Diachronic and/or synchronic variation? The acquisition of sociolinguistic competence in L2 French

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Résumé *Une majorité des premières études en acquisition de langues étrangères a porté sur la variation diachronique dans l'interlangue des apprenants, c'est-à-dire des différences dans l'interlangue liées à une augmentation graduelle du savoir linguistique de l'apprenant (cf. Tarone 1988). La dernière décennie a vu une véritable éclosion d'études combinant une perspective diachronique avec une perspective synchronique, c'est-à-dire, une perspective dans laquelle la variation est perçue comme étant la conséquence de différences individuelles entre apprenants (sexe, degré d'extraversion, attitudes, motivation, variables sociobiographiques liées à l'expérience d'apprentissage, type et fréquence des contacts avec la langue cible). Selon cette perspective, l'absence d'isomorphie avec le comportement linguistique des natifs n'est pas automatiquement attribuée à des lacunes de connaissances. D'autres causes possibles sont prises en considération telles que l'inaccessibilité temporaire à l'information dans des situations stressantes, ou même une décision consciente de la part de l'apprenant de dévier de la norme standard de la langue cible.*

Abstract A majority of the early research in second language acquisition focused on diachronic variation in the learners' interlanguage (IL), that is, differences in the IL linked to a supposed increase in knowledge between two points in time (cf. Tarone 1988). The last decade has seen an increase in studies combining a diachronic perspective with a synchronic one, that is, where variation in production is seen as the consequence of individual differences among learners (gender, extraversion, learning strategies, attitudes, motivation, sociobiographical variables linked to the language learning experience and the use of the target language (TL)). In this perspective, non-native-like patterns are not automatically assumed to be the result of incomplete knowledge, but other possible causes are taken into consideration, such as temporary inaccessibility of information in stressful situations, or even a conscious decision by the L2 user to deviate from the TL norm.

Introduction

The study of sociolinguistic competence in second language acquisition (SLA) started to attract the attention of a growing number of researchers in the late 1980s (Preston 1989), and was broadly situated within a quantitative Labovian tradition (Labov 1972b, 2001). Several colloquia at international conferences (NWAVE in 2000, 2001; Sociolinguistic Symposium in 2002 and 2004), and special issues in international journals have been devoted to the development of sociolinguistic competence in the second language (L2) (Bayley & Regan 2004; Dewaele & Mougeon 2002; Mougeon & Dewaele 2004). Several review articles on the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence in French L2 have been published recently (Dewaele 2004e; Mougeon, Nadasdi, & Rehner 2002; Mougeon, Rehner, & Nadasdi 2004). These reviews have mostly focused on the studies carried out in the quantitative sociolinguistic framework that looked at French L2 learners in Europe (often in study abroad contexts) and French L2 learners in immersion schools in Canada.

The current understanding of sociolinguistic research is linked to the seminal work of Labov (1972b) and Hymes (1974). Both researchers reacted against the powerful paradigm of purely theoretical linguistics. Labov complained that "[t]he great majority of linguists had resolutely turned to the contemplation of their own idiolects.

We have not yet emerged from the shadow of our intuitions (. . .)" (1972: xix). He further wrote in his introduction that he long resisted the use of the term *sociolinguistic* "since it implies that there can be a successful linguistic theory or practice which is not social" (1972: xix). Hymes (1974) also attacks Chomsky's definition of linguistic competence, arguing that it is both too narrow and inadequate:

> An adequate approach must distinguish and investigate four aspects of competence:
> (a) *systemic potential* – whether and to what extent something is not yet realized, and, in a sense, not yet known, it is to this that Chomsky in effect reduces competence; (b) *appropriateness* – whether and to what extent something is in some context suitable, effective, or the like; (c) *occurrence* – whether and to what extent something is done; (d) *feasibility* – whether and to what extent something is possible, given the means of implementation available. (Hymes 1974, reprinted in 1997:13)

We define the notion of sociolinguistic competence as the "ability to perform various speech acts, the ability to manage conversational turns and topics, sensitivity to variation in register and politeness, and an understanding of how these aspects of language vary according to social roles and settings" (Ranney 1992: 25).

Labov (1972b, 2001) has linked linguistic variation to independent variables such as the situation in which an interaction takes places, the type of task being performed and speaker's social characteristics. Following this approach, variationist sociolinguists deal with probabilities of particular variants appearing in specific contexts. Preston (2000:11) illustrates the probabilistic approach as follows: "For a two-way variable, a speaker [. . .] is equipped with a coin, the two sides of which represent the options for that variable; it is flipped before the product appears". He points out that in this context "fair" tosses are unlikely, the chances of obtaining 50% occurrences of each variable are remote. Indeed, several factors contribute to the probability of one variable being selected. The individuals might not be aware of the pattern of their choices as they "are not monitoring their overall performance with some tallying device. They are evidencing the influence of a set of probabilistic weights which come to bear on each occurrence" (Preston 2000: 11). The factors that have been considered in this type of approach are linguistic, sociobiographical and situational. In an L2 context, these might also include time spent abroad, amount of instruction in the TL, first language(s), attitudes towards the TL, and so on. Variationists' preferred tool is a logistical regression analysis, the VARBRUL program (Bayley & Preston 1996) that allows for simultaneous analysis of a variety of factors. The program calculates which factors have a statistically significant effect, as well as the relative importance of each factor. Each factor suspected of influencing the variation is assigned a probability weight, when all the factor groups are applied simultaneously. A higher weight indicates a stronger influence of a factor: If a probability weight exceeds 0.5, it is said to favor the application.

If, on the other hand, the weight falls below 0.5, it is interpreted as disfavoring the application.

The deterministic nature of variable rule probabilities has been criticized (see Young 1999) as well as "the failure of the approach to engage such 'real' psycholinguistic factors as memory, attention, access, processing and the like" (Preston 2000: 28).

The psychological concept presented by Labov as the cause of style-shifting, namely *attention to form*, was first criticized byWolfson (1976) who stated that "it would seem to be a good idea to measure attention to speech independently in order to find out just what it involves. At present we have no ideaWHAT peoplemonitor when they pay attention to their speech" (Wolfson 1976:203) (original emphasis). This criticism has been reiterated ever since (Bell 1984; Dewaele 1995a; Gradol & Swann 1989; Rickford & McNair-Knox 1994). Later psycholinguistic research has shown that speakers constantly shift the focus of their attention as they speak in order to avoid communication breakdown (Levelt 1989). Models of interlanguage variation based on the concept of *attention to form* (for example Tarone's 1989 Chameleon Model) were found to be defective (Dewaele 1995b).

The problem is that too few researchers approach sociolinguistic questions from a psycholinguistic or a psychological perspective. I have argued that only interdisciplinary approaches can hope to provide a complete description of linguistic phenomena (such as sociolinguistic variation), and begin to understand the complex cognitive, psychological and social causes underlying that variation (Dewaele 2005a).

Other methodological and ideological aspects of variationist sociolinguistics have been criticized. Postmodernist feminist researchers like Pavlenko (2002a) have attacked the use of discrete categories like sex, age, and social class as independent variables. Referring to Cameron (1990), Pavlenko states that the assumption that "people behave in certain ways because they are members of certain groups is a correlational fallacy, because the purported explanation is in reality nothing but a descriptive statement" (Pavlenko 2002a:282). Labov (1972b) has also been criticized for the criteria used to determine the socio-economic status of the subjects. This was based largely upon occupation for men; but for women, it was based on the occupation of their husbands (if married or widowed), or their fathers (if single). Cameron and Coates (1989) argue that this method of not classifying women in their own right could quite easily lead to inaccuracies in the results of any subsequent research findings. Much of this early research studied male groups of subjects (Coates 1986), and those that did include female subjects were often based on limited data and led to many stereotyped presumptions about female and male speech (Freed & Greenwood 1996).

Despite the concerns expressed about the variationist approach, a large amount of research into the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence in the L2 has been situated within this paradigm. Dickerson (1975) was among the first to adopt the variationist approach to account for variable phonological

production in the English interlanguage (IL) of Japanese learners. She postulated, "Like native speakers, second language speakers use a language system consisting of variable rules" (1975: 407).

The interest was fuelled not only by purely theoretical considerations – that is the need to situate SLA within a social context (Tarone 1997) – but also by practical and political concerns. Bayley and Regan (2004:327) point out that there is a need in SLA research to move beyond the focus on the standard language to consider "the vernaculars that constitute the input for most immigrants who are acquiring a second or nth language with little or no formal instruction". Having spent years learning "the orthoepic standard norm" (Valdman 2003), instructed L2 learners might find themselves at a loss when they suddenly become L2 *users* (Cook 2002) unable to produce vernacular speech (see also Nadasdi, Mougeon, & Rehner 2005). Valdman (2003:13) describes the difficulty facing learners as follows:

> To speak like a native requires the ability to select among several norms on the basis of the total situational context and in light of varying communicative intents. In addition, the norms for prestigious planned speech are usually complexified with respect to those that characterize vernacular unplanned speech. At the phonological level, they require finer discriminations; at the grammatical level, they involve numerous lower-level and highly specific constraints. Consequently, to approximate these norms learners are likely to produce more deviant forms, both inaccurate from a linguistic perspective and inappropriate from a sociopragmatic one.

