

The Status of Functional Categories in L2 French: Comprehension versus Production*

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ABSTRACT

Variable use of the overt morphology associated with functional categories is a common finding throughout the second language acquisition literature. The nature of this optionality and its implications regarding the relationship between morphology and syntax is a topic of intense debate. Two opposing positions are identified by White (2003). The Morphology-before-Syntax hypothesis claims that variability is indicative of major impairment to the interlanguage grammar in the domain of functional categories and/or their associated features. Conversely, under the Syntax-before-Morphology hypothesis, variability is the consequence of problems in the surface realization of inflectional morphology. While several studies have supported both hypotheses, nearly all of these have relied exclusively on production data (Eubank 1994, 1996; Gess & Herschensohn 2001; Haznedar 1997; Lardiere 1998; Prevost & White 2000; Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1996; Vainikka & Young-Scholten 1994, 1996). The present study focuses on evaluating the claims of competing accounts of morphological variability in second language acquisition via comprehension data. The study demonstrates that adult Anglophone learners of French can interpret morphological agreement contrasts that are represented in INFL and NUM despite deficient production of the inflectional morphology associated with these functional categories, thereby supporting the Syntax-before-Morphology hypothesis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Variable use of the overt morphology associated with functional categories is a common finding throughout the second language acquisition (SLA) literature. The nature of this optionality and its implications regarding the relationship between morphology and syntax is a topic of intense debate. Some researchers claim that variability is indicative of major impairment to the interlanguage grammar in the domain of functional categories, in the form of missing categories and/or features (Eubank 1994, 1996; Vainikka & Young-Scholten 1994,

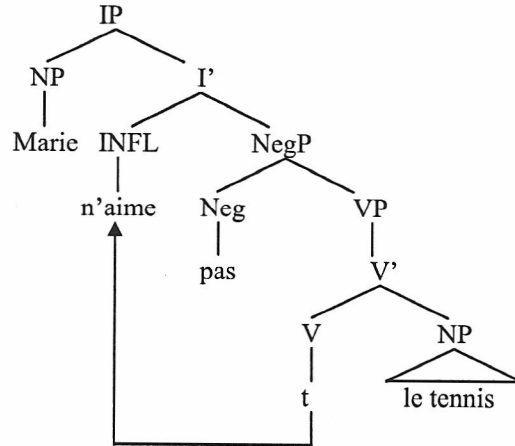
* I would like to thank Lydia White for her guidance and comments throughout the many versions of this paper, as well as all the L2 learners and control subjects who participated in the study. I would also like to thank my mother, Gisèle Funk, for spending her Christmas vacation helping me put together my picture selection tasks. This research was funded by the Social Sciences Research Council of Canada grant no. 410-2001-0719 (to Lydia White).

1996a,b). Other researchers argue against the view that morphological optionality implies an underlying representational deficit. Instead, variability is seen as the consequence of problems in the surface realization of inflectional morphology (Haznedar 1997; Lardiere 1998; Prévost & White 2000a,b; Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1996). The goal of the present study is to examine and evaluate the claims of these competing accounts of morphological variability in SLA. More specifically, the study will focus on determining whether the functional categories INFL and NUM and their strong features are present in the interlanguage grammars of Anglophone learners of L2 French. Unlike most previous research on the morphology-syntax debate, which has relied exclusively on production data, the experiment presented here examines L2 learners' comprehension in addition to their production abilities. Because these do not necessarily parallel each other, both types of data are necessary to obtain a full understanding of SLA.

2. SYNTACTIC BACKGROUND

2.1 INFL AND VERB RAISING

In order for subject-verb agreement to take place, verbs must have their features checked in the functional category INFL (Chomsky 1995). Feature strength in INFL is subject to parametric variation. If INFL has strong features, as in French, finite verbs raise overtly from V to INFL, over negation and adverbs, to check inflectional features. This process is illustrated in Tree 1.



Tree 1¹

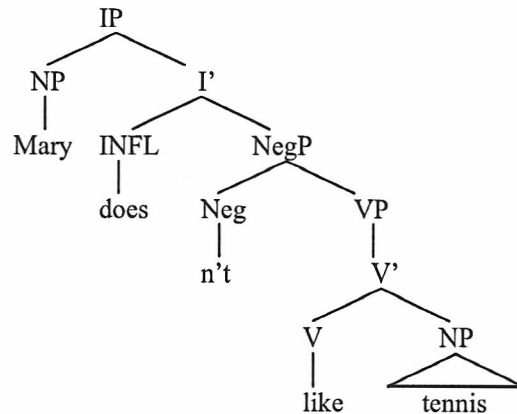
Non-finite verbs, however, remain in the VP. The syntactic consequences of strong feature strength in INFL are reflected in the alternations between the position of finite versus non-finite verbs in surface word order. In French, finite verbs appear to the left of adverbs and the negator *pas*, as in (1), while non-finite verbs appear to the right of these,

¹ The particular analysis of verb movement shown here has been simplified for expository purposes.

as in (2) (Pollock 1989).

- (1) Marie n'aim-e pas le tennis.
 Marie like-3SG.PRES not tennis.
 'Marie doesn't like tennis.'
- (2) Marie fer-ait n'importe quoi pour ne pas jouer au tennis.
 Marie do-3SG.COND anything to not play tennis.
 'Marie would do anything not to play tennis.'

In contrast to French, English has weak features in INFL. Instead of raising to INFL to pick up inflection overtly, English verbs raise covertly at LF. The only exceptions to this are semantically 'light' verbs such as copula *be* and auxiliaries, which behave in a similar fashion to French verbs. Thematic verbs, however, always remain inside the VP in the syntax, as is illustrated in Tree 2.



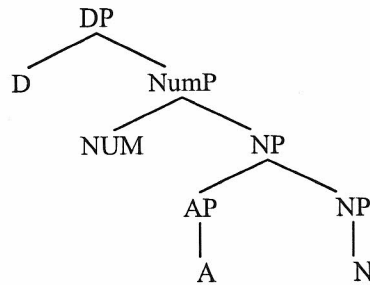
Tree 2

In English, both finite and non-finite thematic verbs appear to the right of adverbs and the negator *not/n't*, as in (3) and (4).

- (3) Mary doesn't like tennis.
 (4) Mary would do anything not to play tennis.

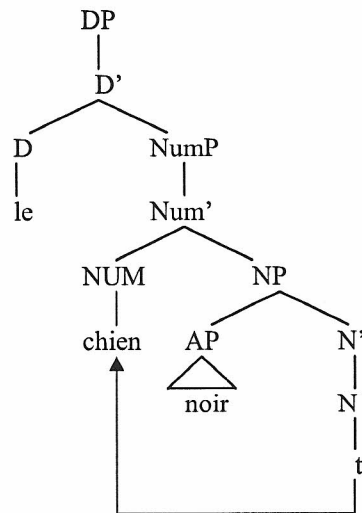
2.2 NUM AND N-RAISING

As illustrated in Tree 3, number features are found in the functional category NUM located in DP, between D and NP (Bernstein 1993; Ritter 1991; Valois 1991).



