

Adverb placement in English L2 learners of French

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EUROSLA 10th - 13th September 2008

1 Rationale

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
- Phd funded by AHRC (ref: 2005/120142) and part of the AHRC funded FLLOC project (ref. 112118)
- Lead by Florence Myles (Newcastle) and Ros Mitchell (Southampton): 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. He suggests that this is a case of low-object scrambling.

1.2 Modules of L2 acquisition

Modules of L2 acquisition

1. Initial State:
 - Organic Grammar/Minimal Trees (Vainikka and Young-Scholten 1996, forthcoming)
 - 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)

1.3 Research questions

Research Questions

1. Can instructed L2 learners reset this parameter, i.e. raise verbs over adverbs internally?
2. Can occurrences of sentence final adverbs in L2 be object-raising of L1 transfer?
3. Can learners distinguish between the adverbs which do and do not permit low-object scrambling?

2 Methodology

2.1 Task

Tasks

Each student completed two tasks:

1. 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
2. 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

2.2 Participants

Subjects

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

	begin	low-int	upper-int	low-adv	upper-adv
N	15	15	15	15	15
years of study	1	4	6	8	10
age	11-12	15-16	17-18	19-20	21-23

	begin	low-int	upper-int	low-adv	upper-adv	NS
SAV	36.9	21.3	0.4	2.7	0	0
SVAX	2.2	7.6	20.4	20.0	30.2	74.7
SVXA	25.8	31.1	45.3	59.6	45.3	4.0
SVA	9.8	5.8	17.3	16.9	21.8	21.3

3 Results

Oral production results: table

Percentages calculated out of 15 obligatory contexts.

Oral production results

1. English adverb order (SAV):

- beginners significantly different from everyone else
- upper intermediate, advanced groups and native speakers not significantly different from each other

2. French adverb order (SVAX):

- beginners and low intermediates significantly different from upper advanced and native speakers
- beginner, intermediates and low advanced not significantly different from each other
- high intermediates and advanced are not significantly different from each other
- native speakers are significantly different from everyone else

3. Sentence final adverbs (SVXA):

- upper intermediate and both advanced groups significantly different from native speakers

Grammaticality judgement results: table

	begin	low-int	upper-int	low-adv	upper-adv	NS
Gr-Gr	65.6	61.1	85	77.8	92.8	98.3
Gr-Ung	31.1	38.3	15	12.7	7.2	0
Ung-Ung	41.1	37.7	37.2	41.1	31.7	76.7
Ung-Gr	51.1	62.2	61.7	66.1	67.8	25.0

Percentages calculated out of 12.

Grammaticality judgement results

Correctly judging grammatical as grammatical:

- Beginners and low intermediates are statistically significantly different from other groups, i.e. they do not accept the target French SVAX order.
- Upper intermediates and Advanced groups are not significantly different from Native Speakers, i.e. do accept target SVAX order and SVAX.

Correctly judging ungrammatical as ungrammatical and incorrectly judging ungrammatical as grammatical:

- Native speakers statistically significantly different from intermediate and advanced groups (not the beginners).
- intermediates and advanced groups accept more (all) sentence final adverbs.

Adverbs by type

In judgement task: 4 grammatical sentences with final adverbs and 4 ungrammatical ones

- grammatical adverbs used: régulièrement, fréquemment (2), lentement
- ungrammatical adverbs used: toujours, encore

Adverbs by type: table

	begin	low-int	upper-int	low-adv	upper-adv	NS
Gr-Gr	2.8	2.53	3.07	3.4	3.67	4
Gr-Ung	1	1.4	0.93	0.6	0.33	0
Ung-Ung	1.67	1.13	0.67	0.73	0.53	2.6
Ung-Gr	1.93	2.87	3.27	3.13	3.47	1.4

Tokens out of 4. Significant difference between native speakers and upper intermediates and advanced groups. Due to overacceptance of ungrammatical sentence final adverbs High number of omissions in beginners and low intermediates.

4 Analysis and Discussion

Q1: Can instructed L2 learners reset this parameter, i.e. raise verbs over adverbs internally?

- Clearly have initial period of English order, the French SVA(X) increases over time and English order is eliminated.
- Remain significantly different to native speakers but this may be due to high number of SAV tokens which were omitted from this analysis.
- Tentatively claim that parameter can be set to allow verb raising (eventually).

Q2 and Q3

2. Can occurrences of sentence final adverbs in L2 be object scrambling or L1 transfer? 3. Can learners distinguish between these adverbs?

- Intermediate and advanced groups the sentence final adverbs are not marked by any “pause” suggesting they are part of the sentence.
- Beginner group appear to have strong task effect as final and initial adverbs are frequent.
- Intermediate and advanced groups overgeneralize SVXA order to all adverbs - especially the upper intermediate and advanced.
- 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.