Beginning to intermediate learners might, for example, be distressed when placed in an authentic situation that requires the use of a highly formal speech. Learners appear to be monostylistic at first, stuck somewhere in the middle of the speech style continuum, only gradually do they start to explore both ends of the continuum (Dewaele 2001; Tarone & Swain 1995; Tyne 2005). Learners in these early stages typically use one sociolinguistic variant (generally the formal one) categorically. It is only at a later stage that alternation between two sociolinguistic variants starts to emerge (Adamson & Regan 1991). This synchronic variation is often non-systematic or "free" variation, oscillating between overuse or underuse of particular variants compared to native speaker (NS) norms. Highly advanced L2 learners/users (i.e., non-native speakers, hence NNS) start to conform to NS variation patterns.

The crucial problem that faces any researcher interested in analyzing the development of sociolinguistic competence in the L2 is the interpretation of the variation observed for specific sociolinguistic markers. As Beebe (1988) underlined in her overview of sociolinguistic approaches to SLA, there is an important limitation in importing sociolinguistic methods designed to measure subtle variation in the speech of NS as L2 performance "involves using a repertoire that is both limited and in a state of flux" (Beebe 1988:44).

The state of flux might be linked, as Rehner (2005) pointed out, to the larger number of independent variables that affect the variation in the L2, and not simply the social characteristics of the speaker combined with situational variables. Additional independent factors include the students' first language(s), the degree of curricular and extra-curricular exposure to the L2, and the type of input received through teachers and pedagogical materials. Rehner (2005) further warned that L2 studies should not blindly adopt the Labovian approach in equating 'correct' L2 forms with 'standard' or 'prestige' L1 forms. She suggests a differentiation between two kinds of variable production observable in L2 data, namely 'Type 1' variation, that is, an alternation between native-like and non-native like forms (errors), and 'Type 2' variation that manifests itself via an alternation between forms that are each used by NS of the TL (Rehner 2005:14–15)[1]. She argues that the measure of learner success in relation to 'Type 1' variation is increasingly error-free production. Measuring success is more difficult in relation to 'Type 2' variation. It can be made in terms of: "(a) learners' use of the same expressions as NS; (b) their use of such expressions at levels of discursive frequency similar to those found in the speech of NS in the same situation; and (c) the correlation of such uses with similar independent factors, both social (e.g., social class, sex, and style), and linguistic (e.g., the surrounding lexical and syntactic context), affecting the uses by NSs" (Rehner 2005: 15).

Yet, as will be demonstrated in the present chapter, even 'Type 2' variation can be linked to incomplete grammatical knowledge, or to limited input, and only among the highly advanced speakers does 'Type 2' variation truly reflect an awareness of sociolinguistic rules in the L2. Finally, some very advanced NNSs may possess full sociolinguistic competence, and yet consciously wish to avoid informal

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[1] Nadasdi et al. (2003) proposed yet another type of variation which partakes of both 'type 1' and 'type 2', namely an alternation between forms that are used by L1 speakers and forms that are nonnative.

variants, thereby creating a false impression of incomplete competence, or at least a different presentation of the self (Koven 1998, 2006; Dewaele 2005a).

Any overview is by nature incomplete and arbitrary. Beebe (1988:45) decided to include five approaches while admitting that it is "simplistic to lump sociolinguistics (broadly defined) into five (and only five) traditions", arguing that it is "equally misleading to treat every researcher as a totally independent voice" (p. 45). Most research has been carried out in the Labovian tradition, which has gradually been expanded to combine ideas and methodologies from other approaches. Beebe criticized the variationists for emphasizing the *what* and ignoring the *why* (p. 44). Recent sociolinguistic research in L2 pays more attention to both the *what* and the *why*. The present study will concentrate primarily on studies that borrowed from the Labovian theory.

However, these variationist studies will be complemented by a number of sociocultural case studies of individual learners/users that present interesting observations and speculations on the *why* of sociolinguistic variation.

The focus will be on advanced learners of French who are typically instructed learners in European and American contexts. They may have occasional contact with NSs for a determined period through study abroad programs. Some Canadian learners share that profile, while others are in daily contact with French through immersion education (Lapkin 1999). The only study in our overview dealing with naturalistic learners is that of Véronique (2005). In the first part of the chapter, some key concepts will be defined. In the second part, a series of empirical studies on French IL will be reviewed that include situation, type and frequency of exposure to French as independent variables. The studies have been ordered roughly by function of the type of dependent variable that was investigated (phonological, morphological, morphosyntactic, and lexical). The third and final part will present some general patterns that emerge from these studies and will consider some pedagogical implications.

Empirical studies

Studies on phonological variants French pronunciation is often considered to be equivalent of the Mont Blanc for NSs of English engaged in deciphering and reproducing complex clusters of phonemes (see Hannahs this volume). Thomas (2004) observed that while some simple phonemes such as /y/ or /ø/, are stable throughout the French-speaking world (they are normally not deleted and essentially realized the same way everywhere), some features are extremely variable, going from full retention to full deletion, depending on a myriad of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. Striking differences between official norm and actual usage add a further challenge for the exhausted learners. Learners who have been taught the "orthoepic norm", that is, an imitation of the native-speaker norm (typically middle class Parisian French) are suddenly confronted with a perplexing array of schwa deletions for which they need to identify the sociolinguistic constraints. Schwa deletion, defined by Thomas as an orthographic *e* which is deleted, is particularly popular among the young NSs of French (*j'pars* instead of *je pars*). Thomas' Canadian learners were found to omit the schwa much less frequently than NSs. Thomas (2004) found that after eight months in a French Second Language program in a university in France, the L2 learners had not changed their rate of schwa deletion in a significant way. However, Uritescu, Mougeon and Handouleh (2002) found that Canadian immersion students who had had the opportunity of staying with a Francophone family displayed significantly higher rates of schwa deletion than the remaining students.

Similar patterns emerged in Uritescu, Mougeon, Rehner and Nadasdi (2004) who analyzed the presence or absence of schwa in unaccented open non-final syllables of 8 anglophone students in French immersion programmes in Ontario. Immersion students were found to employ the mildly-marked variant of schwa deletion much less often than L1 speakers but observed the same phonetic constraints as L1 speakers.

Schwa deletion was positively correlated with exposure to spoken NS French outside the school context. The authors also found that immersion students did not attach a clear social value to schwa deletion.

Sax (2003) compared levels of sociolinguistic competence among 35 American students at three different levels of French study: Second year university French, fourth year French and graduate students. None of the second year students had spent time abroad, half of the fourth year students had spent time abroad, and all of the graduates had spent time abroad (from several weeks to four years). She also obtained data from a control group of 5 NSs. She gathered her data through two role-plays:

One a simulated formal situation, and the other a simulated informal situation. She found that the learners as a combined group deleted /l/ less frequently than NSs, but that they were sensitive to stylistic variation, deleting slightly less in the formal role-play than in the informal role-play. Time spent abroad in France emerged as the strongest predictor of /l/ deletion. The longer the time learners had spent abroad, the more they deleted /l/. Advanced learners were found to delete much more frequently than less advanced peers. The former also showed evidence of stylistic variation between the formal and informal contexts while no such variation appeared in the latter group.

A study by Howard, Lemée and Regan (2006) on /l/ deletion in the French IL of 19 classroom learners in Ireland showed distinct similarities to findings of Sax. Deletion of /l/ was virtually absent before the stay abroad but soared to 33 per cent after the stay abroad. The authors conclude that "living in the native speech community does what the classroom cannot do for the acquisition of native speaker variation patterns" (Howard et al. 2006: 20).

Howard (2004a) reported an unusual preference for informal variants in his study of variable use of the liaison in French IL by a group of 18 classroom learners in Ireland.

Use of the obligatory liaison was found to pose less difficulty to the learners than variable liaison: In a range of syntactic contexts, the learners greatly underused the liaison which constitutes the formal variant of this variable and overused the informal variant, that is, non-use of the liaison. Comparing the learners' data with that of NSs, Howard noticed that learners' use of the liaison was non-existent in some contexts, and when it was used "those contexts (dis)favoring its use are not the same as in the case of the native speaker" (2004a: 159). In a further study on the topic, Howard (2005b) underlines that his findings on the liaison diverge from the general conclusion (cf. Mougeon et al. 2002) that advanced learners respect the linguistic constraints of variation, and overuse formal variants. His learners ignore the use of variable liaison in a wide range of syntactic contexts.

Studies on morphosyntactic variants

Omission of ne Negation in French is expressed through a pre-verbal *ne*, a verb form and one of many possible post-verbal items (*pas, jamais, plus, rien, personne, point*). These post-verbal items used to have a much stronger semantic content and reinforced preverbal *ne*. The weakening of the particle *ne* and the phrase-final stress on the post-verbal item made the *ne* more or less redundant (Englebert 1984). Although still required in written speech and formal oral speech, *ne* is omitted in more than 80% of the cases in informal speech (Coveney 1996:30).

The following extract (example (1)) was presented in Dewaele (2004b:440–441) as an illustration of the variation in the omission of *ne* within the same exchange.

