

# The Role of Negative Chunks in the Development of French by Instructed English Learners

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# Introduction

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

# Background

- Part of my PhD data: collected Dec 2006- May 2007
- Focus was on the acquisition of verb raising (negation, adverbs, subject & object clitics)
- PhD was part of FLLOC project led by Florence Myles and Ros Mitchell ([www.flloc.soton.ac.uk](http://www.flloc.soton.ac.uk))
- 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.

## Myles, Hooper & Mitchell (1998)

- Longitudinal 16 beginners L2 French (ages 11-13)
- First person verb forms, e.g. '*J'aime* (I like)
- Over-extend use of first person to third person contexts
- *La garçon j'aime le cricket* (the boy I like cricket)
- *Elle j'aime le shopping* (she I like shopping)
- Use chunks when they don't have the underlying system.
- Gradually break down chunk to use the third person.

# Myles 2005 L2 French interrogatives

## ○ Within same learner:

- Quelle est la date de ton anniversaire?  
what is the date of your birthday  
‘when is your birthday?’
- \*eh tu âge?  
eh you age  
‘How old are you?’

## ○ Used inappropriately

- Mon petit garçon ehm où habites-tu?  
my little brother ehm where live-2SG you  
‘Where does your little boy live?’

## ○ Learners juxtaposing semantic units.

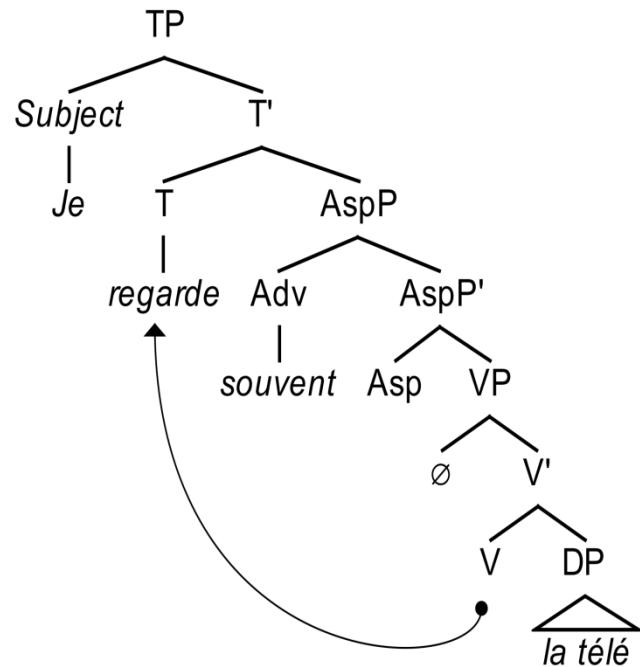
## ○ Learners use chunks when they don’t have an underlying syntactic representation.

# Negation in French and English

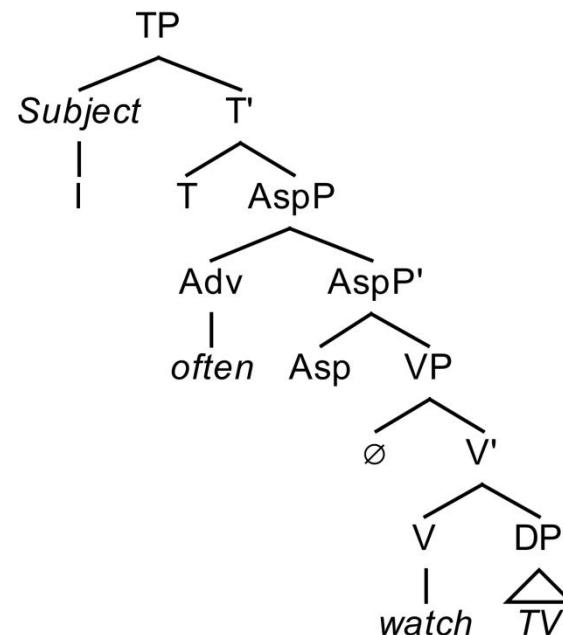
| French   | English  |
|--|--|
| Je (ne) regarde pas la télé.<br>*I watch not the TV. | I don't watch TV.<br>*Je (ne) pas regarde la télé. |
| Je n'ai pas regardé la télé.                         | I haven't watched TV.                              |

