

Syntactic development in instructed English L2 learners of French

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Background

- Looking at the acquisition of negation, adverbs, object clitics.
- Examine if structures are acquired individually or if they cluster together.
- Examine what role (if any) the L1 (English) plays in L2 (French) development.
- Empirically test influential theories of L2 initial state and development.
- Cross-sectionally at different points in development
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- Lead by Florence Myles (Newcastle) and Ros Mitchell (Southampton)
- www.flloc.soton.ac.uk

Word order differences: negation

French

- Marie (ne) lit pas le livre.
M. (ne) reads not the book
S-V-Neg-O

- *Marie (ne) pas lit le livre.
S-Neg-V-O

BUT S-aux-Neg-V-O

- Marie (ne) a pas lu le livre.
- Marie has not read the book.

English

- *Marie reads not the book.
S-V-Neg-O

- Marie does not read the book.
S-do-Neg-V-O

Word order differences: adverbs & object clitics

French

- Marie lit souvent le livre.
M. reads often the book
S-V-A-O

- *Marie souvent lit le livre.
S-A-V-O

- Marie le lit.
S-CI-V

- *Marie lit le.
S-V-CI

English

- *Marie reads often the book.
S-V-A-O

- Marie often reads the book.
S-A-V-O

- *Marie it reads.
S-Pro(noun)-V

- Marie reads it.
S-V-Pro

Word order differences: parameter

According to Pollock (1989) these differences are the result of different verb placement.

In English the lexical verb remains in VP.

In French the lexical verb raises from VP to TP.

French has strong uninterpretable Tense feature.

English does not.

Theories of L2 acquisition

1 Initial State:

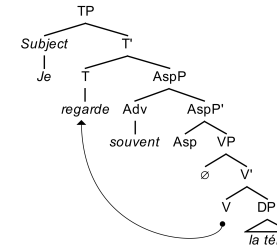
- Organic Grammar/Minimal Trees (Vainikka and Young-Scholten 1996, 2005)
- Full Transfer/ Full Access (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1996)
- Modulated Structure Building (Hawkins, 2001)

2 Development:

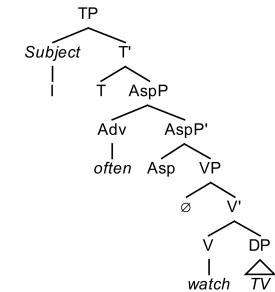
- Missing Surface Inflection (Prévost and White, 2000)
- Failed Functional Features (Hawkins and Chan, 1997)
- Feature Reassembly (Lardière 2008)

Underlying phrase structure (adverb), Pollock 1989, Cinque 1999

French.



English



Research Questions

- 1 what does the second language learner possess at the outset of the L2 acquisition process (i.e. What is the Initial State of L2 acquisition?),
- 2 how does the L2 learner's word order develop/change (functional features), and
- 3 what is the role of the first language (L1) in L2 acquisition (i.e. Does the learner transfer from the L1 into the L2, if so what elements transfer and does this transfer persist?).

Predictions of L2 theories: Initial State

Full Transfer/Full Access

- 1 Functional categories will be present from the outset.
- 2 There will be evidence of L1 transfer in functional categories, i.e. adverbs and negation may appear pre-verbally.
- 3 Re-setting to the target L2 feature is possible given sufficient input.

Organic Grammar

- 1 Initial stage with no evidence of functional projections - i.e. a bare VP with no tense or agreement beyond default forms.
- 2 Functional projections will emerge gradually.
- 3 No L1 transfer of functional projections, i.e. once tense is acquired then verb raising should be obligatory (at least 60% on VYS criteria).

Predictions of L2 theories: Initial State 2

Modulated Structure Building

- 1 Initial stage with no evidence of functional projections - i.e. a bare VP with no tense or agreement beyond default forms.
- 2 Functional projections will emerge gradually.
- 3 There will be evidence of L1 transfer in functional categories, i.e. L1 English learners of French will initially hypothesize a weak uninterpretable tense feature so adverbs and negation may appear pre-verbally.
- 4 Re-setting to the target L2 feature is possible given sufficient input.