Tree 3

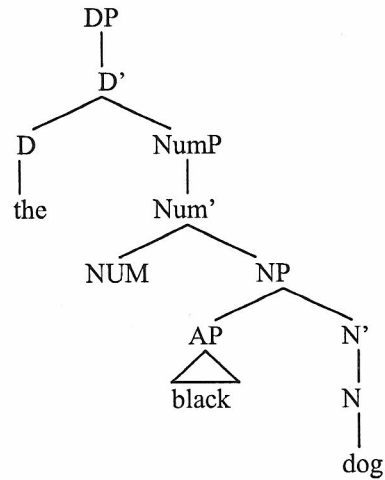
NUM, just like INFL, is subject to parametric variation: its features can be either weak or strong. In French, as in other Romance languages, NUM has strong features. This forces the noun to raise overtly from N to NUM, as depicted in Tree 4.²



Tree 4

Because English, in contrast to French, has weak features in NUM, nouns raise covertly at LF and so remain in N in the syntax, as in Tree 5.

² The particular analysis of noun raising shown here has been simplified for expository purposes.



Tree 5

The presence or absence of N-raising is reflected in surface word order through the position occupied by adjectives with respect to the head noun. In French, the adjective is postnominal,³ as in (5), while in English it is prenominal, as in (6).

- (5) l-e-Ø chien noir-Ø-Ø
 the-MASC-SG dog black-MASC-SG
 'the black dog'
- (6) the black dog

NUM is associated with another property involving gender marking (Gess & Herschensohn 2001). According to Chomsky (1995, 2001), grammatical gender and number are agreement features. They are found on the head noun and have to check corresponding features elsewhere in the structure. The gender feature controls agreement between the determiner, the noun and the adjective.

French, like all Romance languages, has gender marking: nouns have grammatical gender (either masculine or feminine) as an inherent lexical feature and gender agreement is found on determiners and adjectives, as in (7) and (8) (Corbett 1991; Cressy 1978; Stockwell, Bowen & Martin 1965).

- (7) l-a robe blanc-he-Ø
 the-FEM.SG dress white-FEM-SG
 'the white dress'

³ Most French adjectives are postnominal, although there exist some prenominal adjectives (e.g. *grand*, 'big'). The latter type will not be dealt with in this paper.

- (8) l-e-Ø manteau blanc-Ø-Ø
 the-MASC-SG coat white-MASC-SG
 ‘the white coat’

This agreement can be explained by the fact that when the noun raises it enters into either a specifier/head or a head/head relation with the determiner and the adjective, allowing feature checking (Carstens 2000). In contrast to French, English does not have grammatical gender: determiners and adjectives do not show gender agreement with the head noun, as in (9) and (10).

- (9) the white dress
 (10) the white coat

3. FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES IN THE L2 INITIAL STATE

3.1 THE MORPHOLOGY-BEFORE-SYNTAX HYPOTHESIS

Several theories of SLA maintain that L2 learners' interlanguage grammars are in some sense defective, at least in the initial stages of the acquisition process. Interlanguage grammars are said to lack properties that are assumed to be given by UG (functional categories and/or their features) and that are found in the grammars of adult native speakers. Theories differ in terms of what is specifically assumed to be lacking in the initial state of SLA. According to the Minimal Trees hypothesis (Vainikka & Young-Scholten 1994, 1996a,b), functional categories are initially absent from the L2 learner's grammar. The learner's initial state is based on the L1: the lexical categories of the mother tongue, their projections and their associated properties constitute the learner's starting point. Properties that are associated with lexical categories, such as headedness, are thus assumed to transfer from the L1 into the L2. Functional categories, despite their presence in the L1, are claimed not to transfer into the L2: they are absent from the initial state. Functional categories are acquired gradually, their emergence being triggered by input in a way that produces discrete stages of development. Once a category has been acquired, its existence is reflected in production.

The Valueless Features hypothesis (Eubank 1994, 1996), unlike Minimal Trees, claims that functional categories are present in the L2 learner's initial state. It is their feature values that are initially absent from the underlying syntactic structure. Because feature values are assumed not to transfer from the L1, these values are unspecified and are therefore inert in the L2 initial state. The fact that features associated with the learner's functional categories are initially valueless is reflected in optionality concerning certain syntactic properties that are normally governed by feature strength. Verb raising, for instance, is optional in the L2 initial state as it is determined by the strength of the features associated with INFL. Since these values are not specified, they are neither strong nor weak, allowing the verb to raise optionally. Feature strength is eventually acquired during development, as morphological paradigms are acquired.

Although Minimal Trees and Valueless Features differ somewhat in their formulation, they share a single critical assumption. Indeed, both theories assume the existence of a direct relationship between the acquisition of inflectional morphology and the

development of functional phrase structure in the syntax. Because what we are concerned with for the purposes of this study is not the exact nature of what is missing from the L2 initial state (functional categories or features), Minimal Trees and Valueless Features are collapsed into a single theory, the Morphology-before-Syntax Hypothesis (MBSH), as discussed by White (2003). This view assumes that morphology drives syntax and that learners acquire functional categories and/or their features via the acquisition of overt morphological paradigms. The MBSH maintains that the acquisition of inflectional morphology is a prerequisite for the representation of associated functional categories and/or their features in the underlying syntactic structure. Functional categories and their features are considered acquired by the learner only once the suppliance of inflectional morphology in obligatory contexts reaches some arbitrary criterial level; Vainikka & Young-Scholten (1994, 1996a,b) use a value of 60%.

Because the MBSH assumes a direct dependency between morphological and syntactic development in SLA, it considers incomplete morphology to be indicative of an impaired underlying syntactic structure. If the overt morphology associated with a particular functional category is deficient, the MBSH assumes the category in question to be absent from the interlanguage grammar. The variability in production of overt inflection observed in SLA is therefore seen as a reflection of the absence of functional categories and/or their features in L2 learners' grammars.