# Underlying structure

French: verb movement



English: no movement



# Theory

- According to Lasnik (2007), English and French both permit verb raising (strong uninterpretable Tense feature) 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)
  - Learners can use features that appear in certain conditions and re-map or reassemble them to other areas.

# Previous studies on L2 negation and verb movement

- Meisel (1997) - no link between the projection of IP/TP, verb movement and negation.
- Véronique (2005) - L1 Arabic , L2 French
  - “Negator *pas* is first observed in formulaic modal expressions” p.130
  - Verb raising + Negation with aux, modals
  - Then with copula and then lexical verbs.

# Participants

|                   | Beginner | Lower-inter | Upper-Inter |
|-------------------|----------|-------------|-------------|
| Number            | 15       | 15          | 15          |
| Age               | 11-12    | 15-16       | 17-18       |
| Hours instruction | 78-94    | 275-345     | 521-708     |
| Years French      | 1        | 4           | 6           |

- Instructed English speaking learners of French
- 5 secondary schools in NE England
- 10 Native speaker controls

## Proficiency: X-lex (Milton & Meara 2003)

|             | Median | Lowest | Highest |
|-------------|--------|--------|---------|
| Beginner    | 300    | -600   | 1800    |
| low-inter   | 600    | 200    | 1650    |
| upper-inter | 2100   | 1750   | 3000    |
| Controls    | 4800   | 4550   | 4900    |

# Methodology

- Elicited oral production task
- 30 items in total: 10 items with negation
  - (10 with adverbs, 5 negation and adverbs, 5 distractors).
- 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).



## Example of oral task

Target: Elle ne joue pas au golf.

She isn't playing golf / She doesn't play golf.

# Four main structures identified

- Chunk = subject <subject+verb+negation> verb (object)
- auxNeg = subject + auxiliary + negation + finite verb (+ object)
- Neg-V = subject + negation + verb
- V-Neg = subject + verb + negation + object (\*\*target French structure\*\*)
  - Without object excluded as ambiguous if SVNegX or SVXNeg.
  - Excluded “je n’aime pas” (counted as other).

# Chunks

- Only found in the beginner group (26/150)
- 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)

Example: chunk FS10  
Il <je n'ai pas> prendre le bus



Example: FS01  
<Il n'est pas> j'aime écoute



# 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)
- <il n' est pas j' ai> [/] il n' est pas attendre le@n bus (FS08)
- Elle n'est pas jouer au informatique (TS14)
- Je n'ai pas ehm lire ehm le newspaper. (FS09-11)

## Example: FS08

<il n' est pas j' ai> [//] il n' est pas attendre le@n bus



# Preverbal negation

- Found in beginners (24/150) and low-intermediates (35/150) but not high-intermediates
- 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)