Predictions of L2 theories: post Initial State theories

Failed Functional Features

- 1 Learners may not reset the parameter to allow verb raising.
- 2 Learners may use other UG constrained options available in the L1 to show the appearance of verb raising.
- 3 The underlying syntactic representation of the L2 will be the L1.

Feature Reassembly

- 1 English learners of French will first transfer the verb raising features from the L1 into the L2. In other words they will only permit verb raising with auxiliaries and modals.
- 2 Learners will be able to reassemble the verb raising features of English to the French settings. Therefore we would expect to find that when learners raise the verb over negation with lexical verbs, they should also do so with adverbs and vice versa.

Predictions of L2 theories: post Initial State theories 2

- 1 Learners may produce non-finite forms in finite contexts, including in verb raising contexts, i.e. non-finite forms can appear before negation and adverbs.
- 2 Learners may produce non-finite forms with subject clitic pronouns as well as DPs.
- 3 Optionality between finite and non-finite forms in finite contexts may persist to advanced stages.
- 4 There will be clear evidence of a dissociation between syntax and morphology.

Subjects

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

	begin	low-int	high-int	low-adv	high-adv
N	15	15	15	15	15
years study	1	4	6	8	10
age	12-13	15-16	17-18	19-20	21-23

Tasks

Each student completed two types of tasks:

- 1 Oral production task
 - one task elicited negation and adverbs, another object clitics
 - 15 obligatory contexts for each structure.
 - each student completed the production task before the judgement task
- 2 Grammaticality judgement task
 - 64 tokens on task
 - equally weighted between grammatical and ungrammatical
 - students had to circle whether a sentence was very good/ good/ bad/ very bad/ don't know

Example of negation task

Student had to give a short sentence saying the person was not doing the activity.
Target: Elle ne joue pas au golf.



Example of adverb task

Student had to give a short sentence including the word given.
Target: Elle lave souvent le chien.



Example of object clitic task

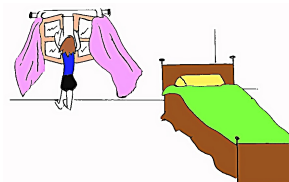
Student was told a story and asked questions.

Object clitic most felicitous answer.

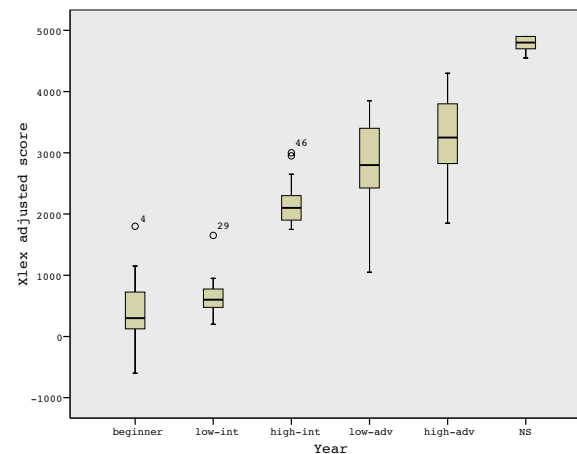
Question: Qu'est-ce qu'elle fait avec la fenêtre?

Target: Elle l'ouvre.

Adapted from Grüter (2005).