The researcher (JM) and Henry (H), a 21 year-old student English native speaker who spent 6months in France during the previous academic year as part of his study abroad experience, discuss Henry's perception that language teachers in the UK do not allow him to use the vernacular French that he picked up in France. Proud as he is of his newly acquired knowledge of informal speech styles, he is frustrated not to be able to demonstrate the progress he has made. The exchange also illustrates micro-stylistic variation. The exchange is mostly a monologue by Henry, with 5 omissions of *ne* in all 5 negations[2]. The only retention of *ne* occurs in the last turn, which involves a microstyle shift, that is, a direct question asked to the researcher with a polite third person pronoun of address *vous*.

(1) *J' ø aime pas j' ø aime pas trop les cours de français parce que je trouve ça ennuyant.*
'I don't like, I don't like the French courses very much because I find them boring.' JM: *Pourquoi ?* 'Why?' H: *Parce que je sais déjà parler français assez bien mais euh c' ø est pas seulement ça c'est euh il faut qu'on parle différemment parce que moi quand je suis allé euh en France j'avais vraiment envie de parler exactement comme un Français.*
'Because I speak French quite well already and but it is not only that it's that we have to speak differently because me, when I went err to France, I wanted to speak exactly like a Frenchman.' JM: *Ah oui.*
'Ah yes.' H: *Mais je ø sais plus le faire et quand on est en cours en Angleterre tout le monde parle en français évidemment avec le le prof est Français.*
'But I can't do it anymore and when one is in England everybody speaks French of course with, the the teacher is French.' JM: *Mmm.*

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[2] •. The symbol "ø" indicates the omission of *ne*.

'Mmm.' H: *Et quand même il faut parler dans le registre soutenu et j' ø aime pas ça c'est tellement euh artificiel.*
'And still one has to speak in a formal register and I don't like that, it's so artificial.' JM: Ah hmm.
'Ah hmm.' H: *Vous **n**'êtes pas d'accord ?* 'Don't you agree?' JM: *Haha.*

'Ha ha.' The main problem with the analysis of morphosyntactic variants lies in the interpretation of the presence and absence of the variant. The case of the negative particle *ne* in French IL provides an excellent illustration of how something apparently simple can in fact be fiendishly complex. The mastery of French negation involves a long circuitous route for English-speaking learners of French. First, they need to realize that negation in French involves a pre-verbal and a post-verbal element. Research on negation in the pre-basic-variety shows an anaphoric negator expressed by *non*, followed later by a non-anaphoric negator inserted in complex utterances, and the emergence of *pas* in modal formulae (*je (ne) sais pas; je (ne) comprends pas*) and presentationals (c'(n) est *pas*, il y a *pas*) (Véronique 2005: 132). Target-like use of the preverbal particle *ne* coincides with the emergence of explicit lexical verbs. Véronique (2005:132) argues that the "analysis of TL verb morphology paves the way for correct placement of the negator". In other words, syntactic and semantic issues need to be resolved in the acquisition of the negation (during which free variation may occur) before the learner can address the issue of variable omission of *ne*.

Course book material and formal grammar instruction leads learners to grasp the functioning of negation resulting in an almost categorical use of a pre-verbal and a post-verbal element. At this point, learners have the necessary grammatical competence to use negation correctly in written French and in formal speech. They may start noticing the omission of the *ne* in informal oral French, and analyze the sociolinguistic constraints on this variant. Poorly written textbooks may also affect learners' understanding of the degree of markedness of the variant. Mougeon et al. (2002) found that the only characters to omit the *ne* in an Ontario textbook for English-speaking learners of French were negatively portrayed. This could have induced the learners in error, they may have concluded that the omission of *ne* is a stigmatized variant. Different options are possible once learners grasp the functioning of the negation: Either they opt for categorical use of the standard variant everywhere (preferring to be too formal rather than risk inappropriate informal use), or they may opt for categorical use of the informal variant (extending it to written language and formal speech), or they may gradually approximate NS variation patterns. For example, the retention of *ne* in Henry's last turn could be linked to a pragmatic fact, namely the occurrence of an interrogative turn addressed to the researcher in a slightly more formal style, after a long series of declarative turns in a more informal style.

Research on the omission of *ne* has shown the crucial effect of authentic interaction in French on this specific variation pattern. Irish learners of French were found to omit the *ne* considerably more in sociolinguistic interviews after spending a year in a francophone region (65% versus 38%) (Regan 1995, 1996, 1997, 2004, 2005). She observed a great deal of inter-individual variation, especially in the corpus collected before the year abroad. Some students had overgeneralized the omission of *ne* after their stay abroad, which Regan interprets as a sign that they were eager to adopt TL sociolinguistic norms and 'sound native' in order to integrate into the TL community (1997: 206). Similar patterns were observed in a study by Rehner andMougeon (1999) based on a corpus of oral IL of 41 young immersion students in Ontario. The amount of time spent in a francophone environment, and the amount of contact with French media as well as amount of formal instruction in French correlated positively with omission rates. Thomas (2004) found that 48 Anglophone Canadian students who spent their third year of university study in France came back with significantly higher omission rates compared to those of the control group who had remained at home.

Sax (2003) also analyzed the omission of *ne*. A VARBRUL analysis revealed showed that time spent in a French-speaking environment contributed to the omission of *ne*.

Learners who had spent little to no time abroad almost never omitted *ne* in both an informal and a formal situation. However, mean omission rates for the intermediate group were 25% and 23% respectively, and they rose to 75% and 63% respectively for those who had spent the longest time abroad. Length of pre-university French study also affected the use of *ne*; learners with more than 5 years of instruction deleted *ne* less frequently (23%) than learners who had only 3 to 4 years of previous instruction in French (55%).

Prolonged authentic use of French with NSs thus seems to kickstart the development of stylistic variation. Students who had never been abroad did not adapt their omission rate according to the situation. Stylistic variation appears in the intermediate group, and it becomes statistically significant in the group that spent most time abroad. Finally, Sax found that the 5 NSs displayed both higher omission rates and more stylistic variation than the group of learners.

Dewaele and Regan (2002) analyzed omission rates of *ne* in a cross-sectional corpus of oral IL of 27 Dutch L1 students at the Free University of Brussels. Participants were interviewed in an informal (conversation), and a formal (oral exam) situation.

Omission rates in the formal situation (12%) were not significantly different from those in the informal situation (15%), which was interpreted as an indication of the incomplete mastery of sociolinguistic rules in the TL by the learners. Omission rates were lower in the formal situation for a majority of participants but they went up for a small number of participants. Length of formal instruction in French did not affect omission rates of *ne* but the amount of authentic use of French outside the classroom and contact with French through radio and television were linked with higher omission rates. More extraverted participants also tended to omit *ne* more frequently. The amount of inter-individual variation was very high. Looking at the data such as the examples presented below (Dewaele & Regan 2002: 141), we realized that it is close to impossible to make a *post-hoc* guess as to whether an omission of *ne* had been a deliberate choice or not.

(2) Anton: *Euh j'étais français troisième langue donc je **n**'ai français.*
'Err, I was French third language so I didn't have French'.
(3) Anton: *Non je **ne** pense ça.*
'no I don't think so'.
(4) Anton: *Je **ne** sais **pas**.*
'I don't know'.
(5) Anton: *Oui j'ai choisi deux heures parce que normalement c' ø est **pas** mathématiques.*
'Yes I've chosen two hours because usually it is not mathematics'.
(6) Filip: *Là j'ai dû commencer avec jouer avec lui mais j' ø ai **jamais** entré au club.*

'There I have been forced to start playing with him but I've never become a member of the club'. (Dewaele & Regan 2002:136) Anton is a speaker with a low level of overall morpho-lexical accuracy, who does not produce the obligatory *pas* in examples (2) and (3), produces the standard variant (*ne + pas*) in example (4), and omits (or forgets) *ne* in example (5). Filip, on the other hand, is a more advanced speaker who is more likely to be aware of the possibility to omit *ne* (see example (6)); he also produces utterances with both *ne* and *pas* such as in example (7):

(7) Filip: *Et je **ne** pouvais **pas** euh participer parce que je **n**'étais **pas** membre d'un club.*
'And I couldn't err participate because I wasn't member of a club'.

(Dewaele & Regan 2002:135) Looking at proficiency levels and omission rates, we realized that the omission of *ne* in French IL follows a U-shaped development. Beginning and intermediate learners typically opt for the more salient post-verbal particle to express negations. Incomplete grammatical knowledge rather than complete sociolinguistic competence would thus not be the result of a conscious decision to omit an element, but rather an absence caused by incomplete grammatical knowledge. As learners progress, they may gradually understand the morpho-syntactic rules for the negation in French, and start to produce pre-verbal and post-verbal particles categorically. Highly advanced learners finally grasp the sociolinguistic rules that allow the particle *ne* to be omitted in certain situations. Given the heterogeneous nature of learner groups in terms of linguistic development, the causes underlying omission are likely to be varied, which would account for the large within-group variation in omission rates. Alternatively, Dutch learners for whom French is an L3 (as was the case for Anton) may be tempted in the first stages to use only the preverbal *ne* as in their English L2 until they realize that it does not function like that in French. Being unable to produce a two-part negative, they may seize on the *pas*-only version because it feels more native and allows them to integrate only one word into their sentence plan, which is less effortful (Foster-Cohen 2002, personal communication). Given the heterogeneous nature of learner groups in terms of linguistic development, the causes underlying omission are likely to be varied, which would account for the large within-group variation in omission rates.

