Development of L2 syntax: Is there a link between object clitics and adverb placement?

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1   Rationale

Background

- Examine the acquisition of French syntax by instructed English native speakers.

- Specifically looking at the acquisition of adverbs and object clitics.

- Cross-sectionally at different points in development

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- www.flloc.soton.ac.uk

1.1   Structure of French and English

Simple adverb placement

French and English differ in terms of adverb placement, e.g.

- Jean regarde souvent la télé.

- *Jean souvent regarde la télé.

- John often watches TV.

- *John watches often TV.

According to Pollock (1989) this difference is due to verb raising, i.e. the adverbs are in the same place and the verb is in a different place. French has a strong uninterpretable Tense feature but English does not. Cinque (1999) argues that all adverbs are part of a universal hierarchy.

Other adverb positions

French and English also allow adverbs to appear in other unstressed positions.

- Jean regarde la télé souvent.

- John watches TV often.

However, this sentence final position only appears to be allowed for certain adverbs and not others.

- *Jean regarde la télé probablement.

- *John watches TV probably.

Laenzlinger account for sentence final adverbs

- Laenzlinger (2002, 2004) argues that Cinque's universal hierarchy of 50+ projections can be grouped into 4: MoodP, ModP, AspP (high), AspP (low).

- He argues that only the AspP(high) adverbs permit sentence final adverbs.

- Adverb still in fixed position but object raising over the verb.

Object clitic / pronoun placement
French and English also differ minimally in terms of object pronoun placement.

- Jean la regarde.

- *Jean regarde la.

- John watches it.

- *John it watches.

Syntax of object clitics

- Sportiche's (1996) analysis of object clitics is adopted.

- Object clitics head their own projection and cliticize on to the verb as it moves up the tree from VP to Tense.

- Therefore, the presence of object clitics will provide evidence for verb raising.

- Similarity with sentence final adverbs as it involved object movement.

1.2 Research questions

Research Questions

1. Do L2 learners raise the verb over adverbs?

2. Do the L2 learners allow sentence final adverbs (object scrambling)?

3. If so, do they distinguish between the types of adverbs that allow object scrambling?

4. Do L1 learners use pre-verbal clitics?

5. Does the presence of verb raising over adverbs and/or low object scrambling correlate with the use of object clitics?

2 Methodology

2.1 Task

Tasks
Each student completed three tasks:

1. Oral production task 1: Adverbs

   - administered as part of a larger task involving negation
   - 15 obligatory contexts - 10 targeting adverbs only and 5 with both negation and adverbs

2. Oral production task 2: Object clitics

   - 15 obligatory contexts for object clitic and 7 fillers.

3. Grammaticality judgement task

- 64 tokens on task: 24 relating to adverb placement, 16 relating to object clitics
- equally weighted between grammatical and ungrammatical
- targeted English adverb order (SAVX), standard French order (SVAX), sentence initial adverbs (ASVX) and sentence final adverbs (SVXA).
- targeted English pronoun order (SVC), standard French order (SCV), clitic pronoun omission (omit)
- students had to circle whether a sentence was very good/good/bad/very bad/ don't know

4. Order of tasks was the same for all learners.

Example of adverb task

- Student shown card with word printed on the bottom.
- Student had to give a short sentence including the word given.
- An example in English was given during the instructions.
- Target: Elle lave souvent le chien.

Example of object clitic task

- Student told a story about a day in the life of a girl called Marie.
- Student shown pictures at the same time - comic.
- Researcher asked a question about the picture - either "'What is she doing"' or "'What is she doing with X?"'
- Student had to give a short sentence in reply to a question.
- Question: Qu'est ce qu'elle fait avec la fenêtre?
- Target: Elle la ferme/ Elle l'ouvre.
- Adapted from Grüter (2005).

2.2 Participants

- 3 groups of 15 instructed English native speakers learning French in UK school and university environments
- advanced students had all spent at least 5 months residency in France
- 5 native speaker controls (ERASMUS students in UK)

Group	Beginners	Intermediates	Advanced
N	15	15	15
years of study	1	6	10
age	11-12	17-18	21-23

3 Results

3.1 Adverb results

Adverbs: oral production and grammaticality judgement results
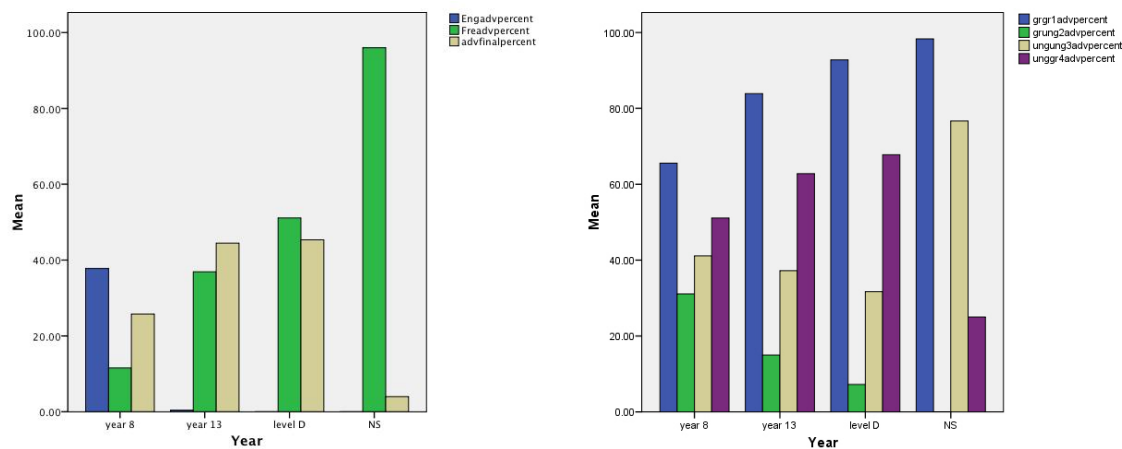
Oral production results Adverbs II