Although it seems reasonable to assume that consistently correct production of inflectional morphology is indicative of successful acquisition of structural positions, the assumption that absence of morphology reflects an absence of corresponding structure is questionable on several grounds (Gess & Herschensohn 2001; Lardiere 1998; Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1996; White 2003). First of all, L2 learners do not exhibit complete absence of inflectional morphology but rather variability. Yet, if functional categories are absent from their grammars, all forms should initially be uninflected. Indeed, how would an inflected verb, for instance, be represented in the absence of INFL? Second, given that L2 learners already have a fully articulated structure in their L1 grammar, abstract functional categories and features are plausibly already available from prior language knowledge. Third, absence of inflectional morphology is not just found with beginners or low proficiency learners, but also in end-state speakers who have near-perfect mastery of the L2 and thus undoubtedly possess functional categories in their grammars (Lardiere 1998). Finally, a common finding in language acquisition research is that comprehension is in advance of production. Absence of overt morphology may therefore be due to problems in performance (e.g. difficulty accessing the appropriate morphological form) rather than problems in underlying competence.

3.2 THE SYNTAX-BEFORE-MORPHOLOGY HYPOTHESIS

In contrast to the MBSH, the Syntax-before-Morphology Hypothesis (SBMH) (White 2003) argues for the completeness of L2 learners' grammatical representations and accounts for variability in terms of difficulties in the surface realization of inflectional morphology. This approach combines the Full Transfer/Full Access hypothesis (Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1996) and the Missing Surface Inflection hypothesis (MSIH) (Haznedar 1997, 2001; Lardiere 1998; Prévost & White 2000a,b).

The Full Transfer/Full Access hypothesis (FT/FA) assumes that L2 learners have access to the full set of abstract properties made available by UG, including functional categories and their fully specified features, from the very beginning of the acquisition process. On this account, syntactic and morphological development can be dissociated: there is no causal relationship between the acquisition of overt morphology and the acquisition of underlying syntactic structure. The mastery of functional categories and their features in the syntax does not depend on prior acquisition of L2 morphology. Morphological incompleteness observed in SLA must therefore be accounted for by factors other than impaired functional categories.

According to the MSIH, variability is attributed to difficulties with the mapping from abstract categories to their surface morphological manifestation. Thus, although L2 learners have a full range of functional categories and features in their interlanguage grammars, they have problems accessing the specific L2 morphological realizations of these abstract categories, or in mapping from abstract categories to particular L2 lexical forms.

3.3 PREVIOUS RESEARCH FINDINGS

A number of studies supporting the SBMH have demonstrated that the interlanguage grammars of L2 learners have a fully-specified functional category INFL. Lardiere (1998) examined the suppliance of past tense morphology on finite verbs in an L2 learner of English, which was found to stabilize at around 34% suppliance in obligatory contexts. She then compared this performance with accuracy on case assignment on pronouns in the same finite past contexts and with presence or absence of CPs. Both of these syntactic properties implicate INFL: correct nominative case assignment depends on INFL for the checking of case features and, because higher categories in the syntactic tree entail the presence of lower categories, CP implies IP. Despite her poor performance on past tense morphology, the subject correctly assigned nominative case (vs. accusative case) to pronoun subjects in finite contexts 100% of the time. Her data also displayed robust evidence for the presence of a CP projection, suggesting that INFL is fully specified in the subject's L2 grammar.

Prévost & White (2000a) investigated morphological variability in spontaneous production data drawn from child and adult L2 learners of French and German. Nonfinite forms produced by adult learners were found to occur in the same positions as finite verbs, suggesting that infinitives were in fact used as substitutes for finite forms. In another study, Prévost & White (2000b) showed that finite forms almost never occurred in non-finite (unraised) positions. The investigators also found that agreement, when used, was appropriate, indicating that the L2 learners' agreement checking mechanisms, which involve INFL, were present and unimpaired.

Two additional studies have examined the status of other functional categories, besides INFL, in the grammars of L2 learners. Gess & Herschensohn (2001) investigated the suppliance of correct forms in the use of determiners, adjective placement, agreement and intrinsic gender by eighty-five Anglophone college students learning French. Results showed that even low proficiency L2 learners produced determiners in obligatory contexts (no bare NPs), suggesting that learners have access to the functional category D from the start. Furthermore, the researchers found an important discrepancy between

performance on syntax and performance on gender and number morphology in lower levels of proficiency, suggesting that the two are independent in the context of SLA. White et al. (2004) examined the SLA of Spanish by speakers of French and English using a spontaneous production task as well as an interpretation task. In Spanish, the functional category NUM has strong features which cause N-raising and produce Noun + Adjective word order in the DP. While French also has gender and N-raising, English does not. White et al. found that the incidence of word order errors within the DP was very low, suggesting that nearly all the subjects, including the Anglophones, had a fully-specified functional category NUM with strong features.

4. THE PRESENT STUDY

4.1 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The methodology employed in previous studies has largely been confined to analyzing spontaneous production data. The typical procedure from the SBMH perspective consists of taking subjects who display a low rate of suppliance of overt morphology associated with a given functional category and demonstrating that these very same subjects perform remarkably accurately on the syntactic properties associated with that functional category. Although this research has been successful in demonstrating that the relationship between the presence of abstract functional categories in the learner's grammar and the morphological forms associated with these categories need not be a close and direct one, its nearly exclusive reliance on spontaneous production data must be called into question. Spontaneous production data is typically obtained via interviews with the subject. This procedure requires the learner to express him/herself as efficiently and quickly as possible (due to pressure to answer the interviewer's questions) and may therefore be exactly the type of situation in which learners experience difficulties accessing underlying knowledge. Consequently, L2 learners are likely to perform less accurately in production tasks, and this may lead to an underestimation of their underlying morphological knowledge.

If the failure to produce inflectional morphology is an unreliable indicator of a learner's underlying representation, data from something other than an oral production task are required. Comprehension tasks provide one such alternative, as these are less demanding in terms of processing (memory, accessibility, etc.) and may therefore provide a more adequate approximation of a learner's competence in the L2. Comprehension tasks can be used to assess whether learners who are not producing overt inflectional morphology are nevertheless aware of the subtle distinctions in meaning provided by inflectional morphemes. If learners are shown to be sensitive to morphosyntactic contrasts associated with functional categories, then these must be represented in the underlying grammar. This scenario would lend additional support to the SBMH: L2 learners have fully specified functional categories and variability in production is attributable to non-linguistic factors such as processing constraints or lexical retrieval failures.

The present study seeks to assess the status of functional categories and their associated features in the interlanguage grammars of Anglophone learners of L2 French. The first task is designed to test whether L2 learners who are not consistently producing

the inflectional morphology associated with the functional categories INFL and NUM have nevertheless acquired the syntactic properties associated with these structural positions (V-raising and N-raising). The two subsequent tasks assess whether such learners demonstrate sensitivity to verbal and nominal morphology in comprehension. Specifically, these tasks test whether learners can understand and interpret the number contrasts on verbs and gender contrasts on adjectives that they fail to realize in production.