Example: FS05\_11: Il ne pas de fumer



# 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)

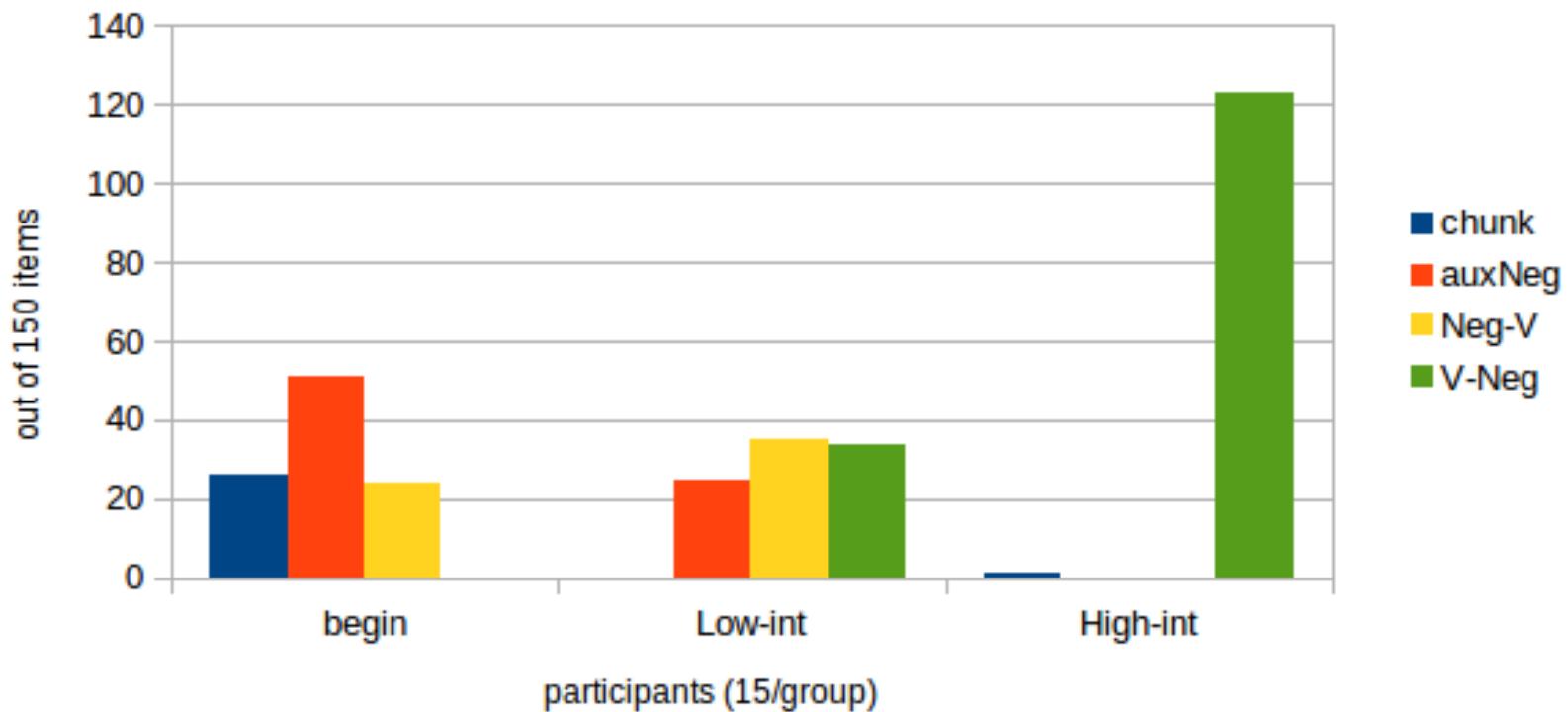
auxNeg = subject + auxiliary + negation + finite verb (+ object)

Neg-V = subject + negation + verb

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

## Types of negation

### Use of negation



# Discussion pt 1

- 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 (see adverb data).
- Variability in the younger groups represents two (or more) different stages in reassembling the features.

