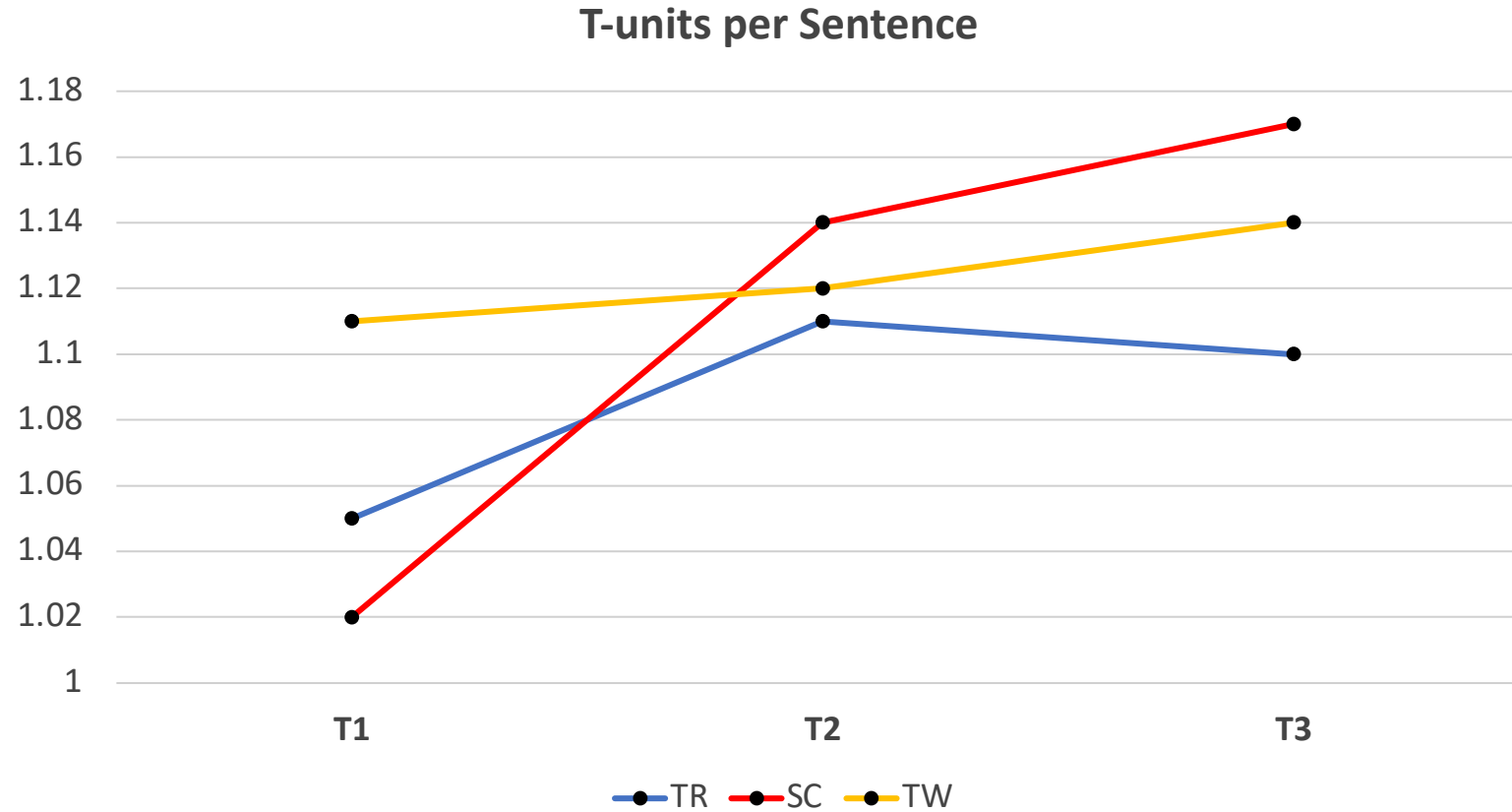
Quantitative Results: Between Groups (EFCR)

