



# The use of chunks in negative utterances by instructed English learners of French

Vivienne Rogers

Newcastle University

[vivienne.rogers@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:vivienne.rogers@education.ox.ac.uk)

# Introduction

- Background
- Definition & Previous work
- French and English negation
- Methodology
- Results
- Discussion

# Background

- Part of my PhD data.
- Focus was on the acquisition of verb raising.
- PhD was attached to FLLOC project ([www.flloc.soton.ac.uk](http://www.flloc.soton.ac.uk)) led by Florence Myles (Newcastle) and Ros Mitchell (Southampton)
- AHRC funded - 2005/120142

# What is a chunk?

- “a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar” (Wray 2002/2009:9)

Myles (2004):

- Greater length and complexity of sequence compared with other learner output, usually well formed.
- Often used inappropriately (syntactically, semantically, pragmatically).
- this means that determining a chunk has to be done on an individual basis, i.e what constitutes a chunk for one learner may not be a chunk for another and that these chunks may change over time.

# Previous work on chunks

- L2 French questions (Myles 2005)
  1. Quel âge as-tu?  
what age have-2SG you  
'How old are you?'
  2. \*Il âge frère?  
he age brother  
'How old is your brother?'
  3. Mon petit garçon ehm où habites-tu?  
my little brother ehm where live-2SG you  
'Where does your little boy live?'

# French and English

**French**

**English**

Je (ne) regarde pas la télé.

\*I watch not the TV.

I don't watch TV.

\*Je (ne) pas regarde la télé.

Je n'ai pas regardé la télé.

I haven't watched TV.

# Theory

- According to Lasnik (2007), English and French both permit verb raising but in English this is limited to auxiliaries (and modals) as they are fully specified in the lexicon.
- Learnability issue: English learners must add the Tense feature to all verbs.
- Feature re-assembly (Lardiere 2009)

# Methodology

- Elicited oral production task
- 25 items in total: 10 items with negation
- Given a card with a picture with a cross through it.
- Told to say that the person was not doing that activity.
- Given any vocabulary needed (verbs in the infinitive).
- 3 groups of 15 instructed English speaking learners – after 1, 4 and 6 years of instruction (75hrs, c.250hrs, c. 650hrs)

# Example of oral task



# Results

	chunk	auxNeg	Neg-V	V-Neg	omit	other
begin	26	51	24	0	13	36
Low-int	0	25	35	34	7	49
High-int	1	0	0	123	2	24

Chunk = subject <subject+verb+negation> verb (object)

auxNeg = subject + auxiliary + negation + finite verb (+ object)

Neg-V = subject + negation + verb

V-Neg = subject + verb + negation (\*\*target French structure\*\*)

# Chunks

- Subject-chunk-verb
- Il <je n'ai pas> prendre le bus (FS10) 
- Il est <n'aime pas> lever (FS04)
- Il a <n'aime pas> attend le bus (FS04)
- Chunk-subject-verb
- <Je n'ai pas> je me lève (FS21)
- <Il n'est pas> j'aime écoute. (FS01)
- <n'est pas> je me douche (FS02)

# Negation with an auxiliary

- Found in beginners (51/150) but less frequently with low-intermediates (25/150) and not with high-int.
- Je ehm n'est pas ehm mes devoirs (FS02)  
I ehm (ne) is not ehm my homework
- <il n' est pas j' ai> [//] il n' est pas attendre le@n bus (FS08) he (ne) is not to-wait the bus
- Elle n'est pas jouer au informatique (TS14)   
she (ne) is not to-play the IT
- Je n'ai pas ehm lire ehm le newspaper. (FS09-11)

# Preverbal negation

- Il ne pas de fumer (FS02-11, FS05-11) 
- Il ne pas faire des devoirs. (FS02-11)
- Il ne pas lever (FS05-11)
- Il ne pas faire du pêche (FS05-11)

# Discussion

- Lots of variability within the beginner and low-intermediate groups.
- High intermediate group raises the verb over negation so eventually learners do reset the parameter.
- Variability in the younger groups represents two (or more) different stages in reassembling the features.
- Stage 1A: using entire chunks with subject + verb
- Stage 1B: transfer from English using -ing form.
- Stage 2: realise -ing form is not possible but not yet attached the strong uninterpretable Tense feature to all verbs so pre-verbal negation.

# Conclusion

- Data support a feature reassembly model of L2 acquisition of syntax.
- Formulaic sequences are used when underlying representation is enough to express idea.
- Initially full phrases transferred but then broken into parts.