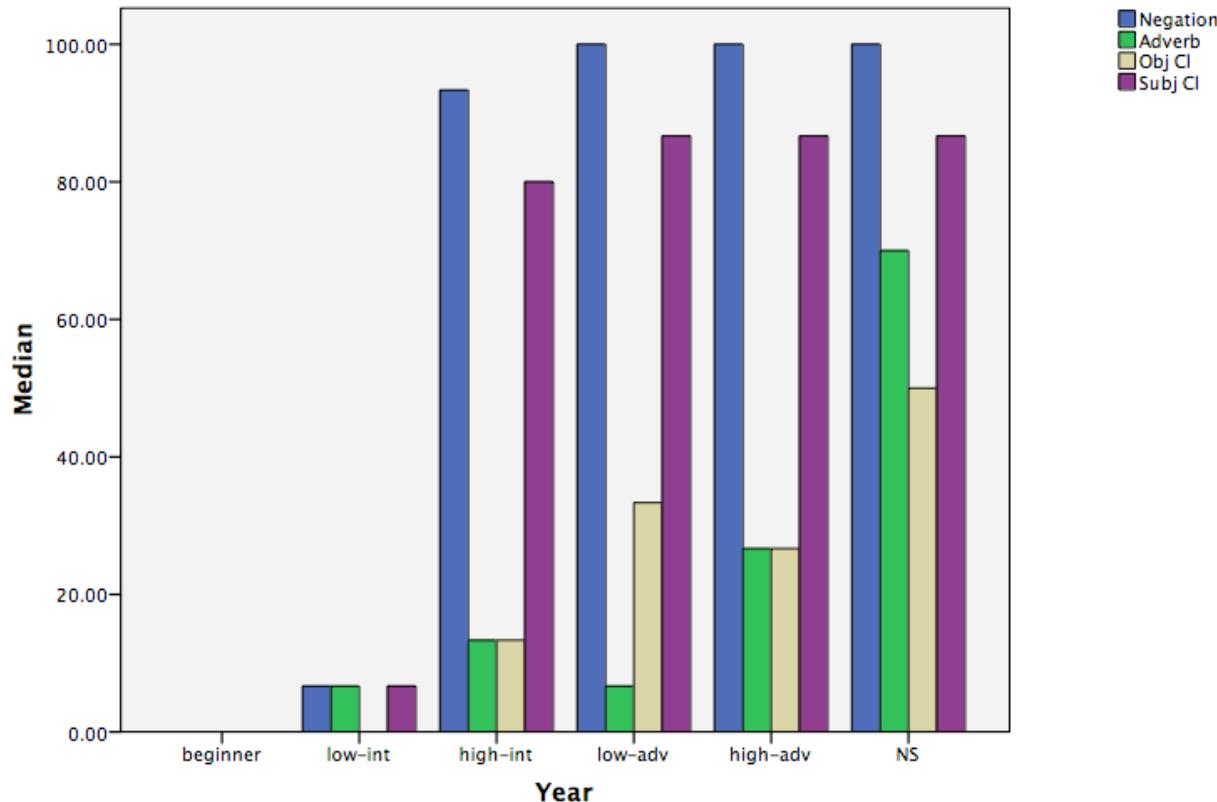
## Discussion pt 2: Stages

- Stage 1A: using entire chunks with subject + verb
- Stage 1B: transfer from English attempting to use copula+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.
- Stage 3: strong uninterpretable Tense feature on all verbs – postverbal negation.

# Just negation or parameter re-setting?

- Data from adverbs in the same elicited oral production task.
  - French has Subject-Verb-Adv-X order but English Subject-Adverb-Verb-X order.
- Data from subject and object clitics from another elicited oral production task.
  - French subject clitics can only appear with a finite verb.
  - French object clitics also appear pre-verbally.
- All the result of verb movement.

# Results on correct production of target French form



# Correlations

- Spearman's Correlations
- Highly significant correlations across all structures at .01 level.

| Negation | -      | .592** | .616** | .846** |
|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Adverb   | .592** | -      | .391** | .547** |
| Obj Cl   | .616** | .391** | -      | .668** |
| Sub Cl   | .846** | .547** | .668** | -      |

# Conclusion

- Formulaic sequences are used when underlying representation is enough to express idea.
- Initially full phrases used but then gradually broken into parts.
  - May be due to third person referent (Myles et al 1998)
- Data support a feature reassembly model of L2 acquisition of syntax.
- Once negative chunks analyzed triggers parameter re-setting.