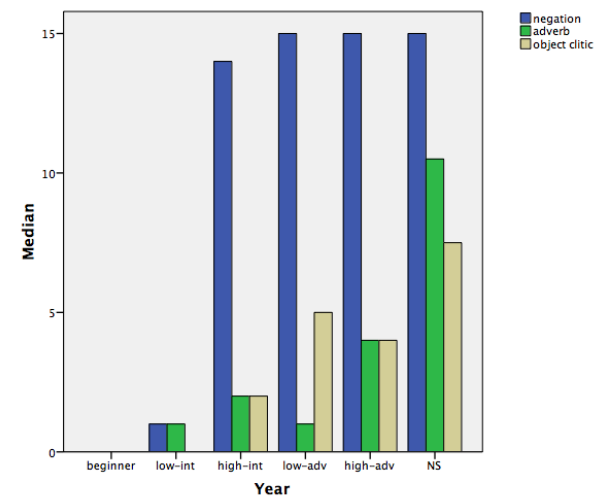
Pre-test



Oral production results:table

		beg	low-int	high-int	low-adv	high-adv	NS
V-Neg	med	0	1	14	15	15	15
	sum	0	44	179	214	210	150/150
	range	0	0-12	0-15	12-15	5-15	15-15
auxNeg	med	2	0	0	0	0	0
	sum	69	25	0	0	2	0/150
	range	0-13	0-8	0	0	0-2	0
SVAX	med	0	1	2	1	4	10.5
	sum	4	18	48	45	68	101/150
	range	0-2	0-7	0-11	0-9	1-11	6-13
Adv-V	median	7	1	0	0	0	0
	sum	82	50	2	6	0	0/150
	range	0-14	0-15	0-1	0-3	0	0
SCV	med	0	0	2	5	4	7.5
	sum	2	4	29	79	67	65/150
	range	0-2	0-3	0-7	0-13	0-9	1-11

Oral production results:graph



Oral production results

- 1 Negation:
 - beginners and low-intermediates are significantly different from each other and everyone else
 - high-int group significantly different from native speaker controls.
 - both advanced groups and native speakers not significantly different from each other
- 2 Adverbs:
 - use of SVAX is low in all learner groups.
 - beginners are significantly different from high-int, advanced and native speakers
 - native speakers are significantly different from everyone else
- 3 Object clitics:
 - not often used by any group but use increased with proficiency.
 - beginners & low-int significantly different from other groups but not each other
 - high-int significantly different from NS

Oral production: correlations

	Negation	Adverb	Obj Cl
Negation	-	.592**	.616**
Adverbs	.592**	-	.391**
Obj Cl	.616**	.391**	-

which initial state theory best fits the data?

- Modulated Structure Building.
- Little evidence of functional projections in the beginner data - lack of negation (only with auxiliaries) or adverbs sentence internally.
- Evidence of L1 transfer in TP (Adv-V and auxNeg)

Which post-initial State theory best fits the data?

- Feature Re-assembly
- Parameter re-setting is possible - everything correlates so no wild grammars.
- Initially transfer L1 English settings for negation then re-assemble them to French settings for all verbs.
- Limited support for Missing Surface Inflection

Conclusions

- Parameter re-setting is possible.
- Learners develop their syntactic representation gradually.
- Learners transfer from the L1 at each stage of development.
- Possible that feature re-assembly from negation triggers raising in other structures.
- Possible artifice of educational setting as negation is explicitly taught much earlier.
- However, adverbs are present in input from early stages if less frequently.

Thank you

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Oral task results for negation across groups

		beginner	low-int	high-int	low-adv	high-adv
V-Neg	<i>median</i>	0	1	14	15	15
	<i>sum</i>	0	44	179	214	210
	<i>range</i>	0	0-12	0-15	12-15	5-15
Neg-V	<i>median</i>	0	1	0	0	0
	<i>sum</i>	40	56	0	0	7
	<i>range</i>	0-9	0-13	0	0	0-7
auxNeg	<i>median</i>	2	0	0	0	0
	<i>sum</i>	69	25	0	0	2
	<i>range</i>	0-13	0-8	0	0	0-2
other	<i>median</i>	5	3	1	0	0
	<i>sum</i>	83	82	42	11	4
	<i>range</i>	0-15	0-15	0-15	0-3	0-1
omit	<i>median</i>	2	1	0	0	0
	<i>sum</i>	33	18	4	0	2
	<i>range</i>	0-6	0-3	0-3	0	0-1