4.2 SUBJECTS

The fourteen nonnative speakers of French tested in this study were native speakers of English. English was the language they spoke at home and, with the exception of three subjects, it was also both parents' first language. Most of the subjects first began learning French at school in their mid to late teens, although two of them were first exposed to the language well into adulthood, in their late twenties. As post puberty learners, all subjects were therefore past any putative critical period. All were taught French as a subject in school. Although all subjects are referred to here as L2 learners of French, this language was actually a third language for four of them (the L2 being either Spanish, German, Korean or Malay). Other subjects who reported first learning French prior to adolescence were eliminated from the study. A few subjects were also eliminated on the basis of their performance on the elicited production task, as only those learners who were not consistently producing nominal and verbal inflection (at or below 60% suppliance in obligatory contexts) were retained for the study. Despite a certain amount of within-group variation in terms of proficiency, the L2 learners tested in this study can be characterized as intermediate level learners of French: although they made quite a few mistakes and had trouble with some vocabulary items, all of the subjects were able to talk about day-to-day activities, express their opinions, and carry on an informal conversation in French. Ten native speakers of French served as a control group.

4.3 TASKS

Three tasks were devised for this experiment: one elicited production task and two picture selection tasks. The elicited production task was always given before the comprehension tasks, in order to avoid priming. The order of the two picture selection tasks was randomized across subjects.

4.3.1 ELICITED PRODUCTION

The elicited production task consisted of an oral translation task in which the subject was presented with 17 English sentences (see Appendix A). The subject was then asked to orally translate each sentence into French, to the best of his/her ability. The sentences used were all simple sentences with beginner-level vocabulary.

The task was designed to elicit a number of structures. In order to examine learners' verb placement and thereby verify whether they had acquired V-raising (a property of French but not of English), subjects were asked to translate three English questions, three negatives and four sentences containing the adverb *souvent* 'often'. The task was also used to determine whether subjects had acquired N-raising, by asking them to translate eight sentences containing adjectives.

Crucially, the production task served to establish each subject’s level of accuracy in producing verbal inflection (number agreement) and nominal inflection (gender agreement) in obligatory contexts. Eleven test sentences were designed to elicit third person plural forms of verbs for which this form differs phonologically from the third person singular form.⁴ Seven sentences also provided obligatory contexts for gender agreement on adjectives.

4.3.2 COMPREHENSION: PICTURE SELECTION

The goal of picture selection is to determine if learners can comprehend morphosyntactic contrasts that they fail to maintain in their own utterances. The two picture selection tasks used in this study were designed to assess comprehension of inflectional contrasts in verbal and nominal morphology in L2 learners who are not consistently exhibiting these contrasts in production.

4.3.2.1 PICTURE SELECTION 1: VERBAL INFLECTION

The first picture selection task was designed to test whether L2 learners could make use of the number distinction present in verbal morphology. More specifically, the task assessed whether L2 learners of French could use the information provided by contrastive forms of a verb to infer properties of the meaning of a given sentence. The contrast used was number agreement between third person singular and third person plural forms of verbs for which this is manifested by a clear phonological contrast. Examples of such verbs include the verb *boire* ‘to drink’ (*il boit* [bwa] ‘he drinks’ vs. *ils boivent* [bwav] ‘they drink’) and the verb *faire* ‘to do/make’ (*elle fait* [fɛ] ‘she does/makes’ vs. *elles font* [fɔ̃] ‘they do/make’). The verbs used were all high frequency verbs in the present tense, suitable for beginners. A list of the test items is provided in Appendix B.

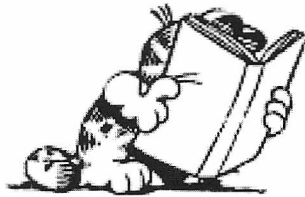
It is important to note that although French third person singular and plural pronouns differ orthographically (*il/ils, elle/elles*), they do not differ phonologically and thus provide no information as to whether the sentence is describing one person or several people.⁵ The only way for the subject to determine whether to give a singular or plural interpretation to the sentence is through verbal inflection, i.e. number agreement.

Subjects were presented with a spoken French sentence containing either the third person singular or third person plural form of a verb. Each sentence was accompanied by a pair of pictures, which differed only in terms of the number of characters (one versus several) performing the depicted action. The subject was then asked to indicate which of the two pictures best fit with the meaning of the spoken sentence. A sample test item is provided in (11).

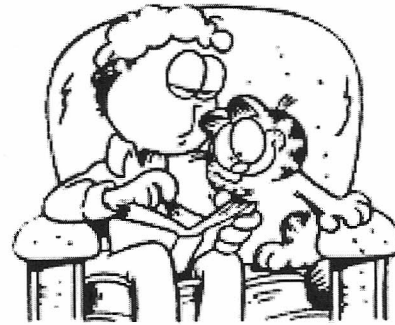
- (11) Test item: Il-s li-sent un livre.
 they.MASC-PL read-3PL.PRES a book.
 ‘They are reading a book.’

⁴ Verbs that do not have phonologically contrastive forms for third person singular versus third person plural were excluded from the analysis.

⁵ An exception to this is the *liaison* phenomenon in which the final *s* on plural pronouns is pronounced when followed by a vowel-initial verb. In order to avoid this acting as a cue to plurality, only consonant-initial verbs were used in the task.



A



B

Here, the test sentence contains the third person plural form of the verb *lire* ‘to read’. This form (*lisent* [liz]) contrasts phonologically with the third person singular form of *lire* (*lit* [li]). The target picture is Picture B, which depicts two characters reading a book and thus illustrates the (correct) plural interpretation of the test sentence.

The task consisted of forty sentences: twenty test sentences, ten semantic distracters and ten sentences containing verbs whose third person singular and third person plural forms are (phonologically) identical. These last sentences were included in order to detect any biases towards singular or plural interpretations of the verb.