- English adverb order (SAV): beginners (year 8) is significantly different from the other groups at 0.05 level.

- French adverb order (SVAX): intermediates and advanced are not significantly different from each other but all other comparisons are significant.

- Sentence final adverbs (SVXA): native speakers significantly different from intermediates and advanced but not beginners.

Grammaticality judgement results: Adverbs II

Correctly judging grammatical as grammatical:

- Beginners statistically significantly different from other groups, i.e. they do not accept the target French SVAX order.

- Intermediates and Advanced not significantly different from Native Speakers, i.e. do accept target SVAX order and SVAX.

Correctly judging ungrammatical as ungrammatical:

- Native speakers statistically significantly different from intermediates and advanced groups.

Correlation between SVAX oral results and judgement significant at 0.01 level. No correlation between use of SVXA results and judgement results.

Stages of development: adverbs

- Stage A: L1 transfer - no verb raising

- Stage B: Mixture of SVAX and SVXA with the adverbs that can appear finally overgeneralized.

3.2 Object clitic results

Object clitics: oral production and grammaticality judgement results
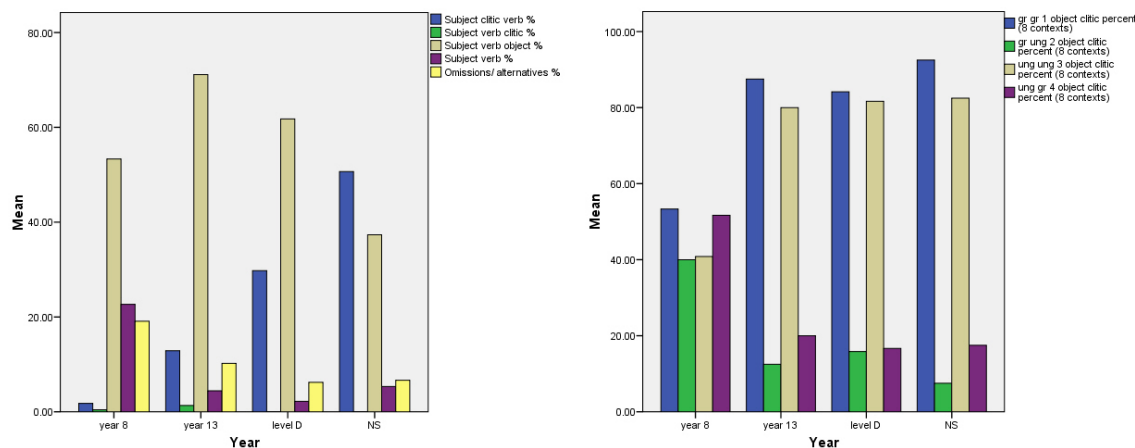
Oral production results: object clitics II

Subject clitic verb order:

- no statistically significant difference between beginners and intermediates.

- advanced and native speakers also not significantly different from eachother.

- beginners and intermediates significantly different from advanced and native speakers

Subject verb object order:

- only statistically significant difference is between the intermediates and advanced.

Grammaticality judgement results: object clitics II

- beginners significantly different from other groups, i.e. they accept the incorrect order ¡Subject-verb-clitic¿

- no significant difference between intermediates, advanced and native speakers, i.e. only accept SCV.

Significant correlation between oral and judgement results at 0.01 level (p=0.427)

Stage of development: object clitics

- Stage A: omission of object

- Stage B: subject verb object

- Stage C: use of object clitics

4 Analysis and Discussion

Is there a link between the adverb results and the object clitic results

- Learners appear to pass through different stages in development but they are qualititatively different, e.g. no L1 transfer in the use of clitics.

- However, significant correlation between SVAX order and SCV (p=0.562, significant at 0.01 level).

- Contrary to suggestion of link between object scrambling and object clitics, there is no correlation between SVXA and SCV.

Conclusions?

- English learners of French initially transfer English word order SAV to French.

- Replaced by target SVAX order and SVXA order, i.e. they allow verb raising and low-object scrambling (intermediates and advanced).

- Object clitics do not regularly appear until advanced levels and are linked to verb raising but not object raising.

Future research

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- Analyze low-intermediate group to see what happens between beginners and intermediates in terms of L1 transfer and adverb placement.

- Analyze low-advanced group to see what happens with object clitics between SVO and SCV orders.