Significant differences in post-verbal negation results

Group	beginner	low-int	high-Int	low-adv	high-adv	NS
beginner	-	*.002	*.000	*.000	*.000	*.000
low-int	*.002	-	*.001	*.000	*.000	*.000
high-Int	*.000	*.001	-	.296	.295	*.024
low-adv	*.000	*.000	.296	-	.850	.139
high-adv	*.000	*.000	.295	.850	-	.139
NS	*.000	*.000	*.024	.139	.139	-

Oral task results for adverbs

		beginner	low-int	high-int	low-adv	high-adv	NS
Adv-V	<i>median</i>	7	1	0	0	0	0
	<i>sum</i>	82/225	50/225	2/225	6/225	0/225	0/150
	<i>range</i>	0-14	0-15	0-1	0-3	0	0
V-Adv-X	<i>median</i>	0	1	2	1	4	10.5
	<i>sum</i>	4/225	18/225	48/225	45/225	68/225	101/150
	<i>range</i>	0-2	0-7	0-11	0-9	1-11	6-13
other	<i>median</i>	5	11	13	13	11	4.5
	<i>sum</i>	99/225	143/225	174/225	172	155/225	48/150
	<i>range</i>	0-15	0-15	4-15	4-15	4-14	2-9
omit	<i>median</i>	2	1	0	0	0	0
	<i>sum</i>	40/225	14/225	1/225	2/225	2/225	1/150
	<i>range</i>	0-7	0-5	0-1	0-1	0-1	0-1

Significant differences in use of pre-verbal adverbs

Group	beginner	low-int	high-Int	low-adv	high-adv	NS
beginner	-	.787	*.006	*.014	*.001	*.009
low-int	.787	-	*.016	.066	*.003	*.016
high-Int	*.006	*.016	-	.787	.772	.787
low-adv	*.014	.066	.787	-	.478	.772
high-adv	*.001	*.003	.772	.478	-	-
NS	*.009	*.016	.787	.772	-	-

Significant differences in use of post-verbal adverbs

Group	beginner	low-int	high-Int	low-adv	high-adv	NS
beginner	-	.186	*.026	*.049	*.000	*.000
low-int	.186	-	.513	.595	*.005	*.000
high-Int	*.026	.513	-	.816	.513	*.004
low-adv	*.049	.595	.816	-	.448	*.004
high-adv	*.000	*.005	.513	.448	-	*.005
NS	*.000	*.000	*.004	*.004	*.005	-

Oral production: use of object clitics

	beginner	low-int	high-int	low-adv	high-adv	NS
S-CI-V	<i>median</i> 0	0	2	5	4	7.5
	<i>sum</i> 2/225	4/225	29/225	79/225	67/225	65/150
	<i>range</i> 0-2	0-3	0-7	0-13	0-9	1-11
S-V-CI	<i>median</i> 0	0	0	0	0	0
	<i>sum</i> 1/225	0/225	3/225	0/225	0/225	0/150
	<i>range</i> 0-1	0	0-3	0	0	0
SVO	<i>median</i> 10	12	11	10	9	5
	<i>sum</i> 145/225	164/225	160/225	135/225	139/225	70/150
	<i>range</i> 0-15	3-15	5-14	2-15	5-14	3-15
other	<i>median</i> 4	3	2	1	1	1
	<i>sum</i> 77/225	57/225	33/225	11/225	19/225	15/150
	<i>s.d.</i> 0-14	0-12	1-4	0-2	0-2	0-3

Significant differences in the production of S-CI-V

Group	beginner	low-int	high-Int	low-adv	high-adv	NS
beginner	-	1.000	*.010	*.001	*.000	*.000
low-int	1.000	-	*.027	*.002	*.001	*.000
high-Int	*.010	*.027	-	.151	.124	*.018
low-adv	*.001	*.002	.151	-	1.000	1.000
high-adv	*.000	*.001	.124	1.000	-	.649
NS	*.000	*.000	*.018	1.000	.649	-