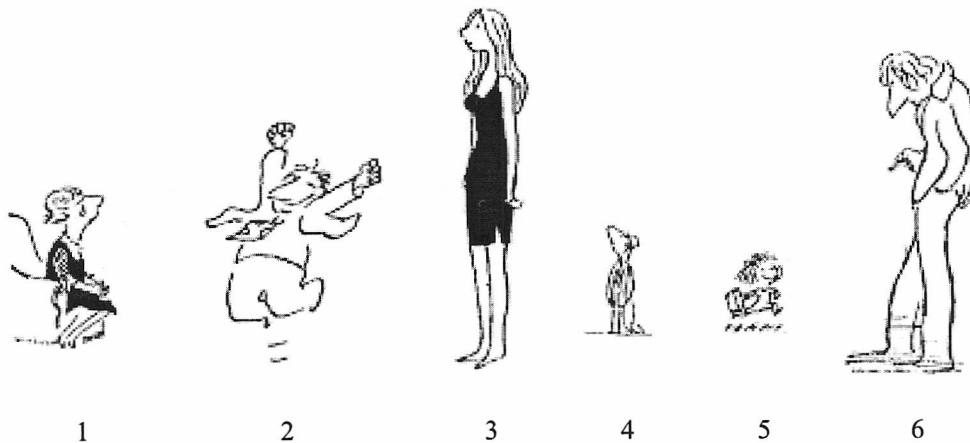
4.3.2.2 PICTURE SELECTION 2: NOMINAL INFLECTION

The second picture selection task was designed to test whether L2 learners who were not consistently producing gender agreement on adjectives could nevertheless exhibit a certain understanding of the gender distinction present in nominal morphology. This issue was addressed by assessing whether subjects could use the information provided by contrastive forms of an adjective (masculine versus feminine) to infer properties of the meaning of a given sentence. Only those adjectives characterized by a clear phonological contrast between the masculine and the feminine forms were used. Examples of such adjectives include the adjectives *grand* [grã] ‘tall_{MASC}’ (versus *grande* [grãd] ‘tall_{FEM}’) and *français* [frãse] ‘French_{MASC}’ (versus *française* [frãsez] ‘French_{FEM}’). A complete list of the adjectives used is provided in Appendix C.

Subjects were presented with a large picture featuring twenty characters: ten males and ten females. Each character was illustrated so as to be easily describable using a particular adjective, such as ‘tall’, ‘blond’, ‘happy’, etc. For each of the ten adjectives, two corresponding characters were depicted: one male and one female. The subject was presented with a spoken French sentence consisting of a first-person statement describing the speaker. Each sentence contained an adjective of either masculine or feminine form.

The subject was then asked to indicate which of the twenty characters was most likely to have uttered the sentence. A sample test item is given in (12):

- (12) Test item: Je suis petit-e-Ø.
 I am short-FEM-SG
 'I am short.'



In this example, the test sentence contains the feminine form of the adjective *petit* 'short'. This form (*petite* [petit]) contrasts phonologically with the masculine form of *petit* (*petit* [peti]). The target character is Character 5, who is a short female and thus illustrates the (correct) feminine interpretation of the test sentence.

The first person singular French pronoun *je* was used instead of the third person singular pronouns *il/elle* as these provide information regarding the gender of the subject. *Je*, on the other hand, provides no such information and thus forces the learner to rely solely on gender features realized overtly on the adjective in order to determine whether the sentence is referring to a male or female.

4.4 HYPOTHESES AND PREDICTIONS

4.4.1 ELICITED PRODUCTION

In accordance with the SBMH, I hypothesize that interlanguage grammars contain the functional categories INFL and NUM, as well as their associated features. I therefore predict that the learners examined in this study will exhibit both V-raising and N-raising with a considerable degree of accuracy in their production data. Because syntactic and morphological development can be dissociated, I further predict that learners will display a significantly higher degree of accuracy on V-raising and N-raising than on suppliance of overt inflectional morphology in obligatory contexts. This prediction is contrary to that of the MBSH, which predicts that L2 learners will exhibit a similar degree of accuracy in both syntax and morphology. According to this position, there should be no significant

difference in performance on V-raising and N-raising, on the one hand, and verbal and nominal morphology, on the other.

4.4.2 PICTURE SELECTION: VERBAL AND NOMINAL INFLECTION

I hypothesize that inconsistent production of verbal and nominal morphology is attributable to difficulties in the surface realization of particular L2 inflectional morphemes. I therefore predict that these subjects, despite deficient overt morphology, will be able to make use of number agreement contrasts on verbs and gender agreement contrasts on nouns in order to perform accurately on the picture selection tasks. L2 learners should demonstrate sensitivity to number agreement features in INFL and gender agreement features in NUM. Subjects are therefore expected to be quite successful in comprehension, despite a general failure to realize agreement morphology in production.

In contrast to the view described above, the MBSH assumes a direct relationship between the acquisition of morphology and the development of phrase structure in the syntax, predicting poor performance on inflection regardless of the nature of the task. Because an appropriate interpretation of the test items in the picture selection task crucially depends on agreement features realized overtly on the verb or adjective, the absence of such features from the learner's underlying representation should prevent him/her from being able to interpret the information provided by these. Performance on this task is thus predicted by the MBSH to be at chance level, if their production is defective.

5. RESULTS

5.1 ELICITED PRODUCTION DATA

The translation task was quite successful in eliciting V-raising. A total of forty negative sentences with V + Neg word order, as in (13a), were elicited, as well as eleven adverbial sentences with V + Adv word order,⁶ as in (13b), and four questions with V + Subject word order,⁷ as in (13c).

⁶ Only those adverbial sentences with transitive verbs were retained for statistical analysis, as only these are unambiguously diagnostic of V-raising. Regarding adverbial sentences, it is important to note that placing the adverb at the end of the sentence (e.g. *Ils lisent le journal souvent.* – subject 8) constitutes a grammatical alternative to placing it immediately after the verb. Learners produced a total of twelve adverbial sentences of this type, indicating that the two different forms are equally natural for them.

⁷ The low number of V + subject questions can be explained by the fact that, in French, questions of the *est-ce que* form (e.g. *Est-ce qu'elle boit du vin rouge?* – subject 7) are also perfectly grammatical. Subjects produced a total of twenty eight questions of this form, suggesting that this may be a more natural way of forming questions in French for these learners compared to the V + subject form.

- (13) a. Marie n'aim-e pas l-es voitures vert-e-s. (subject 4)
 Marie like-3SG.PRES not the-PL cars green-FEM-PL
 'Marie doesn't like green cars.'
- b. Il-s li-t souvent l-e-Ø journal. (subject 3)
 they.MASC-PL read-3SG.PRES often the-MASC-SG newspaper.
 'They often read the newspaper.'
- c. Boi-t-elle le-Ø vin rouge-Ø? (subject 1)
 drink-3SG-PRES-she the.MASC-SG wine red-SG
 'Does she drink red wine?'

