

The development of the determiner phrase (DP) in the French L2 classroom

Sarah Rule

University of Southampton

This paper investigates the development of the determiner phrase in emerging grammars of instructed learners of L2 French (English L1). The research is based on corpora of oral production data collected by teams of researchers at the Universities of Southampton and Newcastle (see www.floc.soton.ac.uk). The data used are from learners in years 8 (aged 12/13), 10 (aged 14/15), and 12 (aged 16/17) in the English school system.

The investigation will track the use of bare noun phrases in the learners' interlanguages, where a determiner is obligatory in the target language, and then move on to investigate the use of determiners (evidence of D), and the development of grammatical gender. The acquisition of a grammatical gender feature is described as persistently difficult for English learners of second language French (Hawkins 1998, Hawkins and Franceschina 2004). Romance languages typically mark a grammatical distinction between masculine and feminine nouns +/- masculine.

Le/un bois [+masc] vert the/a green wood

La/une forêt [-masc] verte the/a green forest

The presence or absence of a gender feature is a parameter of variation allowed by UG. It is present in Romance languages but not in English. If the learners evince development in their acquisition of grammatical gender, have they acquired the feature or are they resorting to compensatory strategies?

Hawkins, R, 1998: Explaining the difficulty of French gender attribution for speakers of English. Paper presented at EUROSLA 8, Paris.

Hawkins, R and Franceschina, F., 2004: Explaining the acquisition and non-acquisition of determiner-noun gender concord in French and Spanish, to appear in Paradis, J. and Prévost, P. (eds) *The acquisition of French in different contexts*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins.

Mitchell, R and Dickson, P 1997: *Progression in classroom foreign language learning*. CLE Occasional Paper 47, University of Southampton.

Myles, F 2002: *Linguistic development in classroom learners of French: a cross-sectional study*. ESRC award R000223421, Final Report. www.regard.ac.uk