EFCR

- TR
- SC
- TW
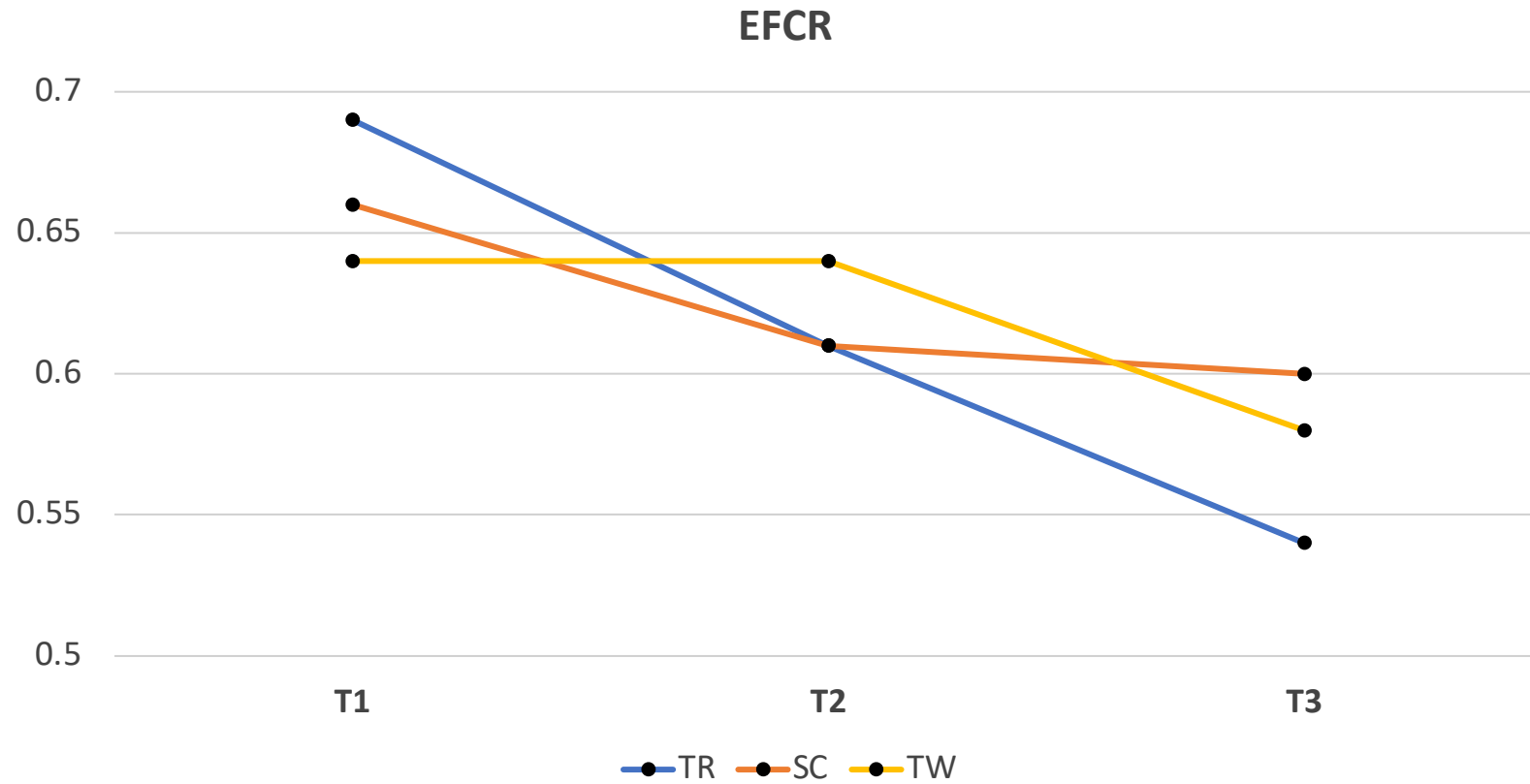
Quantitative Results: Between Groups (W/15M)

Words per 15 minutes
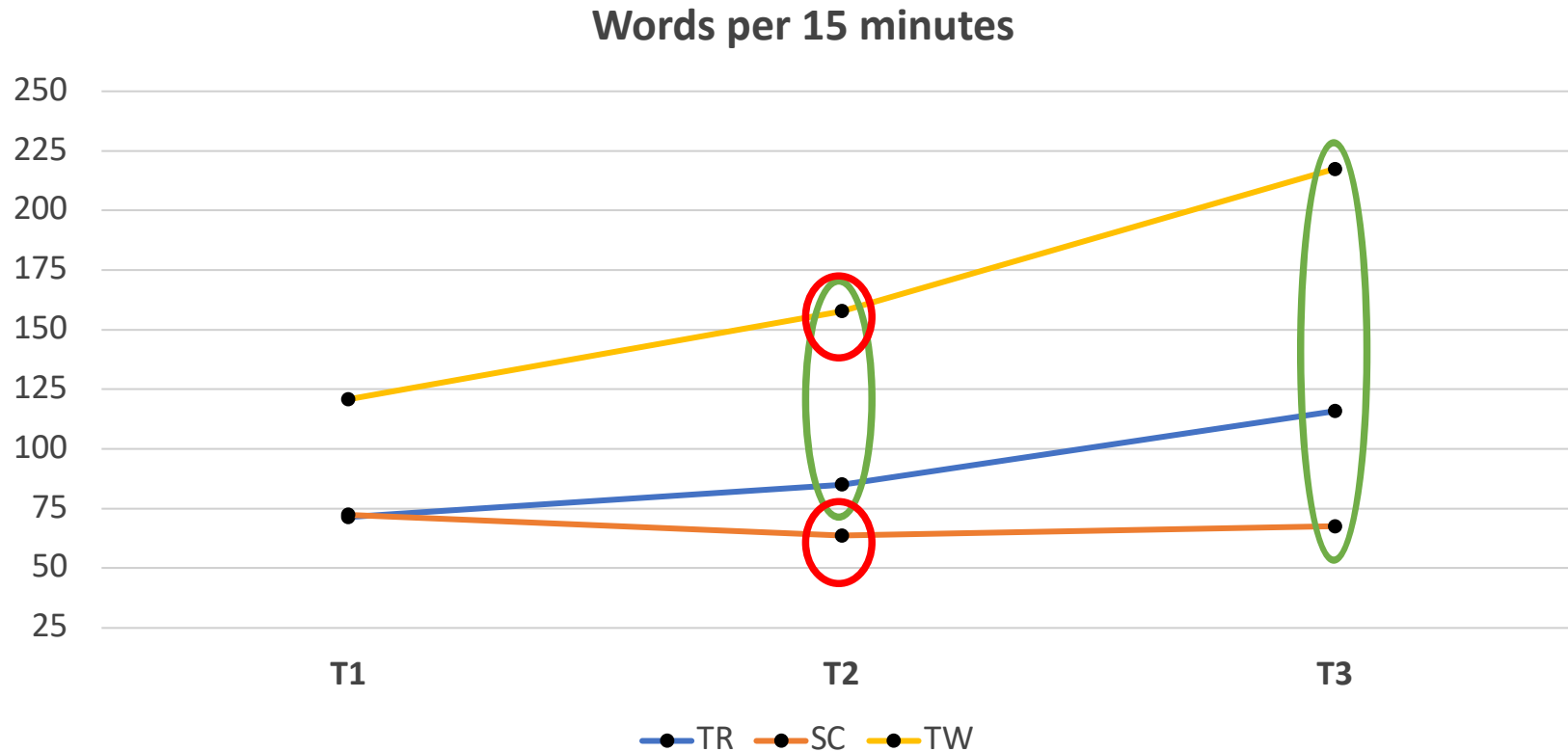
Time 2 = Sig differences b/w SC & TW and TR & TW
Time 3 = Sig differences b/w all three groups