Dewaele (2004a) analyzed inter-individual variation in omission rates of the preverbal particle *ne* in 991 negations produced in conversations between 73 NSs and NNSs of French who were students at Birkbeck College, London. Both endogeneous (user internal) and exogeneous (user external) extralinguistic factors were found to be linked to omission rates of *ne* (mean = 64% for the 9 NSs, and 27% for the 64 NNSs).Whereas age and gender were found to have little effect, the degree of extraversion of the speaker, the frequency of use of French and the native/non-native status of the speakers were significantly correlated with omission rates. Among the exogeneous factors, the composition of the dyad was found to be linked to omission rates: NNSs interacting with NSs omitted *ne*more frequently than NNSs in conversation with other NNSs. It was argued that this accommodation effect among NNSsmight in fact trigger a development towards native-like omission rates.

Pronouns of address

The choice of an appropriate pronoun of address (the formal *vous* or the informal *tu*) in French interactions has been linked to dancing on a sociolinguistic tightrope (Dewaele 2004b). One small misstep means a bad fall with little chance of (sociolinguistic) recovery. Pronouns of address are also notoriously difficult to master as speakers must resolve the inherent socio-pragmatic ambiguity whereby the same linguistic behaviormay be interpreted as following either from perceived status difference or from desire to index social distance (Kinginger 2000: 24). The *vous* can be used as a form of respect, but it can equally serve to indicate a social distance between the interlocutors and the superiority of one of them. The *tu* on the other hand, can be perceived as a sign of solidarity, but it can also carry a value of familiarity or inferiority (or even contempt).

The following extract from the novel *Dieu et moi* (2001) by the Belgian author Jacqueline Harpman provides an apt illustration of the link between pronoun choice and power relations between interlocutors. Conscious violation of the sociolinguistic rules allows an interlocutor to challenge the position of the addressee. The following exchange is situated at the beginning of the story, when the narrator, an old lady and author of many books, has just passed away, surrounded by her family. She had been a fervent non-believer for all her life, and is therefore quite surprised to see an angel fetching her for an interview with God. Facing God (amale), she decides to ask him for a little more time to finish her latest novel. God is magnanimous but he rejects her plea.

The choice of pronouns of address reveals the tension between the narrator and God:

Monsieur, dis-je en soupirant. Dieu qui m'écoutait, vous me rendez nerveuse (. . .) Je voudrais. . . dis-je. – C'est impossible. Les morts n'écrivent pas de romans. – Vous avez donc lu ma pensée ? – Oublies-tu encore qui je suis ? (. . .) A la fin, dis-je, que me veux-tu ? Il ne me parut aucunement dérangé par mon propre tutoiement. Au fond, international comme il devait logiquement l'être, peut-être que pour lui le tutoiement n'était qu'un singulier et, si cela se trouve, j'avais eu tort de me formaliser. (p. 35) 'Sir, I say with a deep sight. God who were listening, you (V) make me nervous. I would like to. . . I say. Impossible. The deceased don't write novels. Have you (V) read my thoughts? – Do you (T) forget who I am? (. . .) In the end, I say, what do you (T) want from me? He didn't seem one bit perturbed by my own use of *tu*. On reflection, international as he had to be logically, maybe *tu* was a simple singular address form, and, in that case, I had been wrong to be so formal'. (translation mine) The *tu* form used by God with the narrator is indicative of his higher status. Being God entails certain linguistic privileges such as the right to use *tu* with all mortals. God declares later: *Je tutoie toutes les créatures* ('I use *tu* with all creatures'). The connotation of the *vous* of the narrator in the beginning is more ambiguous. It shows respect but also polite defiance. It shows that she is not ready to give up easily, and that even as a mere mortal, she expects to be treated with respect. Her use of *tu* in the second paragraph shows her losing her temper, and has the same negative connotation as the previous *vous*. It is also the only *tu* uttered by the narrator in the story.

It takes a while before learners of French understand the functioning of the system of pronouns of address and become capable of inferring the intention underlying a particular choice correctly. Only at that point can they start using them appropriately.

The analysis of a corpus of oral interviews between NS and NNS of French showed that a significant number of participants used either *tu* or *vous* categorically while others used both pronouns in free variation within the same utterance (Dewaele 2002, 2004b). An illustration of this free variation can be seen in the examples (8) and (9).

(8) Tara: *Bon d'accord, et euh quand **tu** finis votre examen **vous** voulez travailler où et faiser quoi ?* 'Good OK, and err when you (T) finish your exam you (V) want to work where and do what?' (9) Rachel: *Et votre **vous vous** avons dit euh **tu** as dit euh euh avant que **vous** êtes une Catalane ?* 'And your (V) you you (V) have said err you (T) have said err err before that you (V) are Catalan?' These NNS who switch back and forth between *tu* and *vous* are typically less advanced speakers. They are struggling with verb morphology and try to express "you" with whatever means at their disposal. Their sociolinguistic rules are clearly still in state of flux. Dewaele (2002b) argued that the phenomenon of instability or free variation in the choice of pronouns of address can be approached through Chaos and Complexity Theory (CCT). The system of pronouns in IL is a complex, dynamic and non-linear system. It is first determined by learners' levels of grammatical competence, and secondly by the amount of sociolinguistic knowledge. Using the CTT metaphor, one could say that the developing pronoun system goes through stable states or "equilibrium points" (categorical use of a variant), before varying freely without any apparent systematicity, and finally reaching a state where the variation becomes more NS-like.

We reported instances of this moment of sudden understanding on the part of NNSs in Dewaele (2002b, 2004b). Most interviews started with an implicit or explicit negotiation phase on the choice of

pronoun. This phase was always implicit in NS-NS interactions, and between highly advanced NNSs and NSs. In some cases, explicit negotiation occurred on the appropriate pronoun. This is illustrated in example (10) where Aman (a female NNS) starts the interview with Angela (a female NS from France) using the formal possessive adjective *votre*. Angela tells her explicitly to use *tu* instead. As Aman does not seem to understand themeaning of the verb *tutoyer*, Angela repeats the verb in the infinitive, urging her to use *tu*: *Il faut me tutoyer* 'you need to say *tu* to me', and after a short pause adds the pronoun *tu*. Aman agrees but uses the *vous* form again. Angela insists on being addressed with *tu*. Clearly confused, Aman avoids using either pronoun in the following sentence. She then switches effectively to *tu* but persists in the second person plural for the verb (*dites*). She does use the correct possessive adjective (*ton*) but does not agree the gender correctly (*ta*) with the noun *famille*.

(10) Aman (NNS): All right *d'accord je suis en compagnie de Angela aujourd'hui, maintenant nous parlons de* ***votre*** *famille*.
'All right, OK, I'm in the company of Angela today, now we speak about your (V) family.' Angela (NS): *Oui* **tutoie**-*moi, non*.
'Yes, use (T) tu with me # no.' Aman (NNS): *Pardon ?* 'Sorry?' Angela (NS): *Il faut me tutoyer # euh **tu***.
'One has to use tu with me # err tu.' Aman (NNS): ***Tu** oui # d'accord si **vous** voulez*.
'Tu yes # OK if you want (V).' Angela (NS): *Non non **tu** # si **tu** veux oui*.

'No no tu # if you (T)would be so kind yes.' Aman (NNS): *Aujourd'hui on parle de toi et moi, de toi et moi, d'accord **tu** me dites euh de quelle chose de **ton** famille ?* 'Today we speak about you andme, you andme, OK, you (T) tell (2nd person plural) me err about what thing about your (T) family?' (Dewaele 2004b:394–395) We argued that this exchange could be an indication that Aman's unwillingness to switch to *vous* may be linked to her unease with the verb morphology of the second person singular. As Aman continues to use *vous* (example (11)), Angela insists again on the use of *tu*, explaining that she does not like to be addressed that way. Aman then admits that she does not know the meaning of the verb *tutoyer*. Angela code-switches to English to make herself clear.

(11) Aman: *Oui **vous** êtes trop gentille **excusez**-moi*.
'Yes you (V) are too kind forgive (V)me.' Angela: ***Tutoie**-moi*.
'Use *tutoiement* (T) with me.' Aman: *Haha?* 'Haha?' Angela: ***Tutoie**-moi*.
'Use *tutoiement* (T) with me.' Aman: ***Tutoie**-moi qu'est-ce que c'est ?* "*Tutoie-moi*" what does it mean?' Angela: *Oui* you know don't be *ne **sois** pas trop formelle avec moi*.
'Yes you know don't be (T) don't be too formal with me.' Aman: *Ah d'accord*.
'Ah OK.' Angela: *Il faut me tutoyer*.
'One (i.e., Aman) has to use *tu* with me.' Aman: *Ah "**tu**" ah d'accord*.

'Ah "*tu*" ah OK.' (2004b:395) An illustration of this gradual understanding of the different values attached to the pronouns of address can be found in Kinginger (2000), Belz and Kinginger (2002), and Kinginger and Belz (2005), who explored the effect of tele-collaborative learning via electronic interaction on the development of L2 pragmatic competence in American learners of French. The researchers, who work within the sociocultural paradigm (cf. Lantolf &Pavlenko 2001) argue that tele-collaborative language classes allow learners to interact and negotiate social meaning with NS peers and thus develop a wider range of registers. The NS partners pointed to instances of inappropriate use of address pronouns during email exchanges, and this led to changes in the learners' language use. A microgenetic analysis of a limited number of learners showed that increased opportunities for interaction and assistance from peers led to a disambiguation of the numerous sociopragmatic meanings of the pronouns of address. Learners became more aware of the use of the informal forms of solidarity (Belz & Kinginger 2002).