Learners were globally quite accurate in producing the correct word order resulting from V-raising (72.4% mean accuracy) as can be seen in Table 1. There was, however, quite a bit of individual variation in V-raising.

subject	negative sentences	adverbial sentences	questions	total	
1	1/1	-	1/1	2/2	100%
2	3/3	1/2	-	4/5	80%
3	3/3	2/3	-	5/6	83%
4	3/3	1/2	1/1	5/6	83%
5	3/3	0/3	-	3/6	50%
6	3/3	-	-	3/3	100%
7	3/3	2/2	-	5/5	100%
8	3/3	2/2	1/1	6/6	100%
9	3/3	0/4	-	3/7	43%
10	3/3	0/2	-	3/5	60%
11	3/3	0/4	-	3/7	43%
12	3/3	0/3	1/1	4/7	57%
13	3/3	0/2	-	3/5	60%
14	3/3	3/3	-	6/6	100%
group results	40/40	11/32	4/4	55/76	72.4%

Table 1. Elicited production: accuracy on V-raising

As can be seen in Table 1, all of the errors involving V-raising occurred with sentences containing adverbs, and not in questions or negatives. Indeed, L2 learners produced a total of twenty one adverbial sentences in which the verb had not raised over the adverb. This absence of V-raising results in ungrammatical Subject + Adverb + V word order. An example of such an error is provided in (14):

- (14) Il-s souvent lire le-Ø journal. (subject 5)
 they.MASC-PL often read-INF the.MASC-SG newspaper
 'They often read the newspaper.'

It is interesting to note that such a failure to raise the verb to INFL did not occur in any other type of sentence. There seems to be a clear dissociation between learners' performance on questions and negatives, on the one hand, and adverbial sentences on the other. This is consistent with other findings in the literature (White 1992; Hawkins et al. 1993).

In general, incidence of word order errors resulting from a failure to raise the verb from V to INFL is relatively low (27.6%). This suggests that almost all subjects have a fully-specified INFL in their L2 grammars.

Turning now to N-raising, the translation task was very successful in eliciting N-raising, as can be seen in Table 2. A total of seventy eight instances of grammatical Noun + Adjective word order were produced, as in (15):

- (15) Jean et Marie ont un-e maison gris-e-Ø. (subject 8)
 Jean and Marie have.3PL.PRES a-SG.FEM house grey-FEM-SG
 'Jean and Marie have a grey house.'

subject	N-raising	
1	6/6	100%
2	5/6	83%
3	6/6	100%
4	5/5	100%
5	6/6	100%
6	6/6	100%
7	6/6	100%
8	6/6	100%
9	6/6	100%
10	6/6	100%
11	6/6	100%
12	2/3	67%
13	6/6	100%
14	6/6	100%
group results	78/80	97.5%

Table 2. Elicited production: accuracy on N-raising

The subjects were very successful in producing the correct Noun + Adjective word order (97.5% mean accuracy). Indeed, twelve out of the fourteen subjects performed at ceiling. Only two instances of ungrammatical Adjective + Noun word order occurred, one of which is presented in (16). The subjects who produced these errors were nevertheless highly accurate, producing the correct word order in the majority of obligatory contexts.

- (16) Est-ce qu'il-s boi-t souvent un-Ø
do they.MASC-PL drink-3SG.PRES often a.MASC-SG
froid-Ø-Ø bière?
cold-MASC-SG beer?
'Do they often drink cold beer?' (subject 2)

Such a low incidence of word order errors within the DP suggests that these L2 learners have a fully-specified functional category NUM.

Despite L2 learners' high degree of accuracy in V-raising and N-raising, their performance on the production of inflectional morphology was very low, as can be seen in Table 3. Mean accuracy on suppliance of third person plural inflection was 26.7%, with a considerable degree of individual variation (scores ranged from 0% to 60% correct suppliance). No subject performed over 60%, as one of the criteria for inclusion in the sample was that the learner be inconsistent in his/her production of nominal and verbal morphology (at or below 60% suppliance in obligatory contexts). Examples of incorrect third person plural inflection are given in (17).

- (17) a. Il-s f-ait du ski souvent. (subject 1)
they.MASC-PL do-3SG.PRES skiing often
'They often go skiing.'
b. Il-s parler français. (subject 5)
they.MASC-PL speak-INF French
'They speak French.'
c. Il-s n'all-ons pas à l'école. (subject 7)
they.MASC-PL go-1PL.PRES not to school
'They aren't going to school.'

When they failed to provide the correct third person plural form of a verb, most learners used either the third person singular form, as in (17a) or the infinitival form, as in (17b). Only two learners (subjects 2 and 14) consistently used only one of these forms (singular inflection) as their default form. The other subjects did not seem to have a systematic default form for third person plural but rather alternated between the singular form and the non-finite form. On some occasions, a few subjects used other types of verbal inflection in the place of third person plural, as in (17c).

subject	third person plural inflection		feminine inflection	
1	0/6	0%	3/7	43%
2	2/10	20%	3/6	50%
3	4/10	40%	4/7	57%
4	1/7	14%	2/6	33%
5	1/9	11%	2/5	40%
6	1/10	10%	3/7	43%
7	6/10	60%	2/7	29%
8	5/9	56%	3/7	43%
9	3/10	30%	2/6	33%
10	6/10	60%	2/7	29%
11	1/9	11%	0/5	0%
12	0/11	0%	0/3	0%
13	4/10	40%	0/5	0%
14	1/10	10%	2/7	29%
group results	35/131	26.7%	28/85	32.9%

Table 3. Elicited production: suppliance of inflection in obligatory contexts

Despite variation in the degree of suppliance of third person plural inflection on verbs, all subjects displayed the same pattern: accuracy on V-raising was higher than or equal to the rate of suppliance of overt verbal morphology. Using a repeated-measures ANOVA, this difference in performance was found to be highly significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that there is no direct relationship between the acquisition of syntactic properties (V-raising) associated with the functional category INFL and the acquisition of the specific L2 morphemes represented in INFL. This finding is in accordance with my predictions.

Regarding the suppliance of gender agreement on adjectives, learners' performance was quite low (32.9% mean accuracy), although superior to their performance on third person plural morphology, as can be seen in Table 3. When failing to use correct feminine inflection, all subjects systematically produced the masculine version of the adjective as their default form.

The low degree of accuracy on feminine inflection stands in sharp contrast to the near-ceiling (97.5%) group results on N-raising. Using a repeated-measures ANOVA, this difference was indeed found to be highly significant ($p < 0.001$). This suggests, in line with my predictions, that although these learners have clearly acquired the strong feature in French NUM that causes N-raising, they continue to exhibit significant difficulties in the production of the overt morphology (feminine inflection) associated with this functional category.

In general, subjects performed remarkably well on V-raising and N-raising, two syntactic properties that depend on the functional categories NUM and INFL and their associated features. It is nevertheless apparent that this knowledge of L2 feature strength does not directly translate into the ability to produce the morphology associated with NUM and INFL, as the low degree of accuracy on production of third person plural and

feminine inflection suggests. This finding is consistent with the SBMH and not the MBSH. The results of the elicited production task are also consistent with other results in the literature, such as those reported by Gess & Herschensohn (2001), who found an important discrepancy between L2 learners' performance on N-raising, on the one hand, and overt gender agreement, on the other. These findings indicate that syntactic and morphological development can be dissociated during the course of SLA: the syntactic properties associated with functional categories are acquired quite early on while deficiencies in the production of particular morphemes associated with these categories persist well into intermediate level proficiency.

