***L2 Grammatical Representation and Processing:
Theory and Practice***

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Reviewed by Marco Casentini

Do adult learners of a second language (L2) have access to Universal Grammar? Does the first language (L1) influence the acquisition of the L2? And if so, to what extent? Without subscribing to one particular theoretical approach, the authors of the chapters in this collection answer these (and many other) questions while presenting new empirical data.

All the works in this book offer a comprehensive overview of the current flourishing contributions on language acquisition. Furthermore, this collection highlights two distinctive features: (a) the excellent variety of the students investigated in the studies (i.e. heritage speakers, instructed and non-instructed learners, and immigrants); (b) the pedagogical implications that emerged from these data.

In the first chapter, Achimova and Déprez investigate the acquisition of definiteness and specificity's features by English learners of L2-French. To check for correlations between the type of context and article choice errors, the authors based their study on an article choice task in which they combined [+/- definite] and [+/- specific] features. The authors also tested to what extent proficiency can affect the (right) article choice by collecting data from ninety-one participants with different proficiency levels (thirty-six low-intermediate, forty-two intermediate, but only thirteen advanced speakers), who self-rated their language proficiency. Finally, through their data analysis, the authors shed light on the influence of L1 transfer and cognitive pressure for less proficient anglophone learners of French.

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In contrast to the first study, in which the authors made use of a large number of informants, in the second chapter Arteaga and Herschensohn conduct a longitudinal test by only collecting data from two advanced learners of L2-French. The authors focused on the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence by checking the right deletion of the French negative *ne*, the correct replacement of the third person plural pronoun *nous* by *on* and, finally, the proper use of the second person pronoun *tu* and *vous* in formal and informal contexts.

Arteaga and Herschensohn interviewed two learners with different learning profiles (i.e. a more naturalistic and an academic learner), before, during and after a year's stay in France. Even though the small number of informants might not seem sufficient for a generalisation of the results, the data collected still confirmed (and, in some cases, disconfirmed) previous L2 studies on the same topic. Furthermore, the authors used their data to encourage the instruction of sociolinguistic competence, suggesting different activities that language teachers can use in the classroom.

In the third chapter, Ayoun investigates the development of time-aspect-modality mastery by L2-French learners, comparing (a relatively small number of) students enrolled on a fourth-year course in a major North American university. To check the influence of learners' L1, Ayoun collected data from students with three different L1s: four heritage French, four heritage Spanish and nine English native speakers. Furthermore, the author carried out her study over sixteen weeks. She collected data at the beginning, the middle and the end of the semester, in order to check if there was any gain over time in the ability of students to produce target verb forms. The results indicate variability among students. According to the author, this might be due to the type of test used in the study, that is, a cloze test. Ayoun herself acknowledged that this type of test is not suitable for testing students, since they produced quite varied results even among the sixteen French native speakers who completed the test as a control group.

The fourth chapter is perhaps the most theoretical one in the collection. The authors, Dekydtspotter and Gilbert, conducted a two-task test to check for long-distance anaphoric dependencies in L2-French, collecting data from both native and non-native speakers (fourteen informants each). Using figures and tables to better display the data, the authors show the computational benefits that syntax seems to provide in the processing of anaphoras.

The final three chapters of the book move from L2-French to other languages. Specifically, in the fifth chapter, Sagarra tests twenty-four English learners of L2-Spanish and seventeen Spanish native speakers to check for

differences and similarities between the two groups in terms of sensitivity to gender agreement violations. Taking into consideration reading time, the author checked for the influence of age and morphological markedness, and differences and similarities between learners and native speakers in terms of the processing of agreement and disagreement of adjectives and the processing of gender versus number.

In the sixth chapter, Vainikka and Young-Scholten focus on the ‘placeholders’ used to fill the heads of phrases within the inflectional phrase (i.e. agreement phrase, negative phrase, tense phrase, aspect phrase) during the acquisition of morphosyntax. Reviewing and analysing data from both L2-German and L2-English production, the authors investigated the influence of language proficiency and the types of heads where learners use placeholders, and also how the level of literacy of learners in their L1 can influence the choice of the kind of placeholders used.

While the chapter described above may appear to be rather theoretical, albeit still providing relevant pedagogical implications for both researchers and teachers, the seventh and final chapter of this book is probably the least theoretical one. In this chapter, Yaden shows the benefits of online courses for language teaching (L2-Spanish in her case). However, the author does not just describe the new approaches she used during her two-year pilot study – she also provides essential suggestions and lists a series of useful tools that teachers can use to organise online classes. Finally, in the concluding part of this chapter, the author presents essential data to make a comparison between online and traditional courses.

In sum, the works collected in this book present new empirical data that, together with the pedagogical implications proposed and the rich list of references at the end of each chapter, represent an important ‘tool’ that is useful for researchers and teachers alike.