Kinginger and Farrell (2004) explored the development ofmeta-pragmatic awareness and, more specifically, social indexicality of the address pronouns in French among eight American students in study abroad programs. The authors used a Language Awareness Interview to investigate learners' awareness of pronouns of address in French before and after a sojourn in France. Results suggest that the greatest area of growth was in development of address-form awareness in relation to age-peers. In a follow-up study, Kinginger and Belz (2005) focused on the development of the system of pronouns of address among two participants. They found that the development of T/V use and awareness reflects the nature of the language learning experience. One participant, Bill, who engaged in frequent interactions with NSs of French in a variety of social contexts, understood that *tu* is a sign of solidarity among peers, and used both pronouns appropriately. Another participant, Deidre, who did not engage in frequent interactions with NSs of French, except in service encounters, understood the relevance of *vous* but remained unaware of the social meaning of the *tu* form with peers.

Appropriate use of pronouns of address can be taught within the classroom with some success. Lyster (1994) showed that learners who had had 7 weeks of instruction based on a combination of an analytic

approach with its focus on correctness, awareness of the variable rules through explicit instruction, and a communicative approach outperformed a control group, which had received standard experiential instruction, in appropriate use of the address pronoun *vous* in formal written and oral French (Lyster 1994: 279).

Lyster and Rebuffot (2002) further investigated the acquisition of pronouns of address in French in Canadian French immersion programs. An analysis of a corpus of audio recordings of teacher-student interaction in immersion classrooms revealed an absence of singular *vous* from classroom discourse. The authors show that *tu* serves as a second-person pronoun of address to indicate singular and familiar reference, but it also indicates indefinite reference along with plural reference. The latter adds to the difficulty already experienced by these young learners of French whose L1, English, uses only one pronoun to encode the functions fulfilled by *tu* and *vous*. The authors also point to a morphological explanation: The over-use of *tu* might be the result of the learners' preference for themorphologically simpler andmore frequent verb forms with *tu* which are homophonous for the first, second, third person singular and third person plural in regular verbs, whereas the second person plural is a different verb form (i.e., *je/tu/il(s)/elle(s) aime* versus *vous aimez*) ('*I / you (T) / she / he / they love* versus *you* (V) *love*').

What independent variables are linked to the choice of the address pronoun in the oral French of NSs and NNSs? The analysis of the spoken corpus revealed that the 9 NSs used *tu* more frequently than NNS in that specific interview-type interaction (Dewaele 2004b). Age and gender of the speaker had no effect. Frequency of use of French was clearly positively correlated with the use of *tu*. NNSs with a system of multiple address pronouns in their L1 were also found to use more *tu*. Among the exogeneous variables, gender of the interlocutor was not to linked to the use of *tu*, but a strong effect for age of the interlocutor emerged, with higher use of *tu* in same-age dyads. These data were complemented with self-reported pronoun use in five situations collected through a written questionnaire from 24 NSs and 102 NNSs.

Both groups were found to differ in their reported use of *tu*. More specifically, the NSs used *tu* much more frequently with known interlocutors, but almost never with unknown interlocutors. The NNSs followed this pattern, but not as consistently: They reported occasional use of *vous* with known interlocutors, but also of *tu* with unknown interlocutors. Older NSs and NNSs reported using fewer *tu*, frequent users of French reported a slightly higher use of *tu* overall. NNSs with a system of multiple address pronouns in their L1 were also found to use more *tu*. The results showed that the exogeneous variables had similar effects on NNSs and NSs. A strong interlocutor effect was discovered, with female and younger interlocutors being reportedly addressed more often with *tu* than male and older interlocutors. Both NSs and NNSs reported using *vous* almost exclusively with strangers.

Our questionnaire on self-reported pronoun use also contained one item concerning the perception of difficulty of the use of pronouns of address. We investigated the individual differences in these judgments in Dewaele and Planchenault (2006).

Unsurprisingly, the 102 NNSs judged the system to be "quite difficult" on average, while the 24 NSs described it as "easy" on average. Unexpectedly, independent variables such as frequency of use of French and length of stay in a francophone environment – linked to increased native-like use of pronouns of address – did not significantly affect the perception of difficulty of the system of address among NNSs. A closer analysis revealed that increasing use of French and longer stays in a francophone environment was not linked to a linear decrease in the values reflecting perception of difficulty. While NNSs at intermediate levels of contact judged the system to be easier than those with less intense contact, difficulty scores peaked again for NNSs who used French most frequently.

This non-linear relation suggests that at some point in the development of their sociolinguistic competence, NNSs feel quite confident about their mastery of the system, but at a later stage they realize that some aspects still elude them. NNSs whose L1s instantiate multiple address pronouns judged the address system in French to be more difficult compared to NNSs whose L1 exemplifies a single address pronoun.

Subject pronouns 'nous' *versus* 'on'

The variable use of subject pronouns *nous* and a subgroup of *on* (which designates a group of persons including the speaker) is another pronominal puzzle that learners of French have to solve. In L1

French, '*nous* + 1st person plural verb' is characteristic of formal styles while '*on* + 3rd person singular verb' is typical of informal styles.

Both mean 'we'. The utterance *Nous allons à la plage* ('we go to the sea') is thus the formal standard variant, while the utterance *On va à la mer* ('we go to the sea') is the informal variant. A number of studies have been carried out on the use of *nous* versus *on* in the French IL of Canadian students in French immersion programs. Swain and Lapkin (1990) found that students in a late immersion program used *on* much more frequently than students in an early immersion program.

Harley (1992) compared the use of *on* firstly in groups of learners from early immersion, late immersion and extended French, and proceeded then to a comparison of the learner corpora with a corpus of NSs from Quebec. Harley found that the early immersion students used substantially more *nous*. Late immersion students appeared to use *on* more frequently, but the NSs used *on* exclusively in the first person plural context.

Rehner, Mougeon and Nadasdi (2003) analyzed the proportion of *nous* versus *on* in their corpus of spoken French gathered among 41 immersion students in Ontario.

It contained 810 tokens of *on*, and 642 tokens of *nous*. The formal variant *nous* thus accounted for 44% of the 1st person plural contexts, the informal variant *on* for the remaining 56%. Exposure to French, through radio and television or through extended stays with Francophone families or in Francophone environments, was found to be linked, though not linearly, to a proportional increase in the use of *on*. Students speaking Spanish or Italian at home were also found to favor the use of *nous*, which could reflect the presence of *noi* and *nosotros* in these languages and the absence of variants similar to *on*. The authors speculate that preference of the English L1 students for *on* could be linked to the fact that English use a subject pronoun *one*. It might not be frequently used in English but its mere existence could facilitate its use in French L2 because of their morpho-phonetical similarity and semantic relatedness. It is also possible that the English L1 students simply did not have another L1 variant pulling them in the direction of *nous*.

Sax (2003) investigated the use of *nous* versus *on* by her American learners of French. Time abroad emerged as the most significant factor. Learners having 2 weeks or less abroad used very few *on* (9%); this proportion jumped to 47% for the intermediate group and reached 93 % for the learners having spent the most time abroad. The three groups used *on* more frequently in the informal situation, which suggests that awareness at some level of stylistic variation exists even before the learners have fully grasped the extent of use in NS speech. Comparing the emergence of *nous/on* variation with the other variables in her study, Sax concludes that *on* is the first stylistic variable to appear.

Lemée (2002) analyzed the *nous/on* variation in the French IL of 48 Irish students.

The participants belonged to four proficiency groups ranging from intermediate (high school leavers) to highly advanced (at the end of three years of university study and a year in France). She found relatively little variation across groups, but students who had spent little time in France usedmore *nous*. Male participants favored *on* but there was no effect for social class. The author argues that the relatively high proportion of *on* in the low proficiency groups was due to incomplete grammatical competence, while the proportion of *on* in the highest group was linked to their growing sociolinguistic competence. Surprisingly, the choice of variant did not vary with the formality of the topic, which suggests that the participants still had some way to go before achieving a full understanding of socio-stylistic variation.

Dewaele (2002a) investigated the use of *nous* versus *on* in both the advanced oral and written French IL of 32 Dutch L1 speakers. A quantitative analysis of the oral corpus revealed that the amount of authentic interaction in the TL positively correlated with use of *on*, as did greater morpho-lexical accuracy rates, fluency, omission of *ne* in negations and use of colloquial vocabulary. A similar analysis of the written corpus revealed proportions of *on* equal to the oral corpus, which suggests that as a group, the learners have not yet completely acquired the variable constraints on the use of *nous/on*.

The research on the variable use of *nous* and *on* shows very clearly so-called pendulum effects in French IL. Initial over-use of the formal variant is often followed by over-use of the informal variant. Learners are keen to sound native, meaning "informal", and are thus tempted to generalize informal variants in formal oral styles or in their formal written work where they are inappropriate from a prescriptive point of view.

