

L1 transfer and adverb placement in English L2 learners of French

Vivienne Rogers
vivienne.rogers@newcastle.ac.uk

Newcastle University

FLLOC conference 7th July 2008

Outline

- 1 Rationale
 - Structure of French and English
 - Research questions
- 2 Methodology
 - Task
 - Participants
- 3 Results
- 4 Analysis and Discussion

Background

- Examine the role of the first language in the second language acquisition of French.
- Specifically looking at the acquisition of adverbs.
- Cross-sectionally at different points in development
- Part of the AHRC funded FLLOC project (ref. 112118) and this data will be made available on the website

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.

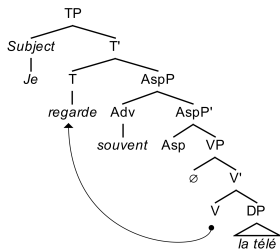
According to Pollock (1989) this difference is due to verb raising, i.e. the adverbs are in the same place and the verb is in a different place.

French has a strong uninterpretable Tense feature but English does not.

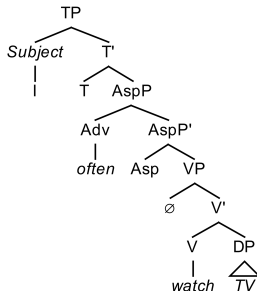
Cinque (1999) argues that all adverbs are part of a universal hierarchy.

Underlying phrase structure, Pollock 1989, Cinque 1999

French.



English



Other adverb positions

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

- Jean regarde la télé souvent.
- John watches TV often.

Other adverb positions

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

- Jean regarde la télé souvent.
- John watches TV often.

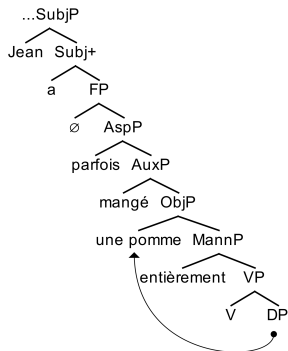
However, this sentence final position only appears to be allowed for certain adverbs and not others.

- *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. He suggests that this is a case of low-object scrambling.



- 1 Do L1 learners transfer their knowledge of English (i.e. do they not raise the verb over the adverb)?
- 2 If so, do they later adopt the French setting?
- 3 Do the L1 learners allow sentence final adverbs (object scrambling)?
- 4 If so, do they distinguish between the types of adverbs that allow object scrambling?

Tasks

Each student completed two tasks:

- 1 Pre-test measure of receptive vocabulary size
- 2 Oral production task
 - administered as part of a larger task involving negation
 - 15 obligatory contexts - 10 targeting adverbs only and 5 with both negation and adverbs
 - each student completed the production task before the judgement task
- 3 Grammaticality judgement task
 - 64 tokens on task: 24 relating to adverb placement.
 - equally weighted between grammatical and ungrammatical
 - targeted English adverb order (SAVX), standard French order (SVAX), sentence initial adverbs (ASVX) and sentence final adverbs (SVXA).
 - students had to circle whether a sentence was very good/good/bad/very bad/ don't know

Example of adverb task

Student had to give a short sentence including the word given.

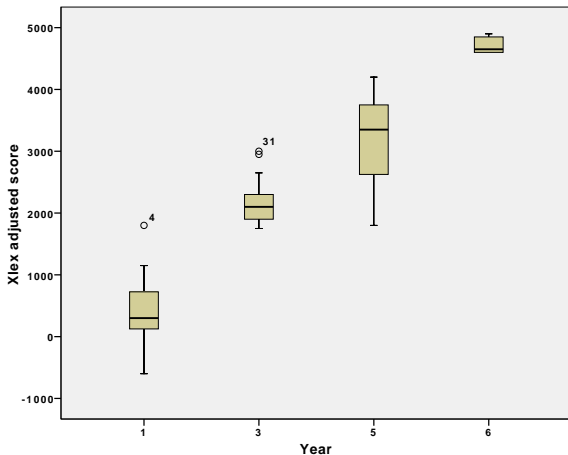
Target: Elle lave souvent le chien.



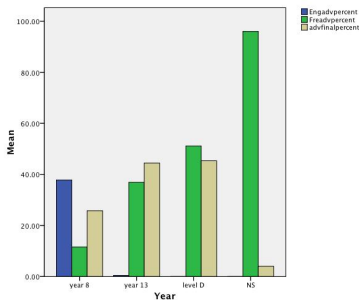
- 3 groups of 15 instructed English native speakers learning French in UK school and university environments
- advanced students had all spent at least 5 months residency in France
- 5 native speaker controls (ERASMUS students in UK)

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

Pre-test results



Oral production results

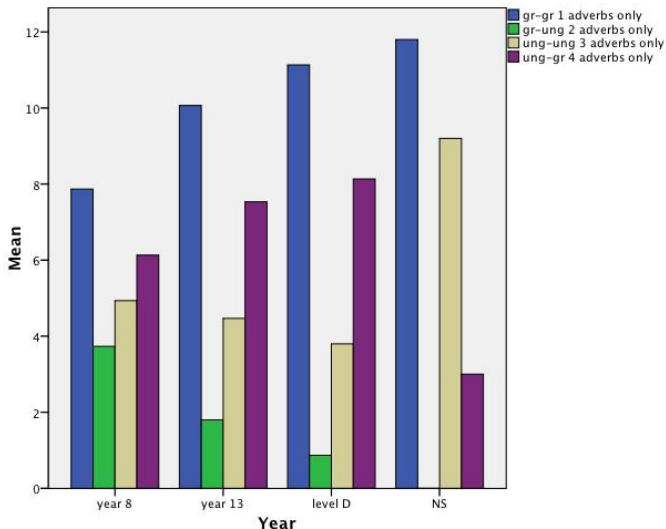


English adverb order (SAV):
beginners (year 8) is significantly different from the other groups at 0.05 level.

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



Grammaticality judgement results 2

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.

Analysis: Beginners

- In the initial stages, beginners produce and accept the English SAVX order and they incorrectly reject the French SVAX order.
- They also produce and accept sentences with the adverb in the final position although in production there is usually a pause before the adverb.
- I suggest this is due to transfer from English.

Analysis: Intermediates and Advanced

- The intermediates produce and accept the French order but use the SVXA order with all adverbs without pauses.
- The advanced group perform similarly to the intermediate group but the percentage of SVAX order increases slightly.
- Both the intermediate and advanced groups have clearly set the uninterpretable tense feature to strong.
- Both overgeneralize SVXA order to all adverbs.
- Unlikely to be due to transfer from English as English also prohibits certain adverbs appearing finally.
- Possibly not correctly assigning semantic class to adverbs or problem lies at semantics/syntax interface.

Analysis: Native speakers

- The native speakers rarely produce SVXA and only with the adverbs "souvent", "régulièrement" and "fréquemment".
- Native speakers also accept SVXA orders but only with high AspP adverbs and reject others.

Conclusions and future research

- 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.
- Overgeneralization errors of which adverbs allow SVXA order persist in even very advanced learners.

Future research

- Analyze low-intermediate group to see what happens between beginners and intermediates in terms of L1 transfer.
- Examine these results in relation to other verb-raising phenomena, e.g. negation, object clitics.

Thank you
vivienne.rogers@newcastle.ac.uk
www.flloc.soton.ac.uk