

Language contact in a combined variationist and SLA context: Testing the effects of language contact and learner proficiency on the development of sociolinguistic competence in L2 French past temporal reference

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Researchers in the fields of second language acquisition (SLA) and sociolinguistics (Corder, 1981; Ellis, 1985; Regan, 1996; Young, 1988) theorize that speakers must acquire target-language grammatical structures before progressing towards acquisition of dialectal and stylistic differences, i.e. the development of sociolinguistic competence in interlanguage. However, few studies in the variationist sociolinguistic literature have thoroughly tested this claim. I investigate whether examining and quantifying the effects of target-language contact and learner proficiency has the potential to facilitate in identifying the point at which language acquisition is overtaken by the development of sociolinguistic competence in L2.

This paper probes L2 variation in context of French past temporal reference (PTR) productions by adult, L1 speakers of English from Montreal, Quebec, Canada. I extracted French PTR tokens (ex., the imperfective past *je faisais mes devoirs* 'I was doing my homework', vs. the *passé composé* *j'ai fait mes devoirs* 'I did my homework') from sociolinguistic interviews with 22 Montreal Anglophones (Blondeau, Nagy, Sankoff, & Thibault, 2002) and nine Montreal Francophones (Thibault & Vincent, 1990), coding for both linguistic factors (e.g., temporal sequence, lexical aspect, and grammatical aspect) and extra-linguistic factors (e.g., degree of target language contact, and L2 language proficiency for the L2 speakers, and linguistic marketplace scores for the L1 French speakers).

I test for quantitative evidence of the development of sensitivity to target-language variation on the part of the non-native speakers in the context of French PTR, putting target-language contact and learner proficiency effects in the context of the strong predictive claims of the Aspect Hypothesis within SLA research (Andersen, 1991; Andersen & Shirai, 1994; Bardovi-Harlig, 2000) regarding learners' reliance on semantic criteria in acquiring and productively using past-tense morphology. Results (L2 French Speakers N= 1915, L1 French Speakers N= 588) indicate that L2 speakers overuse French periphrastic past *passé composé* (ex., *j'ai fait quelque chose* 'I did something') and present tense forms (ex., *je fais quelque chose* 'I do/am doing something') at the expense of the imperfective past *imparfait* (ex., *je faisais quelque chose* 'I was doing something') in contrast with their L1 peers. Though even the most advanced L2 speakers continue to overuse present tense morphology in comparison to their Francophone peers, those having the most contact with French speakers demonstrate more native-like distribution of the imperfective and periphrastic past. I seek to disentangle the point at which language acquisition is overtaken by the development of sociolinguistic competence in L2. Supporting the predictions of the Aspect Hypothesis, preliminary results suggest that a) the L2 speakers with the highest level of L2 proficiency and target language contact employ the *passé composé* with activity and stative verbs at higher rates than the speakers with the lowest level of L2 proficiency and of target language contact; and b) the speakers with the highest level of L2 proficiency and of target language contact produce the *imparfait* with accomplishment and achievement verbs at higher rates than the lowest-L2 proficiency speakers with the greatest degree of target language contact. This study has the potential to expand knowledge about French PTR variation to the L2 French context, as no previous study on this variable has been conducted on French as a second language.

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