Quantitative Results: Between-Groups

		MLS	C/T	T/S	EFCR	W/15M
Time 1						
Sentence-combining	Translation	-	-	-	-	-
	Timed-writing	-	-	-	-	-
Translation	Timed-writing	-	-	-	-	-
Time 2						
Sentence-combining	Translation	-	-	-	-	-
	Timed-writing	-	-	-	-	*
Translation	Timed-writing	-	-	-	-	*
Time 3						
Sentence-combining	Translation	-	-	-	-	*
	Timed-writing	-	-	-	-	*
Translation	Timed-writing	-	-	-	-	*

* = significant difference at $p < .05$; - = no significant difference

Summary of Quantitative Results (Tasks)

Complexity:

- SC seems to aid the development of complexity
  - Coordination & overall sentence length

Accuracy

- TW seems to hinder the development of accuracy

Fluency

- TW significantly aids the development of fluency
- SC seems to hinder the development of fluency

Summary of Quantitative Results (Variables)

Fluency / Accuracy trade-off

- TR & TW groups made the most gains in fluency and the most decline in accuracy

Qualitative

Data sources: Online interviews

Participants: 5 (2 from TW & TR; 1 from S/C)

When: Beginning & End of semester (total 5 hours)

Questions: Their experience with the task, writing, English

Analysis: Recorded, Summarized & Transcribed

Within case: Organize the data of each participant based on themes (deductive)

↓

Across case: Compare and contrast cases

Common Themes

Theme	Translation	Sentence-combing	Timed Writing
Teacher feedback	Important	Important	Important
Transfer	Task ⇄ Presentation, Grammar, Writing	Task → TOEIC, Reading	Task → Speaking
Other kinds of practice	S/C and paragraph writing	Timed Writing	S/C
Attention	Understanding the sentence and context		Word count

Qualitative Results: Translation

Accuracy↓: Taking a risk (and failing?)

Student TR/B: *"It's like a **Russian doll**. In this long sentence, there is another subject and verb (clause)"*

Student TR/A:*"I **try to use relative clause** as much as I can"*

Fluency↑:

Student TR/B: *"**I could write more** the second time (Time 2)...through the writing tasks, **I have learned a variety of ways to express ideas** that I did not know before."*

Qualitative Results: Sentence-combining

Complexity ↑:

Student SC/A: *"I think it is important to **understand how conjunctions** are used. ..., how **adverbs such as 'in addition'** is used. It indicates how the story transitions. **I would like to use it more in my writing"*** (interview 2).

Qualitative Results: Timed Writing

Accuracy↓< Fluency

Student TW/A:

*"I focus on **getting more words**" (Interview 1).*

*"I am just trying to get more word counts… I think **I make more grammar mistakes now**" (interview 2).*

Student TW/B:

*"I am **not sure and worried** if my grammar is correct."*

General Implications: Instructors should…

- Have a clear purpose

- Make a connection

- Provide Feedback

General Implications for Tasks

Timed writing: Topics & Strategies

Translation: Feedback & Avoid cognitive overload

Sentence-combining: Supplement with other activities

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