Tense and grammatical aspect

Even highly advanced learners of French continue to experience difficulties with tense and aspect in French (Ayoun & Salaberry 2005). So-called "fragile zones" persist in advanced IL reflected in under- and over-use of past time forms in certain contexts (Ayoun 2001, 2004; Bartning 1997; Howard 2002b, 2002c, 2005d; Labeau 2005). The appropriate functional use of certain morphological forms also remains a challenge (Howard 2005a). Howard (2001, 2002a) focused on the adjustment of functional use of aspectuo-temporal morphology of 18 Irish instructed learners of French in conversations with the researcher. The learners were university students specializing in French and who had been learning French for 5–6 years at secondary school. Three groups were distinguished according to amount of instruction in French at the university level, and time spent in France: (a) Two years of classroom instruction (b) Three years of classroom instruction; (c) Two years of classroom instruction, and an academic year at a university in France. One such analysis concerns the internal development on use of such forms as the *imparfait* (imperfect) at various stages within the advanced learner variety. Overall, it appeared that use of the *imparfait*, the imperfective marker, is less advanced than the use of *passé composé* (perfect), the perfective marker.

He found that study abroad students attained a higher level of accuracy across a more expansive range of aspectual contexts (Howard 2001). The study abroad learners were also found to be less likely to overuse the present in past imperfective contexts.Howard (2005a) found that the *plus-que-parfait* (pluperfect) develops later still, which he attributes to the functional complexity of its aspectual value. Also, learners who had had extra instruction showed relatively similar levels of use of the *plus-que-parfait* (pluperfect) compared to study abroad learners. This finding was balanced however by the fact that the study abroad learners did demonstrate an increased development on use of the *imparfait.*

Howard (2004a) used the same population to consider the interaction between linguistic factors in the case of aspectuo-temporal variation in L2 French. He focused on the question of how the learner expresses temporal reference in linguistic contexts where the predictions of the hypothesis at work behind a particular factor (inherent lexical aspect) are at odds with another factor (discourse grounding). He argues that an analysis of such contexts ultimately allows an investigation of the question of which factor(s) might exert a more dominant influence in the learner's aspectuo-temporal system. His results suggest that both factors interact in their effect: The occurrence of each form varies not only between the foreground and the background, but also across the verb types within each ground.

Harley (1992), Lyster (1996) and Swain and Lapkin (1990) reported that the grammatical complexity of verb formsmight limit their use in French IL. Their immersion students clearly preferred the present tense although this is the informal option rather than using the more formal *conditionnel* in requests. In the case of the Swain and Lapkin study the students had no trouble associating *s'il vous plait* ('please') or polite openers such as *pardon* ('pardon'), or *pardonnez-moi* ('excuse me') with the formal register.

Nadasdi, Mougeon and Rehner (2003) studied the expression of future in a corpus of oral IL of 16 French immersion students. They looked at three constructions in particular: The *futur périphrastique* (periphrastic future) and the *présent de l'indicatif* (present), which are considered informal, and the *futur fléchi* (synthetic future), considered to be more formal. Overall the *futur périphrastique* accounted for 78% of the cases, with 11% for the two other variants (p. 205). A VARBRUL analysis revealed that length of stay in a francophone environment (ranging from 0 to "more than 3 weeks") had a strong effect, with a linear positive relationship between length of stay and use of the *futur périphrastique*, an equally negative relation emerged between length of stay and the use of the *future fléchi*, and, to a less degree, the present tense. Girls were found to usemore *future fléchi* than boys. Students from non-Anglophone backgrounds used more *futur périphrastique*. The second part of the study focused on the use of informal French-Canadian variants of the *futur périphrastique*, (*je vais*, *je vas* and *m'as*). A negative correlation was found between length of stay in a francophone environment and the proportion of the marked variant *je vas*. No student used the stigmatized variant *m'as.*

Studies on syntactic variants

The developing knowledge of phonology, morphology, and the lexicon has to be supported by a concomitant understanding of syntactic rules that allow the L2 learners/ users to string words together and produce grammatical utterances. The learner who notices superficial similarities between syntactic rules in his/her L1 and French syntax could conclude prematurely that getting the words in the right order is less of a challenge than pronouncing them correctly. Indeed, SVO word order (Subject- Verb-

Object) exists both in English and in French; verb agreement with the subject (person agreement) functions in similar ways, but at that point English L1 learners of French may suddenly realize that agreement in gender is also necessary between the head noun and its adjectives. Then, crucially, learners need to remember that the adjective precedes the noun in English (as in 'the great white cliffs of Dover'), while they can both precede or follow the noun in French (*les grandes falaises blanches de Douvres*).

Moreover, some adjectives in French can be placed pre-nominally or post-nominally but their meaning changes according to their position (*un grand homme* = a great man, versus *un homme grand* = a tall man) (see Ayoun & Herschensohn this volume).

Once learners of French have memorized the syntactic rules governing interrogative structures and are able to produce grammatically accurate questions, they have to start sensing the stylistic connotations of the different structures and use them appropriately.

This may take a while and widespread variation occurs at that stage. Dewaele (1999) looked at variation in the use of 8 direct interrogative structures (Yes/No questions and WH-questions) in a corpus of spoken French produced by 5 NSs and 15 NNSs, all living in London, and compared these results with data from existing corpora of oral native French. Examples of every structure are presented in the examples (12) to (19).3 •. S = subject clitic or Noun Phrase; CL = subject clitic; NP = subject Noun Phrase; V = verb; E = est-ce que/qui; Q = WH word or phrase.

(12) [SV]Mary (NNS): *Vous n'avez pas de difficulté avec l'anglais ?* 'Don't you have difficulties with English?' (13) [ESV] Djé (NNS): *Mais est-ce qu'il y a des cours que vous préférez ?* 'But are there courses that you prefer?' (14) [V-CL] Steven (NNS): *Pouvez-vous donner une description ?* 'Can you give a description?' (15) [QSV] Xenia (NNS): *Donc pourquoi tu as choisi d'euh d'étudier à Birkbeck ?* 'So why have you chosen to err to study at Birkbeck?'* (16) [QESV] Christine (NS): *Qu'est-ce que tu vas aller faire à un cours pareil ?* 'What are you going to do in such a course?'* (17) [SVQ] Tanguy (NS): *Tu habites où à Londres ?* 'Where do you live in London?' (18) [QV-CL] Karine (NS): *Ben pourquoi as-tu continué tes études ?* 'Well why have you continued your studies?' (19) [QV-NP]Martin (NNS): *Quelle est votre motiv, motivisat, motivation ?* 'What is your motiv, motivisat, motivation?' (Dewaele 1999:163) The structures [V-CL], [QV-CL] and [QV-NP] are generally considered to belong to the careful style, the structures [ESV] and [QESV] are considered neutral, but rather inappropriate in writing, the structures [SV] and [SVQ] are considered colloquial but correct in speech, the structure [QSV] is generally labelled "working-class" and incorrect (Grevisse 1980).

A large amount of variation in the proportions of these structures was found in the NS corpora, making comparisons with NNS corpora very difficult. While the analysis of variation between two variants is quite straightforward, patterns of variation between eight variants are inherently more fluid and complex, and hence harder to compare. A comparison of group averages for NS and NNS revealed no difference between for Yes/No questions, but a significant difference emerged for the WH questions.

The NNSs avoided WH-variants that ranked low on the socio-stylistic scale and used more formal WH-variants with clitic inversion instead. We speculated that the higher proportion of inversion could be linked to the influence of English, where there is systematic inversion in interrogatives, strengthening the probability among both NNSs and NSs to opt for inversion in interrogatives when speaking French. No single socio-biographical variable was linked to variation in the proportions of the various interrogative structures. One pragmatic factor, however, was found to strengthen the probability of interrogatives structures with inversion. The 13 participants (3 NSs and 10 NNSs) who used [V-CL] and [QV-CL] structures chose them in more than 95% of cases to introduce a new topic or a new theme within a topic. In other words, inversion in the question signalled the shift to a new topic or theme in the interview.

Sax (2003) also considered interrogatives in her investigation on the development of sociolinguistic competence in the French IL of American learners but she focused only on partial interrogatives (WH-questions). The learners showed a strong awareness of the stylistic value of the formal variant with subject-verb inversion (*avez-vous?* 'have you', instead of the less formal *vous avez?* 'you have'), using it at a rate of 21% in the formal context versus only 14% in the informal context. Learners who had spent little to no time abroad used *est-ce que* (question tag) most frequently (44%), followed by inversion, fronting (*Quoi/Que tu fais?* 'what you do'), and finally pronominalization (*tu fais quoi?* 'you do what'). Students who had spent some time abroad used similar proportions of *est-ce que* and inversion, but their use of fronting decreased, while their use of pronominalization increased. Those who had spent most time abroad used fewer *est-ce que* and inversion. The NS control group was found to avoid inversion completely, preferring *qu'est-ce que* and pronominalizations.

Studies on lexical variants

The vocabulary taught in the French as a foreign language class is inevitably an emasculated version of the rich and vibrant vocabulary used daily by Francophones. Learners wishing to engage in peer interaction with NSs often discover that they are totally outgunned. Their limited stylistic range and ignorance of social, sexual, racial vocabulary as well as colloquial idioms leave them stranded. The reasons for this are linked to ethical and practical concerns, and to the inherent difficulty of acquiring a deep understanding of words with a limited input and relatively little authentic use of the words.