5.2 PICTURE SELECTION DATA: VERBAL INFLECTION

Results from the picture selection task examining learners' understanding of third person plural inflectional morphology are presented in table 4. All subjects performed at or very near ceiling (19/20) on the distracter sentences, indicating that they had no difficulty in principle with this task. Performance on the test items was generally quite high (70.7% mean accuracy). Subjects' scores on this task were greatly improved compared to their scores on the elicited production task. A repeated-measures ANOVA found the difference between degree of accuracy in the comprehension of verbal inflection in this task and degree of accuracy in the production of verbal inflection in the elicited production task to be highly significant ($p < 0.001$). The control group, consisting of ten native French speakers, performed at ceiling on this task.

Because the production and comprehension tasks are quite different in nature, it is arguable that results from these two tasks are not directly comparable. Indeed, a subject who produces third person plural inflection half of the time will obtain a score of 50% in production while a subject who performs at chance level, merely guessing, in comprehension will also obtain a score of 50%. An additional statistical comparison was conducted in order to verify whether the difference in accuracy between the two tasks remains significant when the scores of only those subjects who performed unambiguously above chance in comprehension (at or over 80%) are compared. This difference was indeed found to be significant ($p < 0.05$).

subject	elicited production		picture selection	
1	0/6	0%	5/10	50%
2	2/10	20%	9/10	90%
3	4/10	40%	8/10	80%
4	1/7	14%	6/10	60%
5	1/9	11%	3/10	30%
6	1/10	10%	7/10	70%
7	6/10	60%	10/10	100%
8	5/9	56%	10/10	100%
9	3/10	30%	7/10	70%
10	6/10	60%	8/10	80%
11	1/9	11%	6/10	60%
12	0/11	0%	4/10	40%
13	4/10	40%	6/10	60%
14	1/10	10%	10/10	100%
group results	35/131	26.7%	99/140	70.7%

Table 4. Picture selection: accuracy on third person plural inflection

The significant difference between L2 learners' performance in the elicited production task, on the one hand, and performance on the picture selection task, on the other, indicates that sensitivity to the information provided by inflectional morphology occurs even in the absence of consistent suppliance of this type of morphology in production. This finding is in line with my predictions and suggests that the production of overt verbal morphemes is not a prerequisite for their interpretability in comprehension.

5.3 PICTURE SELECTION DATA: NOMINAL INFLECTION

Subjects' performance on the picture selection task assessing nominal inflection (75.7% mean accuracy, see Table 5) was very similar to their performance on the picture selection task examining verbal inflection (70.7% mean accuracy). Degree of accuracy on the nominal picture selection task was found to be significantly higher ($p < 0.001$) than nominal morphology in the elicited production task (32.9% mean accuracy), as can be seen in Table 5. Performance on feminine and masculine inflection was nearly identical in all subjects: those who had acquired gender agreement performed with high accuracy on both masculine and feminine test items, while those who had not yet fully acquired this property of French displayed similar deficiencies in both types of test items.

As in the analysis of the first picture selection task, an additional statistical comparison between accuracy in production and comprehension was conducted for subjects whose performance in comprehension of nominal inflection was clearly above chance. This difference was found to be highly significant ($p < 0.001$).

subject	elicited production (feminine inflection)		picture selection (feminine inflection)		picture selection (masculine inflection)	
1	3/7	43%	3/10	30%	4/10	40%
2	3/6	50%	7/10	70%	6/10	60%
3	4/7	57%	9/10	90%	10/10	100%
4	2/6	33%	6/10	60%	7/10	70%
5	2/5	40%	6/10	60%	8/10	80%
6	3/7	43%	9/10	90%	9/10	90%
7	2/7	29%	10/10	100%	10/10	100%
8	3/7	43%	10/10	100%	10/10	100%
9	2/6	33%	9/10	90%	8/10	80%
10	2/7	29%	9/10	90%	8/10	80%
11	0/5	0%	8/10	80%	6/10	60%
12	0/3	0%	5/10	50%	7/10	70%
13	0/5	0%	7/10	70%	7/10	70%
14	2/7	29%	8/10	80%	8/10	80%
group results	28/85	32.9%	106/140	75.7%	108/140	77.1%

Table 5. Picture selection: accuracy on nominal inflection on adjectives

Despite individual differences, the majority of L2 learners display a similar pattern: above chance performance on comprehension and poor performance on production. This result is consistent with my predictions and suggests that L2 learners are sensitive to features represented in functional categories, such as gender in NUM, even when they are not consistently producing the morphology associated with these features.

6. CONCLUSION

Despite a clear deficiency in the production of inflectional morphology associated with the functional categories INFL and NUM, the L2 learners examined in this study display near-perfect performance on V-raising and N-raising, two syntactic properties associated with these categories. This finding stands in sharp contrast to the claims of the MBSH, which would require learners to exhibit a high degree of accuracy on associated morphology in order to posit the presence of INFL, NUM, their features and feature strength in L2 grammars. Furthermore, subjects show sensitivity to the inflectional morphology associated with INFL and NUM, as they can use the information provided by these morphemes as cues for the interpretation of sentences in comprehension. If learners are able to discriminate third person plural versus third person singular inflection and feminine versus masculine inflection in comprehension, these contrasts must have some kind of representation in INFL and NUM, respectively. This is incompatible with the claims of the MBSH, according to which L2 learners cannot represent a given contrast in their underlying grammar if they are not reliably producing it. The MBSH would indeed assume across-the-board deficits for L2 learners who are not consistently

producing inflectional morphology in obligatory contexts.

Taken together, the results of the elicited production task and the two picture selection tasks are largely inconsistent with the MBSH and instead support the claim that syntactic and morphological development can be dissociated in SLA. Subjects' high degree of accuracy on V-raising and on the comprehension of contrasts in verbal inflection suggests that INFL and the fully specified features associated with it are present in their L2 grammars, in spite of inconsistent suppliance of verbal morphology in production. Similarly, high level performance on N-raising and sensitivity to the contrastive information provided by nominal inflection indicate that L2 learners possess a fully-specified functional category NUM in their interlanguage grammars, even in the absence of consistent suppliance of the associated morphology in production. The findings reported here thus favor the SBMH, according to which the presence of functional categories and their associated features in the interlanguage grammar does not depend on prior acquisition of the morphological paradigms that are associated with these functional categories. Inconsistency in production does not preclude an intact underlying representation.