First, one might wonder whether colloquial words that are so frequent in informal interactions between NSs can legitimately be included in teaching manuals. A lot of high frequency colloquial words refer to sexual acts for example, and their inclusion in the foreign language curriculum would probably lead to more than a raising of eyebrows.

Secondly, the teaching system is traditionally more concerned with word phonology, morphology, lexico-syntax and denotative word meaning rather than with associative word meaning (consisting of connotations and stylistic properties) (Bijvoet 2002). The priority in the classroom is given to basic vocabulary learning (denotative word meaning), suitable for the widest possible range of social situations rather than themore fickle and elusive associative word meaning which is inherently more difficult to teach. While denotations are shared by large groups of speakers, connotations are shared by particular communities of practice and are much more dynamic. In order to produce socially appropriate speech, an L2 user needs to master the connotations and the stylistic nuances of particular words (see also Levison & Lessard's chapter in the present volume).

Mougeon and Rehner (2001) and Rehner (2005) considered the development of discourse and linguistic competencies by Ontario French immersion students. Both studies focus on polysemous and polyfunctional words. Mougeon and Rehner (2001) considered *juste* versus *seulement* versus *rien que*; Rehner (2005) studied *comme/like*; *donc/alors/(ça) fait que/so*; *bon*; *là*) which play key roles in the expression of fundamental semantic notions and discursive functions. She compared the students' discursive and non-discursive uses of these expressions with native and teacher norms. The students' frequency of use of the expressions and the range of discursive functions this use fulfills were found to be influenced by the existence of equivalent expressions in their L1. Students' gender and/or social class appeared only to affect the use of those expressions with English discursive equivalents. Frequency of exposure for the students was positively correlated with use of four of the six French expressions. Rehner (2005) showed that, while the students' rank order of frequency of use of the expressions matches almost exactly that of the immersion teachers, it is far from approximating NS norms. In a further study based on the same corpus, Rehner and Mougeon (2003) focused on how the students express the notion of consequence inter-sententially. The students were found to use *alors* and *donc*, as well as a variant in English, *namely so*.

The variant (*ça*) *fait que,* which is a very frequent vernacular variant in Quebec French, was absent in the students' educational input and in their speech production.

Dewaele and Regan (2001) addressed the issue of under-representation or avoidance of colloquial words in the advanced French IL of 29 Dutch L1 speakers and of 6 Hiberno-Irish English L1 speakers before and after spending a year in a Francophone environment. Colloquial words (i.e., words which were coded as stylistically colloquial by the French monolingual dictionary *Le Petit Robert* 1979) were found to be very rare in the two corpora as learners preferred more formal synonyms (the word *argent* instead of *fric* 'money', *travailler* instead of *bosser* 'to work'). Even learners who reported frequent active authentic communication in French used significantly fewer colloquial words in the cross-sectional corpus than in a comparable corpus from a control group of 6 NSs of French. While the proportion of colloquial words increased significantly after a year abroad in the longitudinal corpus, the values remained significantly below those obtained from the control group. It was argued that only prolonged authentic contact with the TL community might allow learners to develop the kind of implicit, proceduralized socio-pragmatic knowledge that would allow an increased use of colloquial words. An additional explanation for the relative infrequency of colloquial variants in the speech of advanced learners of French may be that the social-psychological costs of using them inappropriately is higher than that of using formal variants inappropriately, since the use of formal variants is what is expected of L2 learners (Mougeon 2002, personal communication).

In a further study on colloquial vocabulary in French, Dewaele (2004d) analyzed the Birkbeck corpus of interviews between 62 NSs and NNSs of French. Statistical analyses revealed a positive relation between the use of colloquial words and extraversion level, frequency of contact with French and

proficiency level in French. It was argued that the extraverts' inclination to take risks, combined with lower communicative anxiety, might explain the higher use of colloquial words. Proficiency seems to be a prerequisite, but not the only factor, for actual use of colloquial vocabulary. Indeed, NSs were found to use only marginally more colloquial words than NNSs.

Evans and Fisher (2005) found that short but intense contact with a TL seems to be linked to an increase of expressive use of that language among elementary level students. They showed that short exchange visits (up to 11 days) by 68 young British pupils in France lead to significant increases in listening skills and in expressive use of language in writing: "verbs of likes and dislikes (e.g., *j'aime, j'aime pas* 'I like, I don't like'), set phrases (e.g. *c'est super* 'it's great', *c'était ennuyeux* 'it was boring'), or use of adjectives of evaluation (e.g., *elle est sympa* 'she's nice')" (Evans & Fisher 2005: 187).

The Evans and Fisher study corroborates the findings for the use of emotion words in our study of advanced Flemish learners of French and advanced Russian learners of English (Dewaele & Pavlenko 2002). Dutch L1 learners of French and Russian L1 learners of English under-used emotion vocabulary in informal conversations and film retellings in their IL. The Dutch L1 learners of French with higher levels of morpholexical accuracy – who also happened to be the ones using their IL most frequently outside the classroom (Dewaele 1994) – were found to use a significantly larger proportion of, and a greater diversity of, emotion words in their conversations with the researcher. Two other variables were found to be significantly linked to the use of emotion words in the French IL corpus: Gender and degree of extraversion. Female and extravert participants used a wider range of emotion lemmas and a greater number of emotion word tokens than male and introvert participants.

Kinginger and Farrell (2005) have presented a completely different approach to the study of lexical competence in French IL. They investigated the effect of the confrontation with gendered practices and ideologies on the development of communicative competence in a sample of three American students who spent their study abroad semester in France. Two female and one male student, who kept a diary of their experiences, were interviewed before and after their stay abroad. The linguistic instruments used in the study were a standardized test of general proficiency in reading and listening (*Test de Français International*), and a Language Awareness Interview focusing on knowledge of colloquial words. The stay abroad did not boost the linguistic development of the first female student, Deirdre: Her score went down on the reading test, while it improved only marginally on the listening test and on the colloquial word test.

The authors link this finding to her early rejection of French gender practices which she perceived as sexual harassment. This resulted in sense of alienation from the social context and interrupted her investment in the language learning process. The second female student, Jada, saw the French gender practices as a challenge but engaged in numerous social interactions with French men. The authors connect this to her dramatic gains on the three linguistic tests. The male student, Bill, did not question his performance of gender in light of the new social environment, was successful in the classroom as well as in interactions of NSs of French, and made spectacular gains on the linguistic tests. The authors are careful not to attribute causality to the relation between the students' stories and the quantitative data, but their study sheds a welcome light on the baffling issue of the huge amount of inter-individual variation in the rate of acquisition of sociolinguistic competence after a period abroad.

Discussion

This final section will first consider some methodological issues about the studies that were reviewed. Some general trends in the results will then be identified and interpreted by considering the complex interaction between dyad characteristics and individual factors.

The first methodological point to be made is the general preference for cross-sectional studies on relatively large samples rather than longitudinal studies. This means that groups of different proficiency levels are distinguished, and the results are interpreted as an illustration of on-going development. Longitudinal studies tend to have smaller sample sizes, which could lead to questions about the generalizability of the results, as outliers might obscure or accentuate group patterns. More longitudinal studies with large groups are needed (cf. Howard 2005a; Regan 2004; Thomas 2002, 2004).

Another methodological difficulty lies in the sample size of the NS baseline data.

As the researchers usually work in French departments with L2 learners, they usually have access to larger numbers of learners than NSs, which are typically language teachers or assistants who might be tempted to produce hyper-correct speech when recorded in interviews. Authors generally refer to studies carried out in native French, allowing them to compare values for certain variables. However, inter-corpora comparisons are often difficult to carry out because of the different methodologies used to collect the data, different categorizations of dependent and independent variables, different times, populations and tasks. Using someone else's corpus means that one is in the dark about certain aspects that might be crucial for the interpretation of data and results. The inclusion of even a small number of NSs in the original design, provides a valuable base-line value. Some statistical tests such as t-tests are quite robust and can be used to compare samples of unequal size.

A final methodological problem resides in the fact that researchers can never be entirely certain that the variation they observe in the use of sociolinguistic variants is synchronic or diachronic in origin. The use of certain variants may increase over time, but their use in certain contexts may suddenly drop, not because the L2 user has forgotten the variant, but because it may suddenly be judged too risky, or because it may have morphological implications that the L2 users wishes to avoid (for example a L2 user may wish to avoid the formal pronoun *vous* in combination with the verb *dire* in order to avoid the irregular form *dites*, and feel safer to use the regular *tu dis*). One possible way to overcome the limitation in the interpretation of quantitative data is through supplementary qualitative data. While L2 users may not always be aware of every single choice of a sociolinguistic variant, they may have developed general strategies linked to speech styles in specific situations, and they may have established their own personal list of the degree of markedness of certain variants. Researchers who tap into the personal experience of the learner/user through diary studies or meta-linguistic and meta-pragmatic interviews can obtain strong clues on why individuals act in certain ways. The research shows that issues of identity, attitudes and self-perception are linked to sociolinguistic choices. By combining this emic perspective (participant-centered) with the traditional quantitative analyses (typically researcher-centered, hence "etic"), sociolinguists could obtain a more global understanding of variation patterns among learners and L2 users.

One fairly consistent finding in our overview is the over-use of formal variants.

It has been linked to restricted access to sufficiently diverse linguistic input. Lack of access makes it very difficult for L2 users to pick up the linguistic characteristics and variation patterns of their chosen community of practice within the larger group of TL speakers. Instructed L2 learners aremainly exposed to formal speech styles and written material (see Mougeon et al. 2002).

A consistent and systematic finding in the literature is that authentic interactions with NS of the TL have a noticeable effect on the learners' IL. A more prolonged stay in the TL community, or intense contact with members of that community, is necessary to develop sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence. Some of the changes seem to happen without the user noticing, such as specific lexico-syntactic choices in the formulation of emotional speech acts (Pavlenko 2002b) which the author attributes to conceptual restructuring linked to the process of L2 socialization.

However, learners might consciously reject linguistic variants common in certain communities of practice. Dewaele (2004c) reported that L2 users often refrain from using swear words in the L2 because they feel that NS display a proprietary attitude towards these words. L2 users who betray their non-nativeness through their accent but do use these words that characterize "in-group" membership may be surprised by the unwanted illocutionary effects. The development of advanced language learners' sociolinguistic competence allows them to identify not only gender-specific variants, but also social or generational speech patterns used by groups of NS with whom they may wish to identify. The young learners' desire to stop sounding like their teachers at some point in their linguistic development probably reflects a similar process in the L1 where it is perceived 'uncool' to speak like one's parents. By consciously traveling up and down the continuum of speech styles learners can show their linguistic independence.

However, learners may also consciously decide not to adopt certain variation patterns from the NS community if they judge them to be in conflict with their own ideological and cultural beliefs or sense of self. Tensions can also arise between L2 learners and NSs on "appropriate" topics of conversation. Kinginger (2004) reports the case of a young American working-class woman from a migrant family, Alice, who spends a year studying in France, and slowly acquires sociolinguistic and socio-cultural competence in French. Alice expresses frustration in her diary about her companion Cedric who refuses to respect her decision to ignore politics and who criticizes the political actions of the US:

Moi, je fais pas la politique, je m'en fous (. . .) j'ai demandé si on pourrait changer de sujet. . .j'ai essayé au moins 3 fois de changer mais chaque fois il a continué.

(Kinginger 2004:236–237) 'I, I don't do politics, I don't care (. . .) I've asked whether we could change topic. . .I tried to change it at least 3 times but every time he has continued'. (translation mine) Variation patterns can extend to non-verbal areas of self-expression. Kinginger and Farrell (2005: 9) illustrate the resistance of Deidre to conform to French gender patterns.

Deidre perceives herself as an athletic American woman for whom it is perfectly acceptable to go to class in sweat pants. She can't understand what she perceives as French women's obsession with their looks: "Monday morning rolls around and the girls dress up like they're going out Friday night, and it just – it looks ridiculous to me.

(Interview, May 2003)".

Another recurrent finding in the literature is the relatively small amount of interstylistic variation which suggests that the L2 users have not yet identified (or differentiated) the socio-stylistic value of the various sociolinguistic variants and do not style shift in a native-like way. However, inter-individual variation between L2 users is generally much larger than such variation between NSs. One possible explanation is that the L2 user's probability of choosing a variant will always differ from that of the NS as an extra set of independent variables enters the equation. Beebe (1988) was right to advocate caution in the use of sociolinguistic methods for the analysis of variation in the L2. Superficially similar patterns of variation may be the result of different underlying mechanisms. In the L1 the choice of a particular variant can be the result of a conscious or unconscious decision between instantaneously accessible alternatives of which the illocutionary effects are perfectly clear, it is unlikely that L2 users always have much liberty, their choice may sometimes be guided by L1 or IL transfer, and they may be unsure about the exact illocutionary effects of a variant.

The findings do have some important didactic implications. Valdman (2000, 2003) has advocated the inclusion of a variety of speech styles in French instruction in order to provide learners with a realistic linguistic diversity. Rather than sticking to the "standard" norm in French classes using contrived and inauthentic materials, Valdman proposes to introduce the more dynamic "pedagogical" norm that would "offer learners changing targets that lead them progressively toward the full range of TL variants" (2003: 13). It would adhere to standard French expected of learners, but it would account for sociolinguistic considerations, for attitudes of NSs toward sociolinguistic variants, and for the own students' acquisitional patterns. Training in the pedagogical norm rather than the standard norm would allow the transition from L2 learners to L2 users to be much smoother. Daily interactions and service encounters happen generally in a relatively informal style, it thus makes perfect pedagogical sense to prepare L2 learners appropriately for these interactions.

Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (2000) refer to Valdman's notion of pedagogical norm in their study on overt and covert prestige in the French language classroom. Their starting point was that social status and prestige as instantiated in the classroom setting are important socio-affective factors linked to the acquisition of effective pronunciation skills in the L2. An analysis of the performance and perceptions of 100 American university students in a French class showed the wide range of perceptions of what it means to "sound good" when speaking French. After a detailed study of phonemic and phonological errors combined with students' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes, the authors conclude that a fairly homogeneous value system (i.e., a pedagogical norm) exists among their students. The authors do point out that the chief concern of the students was to establish group solidarity and please their peers.

Conclusion

To conclude, both the investigation of the acquisition and performance of sociolinguistic competence in the L2 and the teaching of sociolinguistic rules present considerable theoretical, methodological and practical obstacles. First, because the target is an abstract set of complex native variation patterns it takes a while before learners understand what they are aiming for. In other words, it is a moving target that no single book or grammar can capture. One difficulty for the learners is that once they have decided on what the appropriate style should be, theymay feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of choices that have to be made instantaneously about appropriate variants - ranging from phonology to syntax, and even discourse. Inevitably, when juggling with toomany balls, they will occasionally drop a few, so to speak, which could have embarrassing consequences. Code-switching to a vernacular style in the L1 was one effortand embarrassment-avoidance strategy observed by Tarone and Swain (1995) in immersion education. Another difficulty facing the learner is the huge variability that exists within

the NS community (both socially and geographically), and the learners' need to identify the sociolect that will suit them best. Secondly, the sociolects are ever evolving.

As a consequence, stigmatized variants may lose their stigma and become appropriate in more informal speech styles (such as the omission of *ne* or the use of *on* instead of *nous*). This makes it harder to capture them and present them as pedagogical norm to language learners. Thirdly, no amount of classroom instruction can suffice to instill the intuition of what sociolinguistic variant is appropriate in a specific situation. The English L1 learner of French who is used to a single pronoun of address will struggle to form an accurate conceptual representation of a system that involves two pronouns. That learner will quickly realize in authentic communication that this choice of pronoun in French is not just a trivial matter. While no NS would complain about the inappropriate omission of *ne*, interrogative structure or liaison, there would probably be a much stronger reaction on the part of the NS for an inappropriate use of *tu*. The fact is that every NS of French recalls instances of inappropriate use of pronouns in exchanges with other NS of French (Dewaele 2004b). Acquiring sociolinguistic competence in French equates the ability to navigate a social minefield.

It may become easier and automatic after sufficient practice, but nobody can ever feel completely safe.

What is a minefield for learners is a rich area of investigation for researchers. Further research on the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence could concentrate on differences in the trajectories followed by learners in immersion education and those in purely instructed settings, following the example of studies like those by Thomas (2004). It is equally important that researchers studying the IL development of instructed learners enquire in sufficient detail about the learners' contact and exposure to the TL outside the classroom. In this age of global communication, learners have many more opportunities to use their IL skills than ever before. The likelihood of being exposed to the TL is also much greater for learners living in big multilingual and multicultural cities. Much more detailed research is also needed on individual differences between learners/users and link patterns of sociolinguistic variation to psychological, psycholinguistic (cf. Preston 2000), socio-pragmatic and socio-cultural variables. The addition of an emic perspective to the traditional etic perspective of variationist sociolinguistics could lead to a better understanding of the complex processes underlying variation patterns. Sociolinguistic variation reflects L2 users' choices, which can be unconscious or conscious. Ideally researchers could combine quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Rigorous quantitative analyses could identify the effect of specific independent variables and establish probabilities of occurrence of the dependent sociolinguistic variables. A complementary phase could then include the L2 users' metalinguistic intuitions on their use of the dependent variables (conscious choices), their social and personal context, their perception of belonging to different groups within the TL and the L1 community. The qualitative information might help interpret the quantitative findings and hence escape the correlational fallacy (Pavlenko 2002a). The argument for a combination of etic and emic perspectives is not new (see Eckert 1989; Trévise & Noyau 1984) but it seems worth restating it in order to avoid the fragmentation of our field into isolated fiefdoms.

The productivity of a field can be estimated through the amount of output it generates.

It is more difficult to judge its impact on a larger scale. Didactic implications of sociolinguistic research have found their way to the teaching profession. In my opinion, the best illustration of the impact of the sociolinguistic enterprise within social sciences would be through the incorporation of sociolinguistic variables and issues in the work of psycholinguists, psychologists and pragmaticists. To achieve this goal, sociolinguists need to communicate their findings not only to their own community but also to their peers outside their field. By drawing them in, old problems could be solved or discarded and new broader research agendas could be established.

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