In conclusion, it is clear from the results of this study that incomplete morphology in production is not necessarily indicative of an impaired underlying syntactic structure, unlike what the MBSH assumes. Even if the overt morphology associated with a particular functional category is deficient, the category in question may be present in the interlanguage grammar. Variability in the production of overt inflection observed in SLA reflects learners' difficulties in identifying specific L2 morphological realizations of abstract functional categories, rather than the absence of these and/or associated features in the grammar. As was clearly demonstrated in the experiment presented in this paper, data from comprehension tasks do not necessarily parallel production data. L2 learners perform more accurately on tasks where they do not themselves have to retrieve forms from the lexicon on-line during speech. Further research on SLA should therefore focus on collecting data from a variety of tasks (production and comprehension) in order to arrive at a complete understanding of L2 development in this domain.

APPENDIX A: ELICITED PRODUCTION TASK: TEST SENTENCES USED IN THE ORAL TRANSLATION TASK

1. John and Mary have a grey house. → *Jean et Marie **ont** une maison grise.*
2. They often go skiing. → *Ils **font** souvent du ski.*
3. John's grandmother is very old. → *La grand-mère de Jean est très vieille.*
4. They drive a white car. → *Ils **conduisent** une voiture blanche.*
5. They can speak French. → *Ils **savent** parler français.*
6. Mary's father lives in France. → *Le père de Marie vit en France.*
7. John and Mary are making a cake. → *Jean et Marie **font** un gâteau.*
8. Do they often drink cold beer? → ***Boivent-ils** souvent de la bière froide?*
9. They live in Quebec. → *Ils **vivent** au Québec.*
10. Mary is wearing a white dress. → *Marie porte une robe blanche.*
11. Is she happy? → *Est-elle heureuse?*
12. The children aren't sleeping. → *Les enfants ne **dorment** pas.*
13. Mary and John often go to the pool. → *Marie et Jean **vont** souvent à la piscine.*
14. They aren't going to school today. → *Ils ne **vont** pas à l'école aujourd'hui.*
15. Mary doesn't like green cars. → *Marie n'aime pas les voitures vertes.*
16. Does she drink red wine? → *Boit-elle du vin rouge?*
17. They often read the newspaper. → *Ils **lisent** souvent le journal.*

APPENDIX B: PICTURE SELECTION TASK: TEST SENTENCES USED TO EVALUATE COMPREHENSION OF VERBAL MORPHOLOGY

1. Elle *va*(sg) à la plage. = She's going to the beach.
2. Il *conduit*(sg). = He's driving.
3. Il *lit*(sg) un livre. = He's reading a book.
4. Il *vit*(sg) en France. = He lives in France.
5. Elle *reçoit*(sg) un cadeau. = She's receiving a gift.
6. Ils *boivent*(pl). = They're drinking.
7. Ils *dorment*(pl). = They're sleeping.
8. Elles *font*(pl) le ménage. = They're cleaning.
9. Ils *savent*(pl) parler chinois. = They know how to speak Chinese.
10. Elles *sortent*(pl) du magasin. = They're going/walking out of the store.
11. Elles *vont*(pl) à la plage. = They're going to the beach.
12. Ils *conduisent*(pl). = They're driving.
13. Ils *lisent*(pl) un livre. = They're reading a book.
14. Ils *vivent*(pl) en France. = They live in France.
15. Elles *reçoivent*(pl) un cadeau. = They're receiving a gift.
16. Il *boit*(sg). = He's drinking.
17. Il *dort*(sg). = He's sleeping.
18. Elle *fait*(sg) le ménage. = She's cleaning.
19. Il *sait*(sg) parler chinois. = He knows how to speak Chinese.
20. Elle *sort*(sg) du magasin. = She's going/walking out of the store.

APPENDIX C: PICTURE SELECTION TASK: TEST SENTENCES USED TO EVALUATE COMPREHENSION OF NOMINAL MORPHOLOGY

- | | | | |
|-----|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. | Je suis <i>grande</i> (fem). | / Je suis <i>grand</i> (masc). | = I am tall. |
| 2. | Je suis <i>sportive</i> (fem). | / Je suis <i>sportif</i> (masc). | = I am athletic. |
| 3. | Je suis <i>française</i> (fem). | / Je suis <i>français</i> (masc). | = I am French. |
| 4. | Je suis <i>heureuse</i> (fem). | / Je suis <i>heureux</i> (masc). | = I am happy. |
| 5. | Je suis <i>intelligente</i> (fem). | / Je suis <i>intelligent</i> (masc) | = I am intelligent. |
| 6. | Je suis <i>petite</i> (fem). | / Je suis <i>petit</i> (masc). | = I am short. |
| 7. | Je suis <i>blonde</i> (fem). | / Je suis <i>blond</i> (masc). | = I am blond. |
| 8. | Je suis <i>malheureuse</i> (fem). | / Je suis <i>malheureux</i> (masc). | = I am unhappy. |
| 9. | Je suis <i>grosse</i> (fem). | / Je suis <i>gros</i> (masc). | = I am fat. |
| 10. | Je suis <i>musicienne</i> (fem). | / Je suis <i>musicien</i> (masc). | = I am a musician. |

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RÉSUMÉ

Il est bien connu qu'une grande variabilité gouverne l'utilisation de la morphologie associée aux catégories fonctionnelles lors de l'acquisition d'une langue seconde. La nature exacte de cette variabilité ainsi que ses implications quant à la relation entre la morphologie et la syntaxe est un grand sujet de débat. White (2003) identifie deux positions: l'hypothèse de la morphologie-avant-la syntaxe («the Morphology-before-Syntax hypothesis») et l'hypothèse de la syntaxe-avant-la morphologie («the Syntax-before-Morphology hypothesis»). La première hypothèse attribue la variabilité observée à un déficit important de la grammaire de la langue seconde dans le domaine des catégories fonctionnelles, tandis que la deuxième suppose au contraire que cette variabilité est la conséquence de difficultés dans la réalisation superficielle de la morphologie. Plusieurs études soutiennent chacune de ces deux positions, mais la grande majorité d'entre elles n'utilisent que des données provenant de tests de production orale (Eubank 1994, 1996; Gess & Herschensohn 2001; Haznedar 1997; Lardiere 1998; Prevost & White 2000; Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1996; Vainikka & Young-Scholten 1994, 1996). La présente étude a pour but d'évaluer les deux points de vue mentionnés ci-dessus par le biais de données provenant de tests de compréhension. Les résultats obtenus démontrent que des adultes anglophones qui apprennent le français comme langue seconde peuvent comprendre et interpréter des contrastes morphologiques représentés dans INFL et NUM malgré une production défectueuse des morphèmes associés à ces catégories fonctionnelles et soutiennent ainsi l'hypothèse de la syntaxe-avant-la morphologie.