

Editorial

Introductory Article: French in Second Language Acquisition Research

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Emerging in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the ground-breaking work of Stephen Pit Corder, followed by Larry Selinker (1972) conceptualisation of ‘interlanguage’, second language acquisition (SLA) has developed into a highly buoyant independent field within the wider terrain that is applied linguistics. Over the last number of decades, Corder’s and Selinker’s initial innovative characterisation of the learner’s language system, interlanguage, ignited extensive investigation of the nature of interlanguage development and second language (L2) processes and representation. That extensive body of work has drawn on and served to inform diverse approaches to SLA, including those for example within generative, formal, functionalist, and variationist traditions. Through their detailed tracking of learner language using diverse data elicitation types, ranging from judgement and completion tasks to narrative and personal retellings, along with other free production tasks such as semi-guided conversations, studies have sought to capture the detail underlying various aspects of the learner’s language system as it evolves during the learning trajectory. Crucially, that detail has informed our understanding of the nature of language acquisition and the acquisition challenge at play in an L2, in some cases in comparison with first language (L1) learning and bilingual L1 acquisition (2L1), including heritage language learning, as well as third language (L3) learning.

While interlanguage studies have served to considerably shape our understanding of L2 acquisition processes and outcomes, the early 2000s saw a social turn complementing the more psycholinguistic orientation which was seen to previously predominate, albeit not exclusively, in much previous work. In contrast with the universality of common language-neutral developmental processes across learners that a more psycholinguistic tradition was often seen to underline and which did not sufficiently account for individual differences across learners, a more socially oriented focus foregrounded the critical need to explain such differences. In so doing, we now have a substantial body of work that highlights the wide-ranging learner-internal factors that are at play in the learner’s language experiences and developmental trajectory, of both an ascribed and acquired nature. They include age and gender, aptitude and cognitive capacity and orientation, and personality, along with motivation and attitudes, self-regulation, and agency, among others. Such factors make for a complex array of factors that highlight the individual nature of language learning where the learner’s personal socio-biographical characteristics are observed to play a critical role.

The latter socially oriented approach has also highlighted the need to cast our lamp on how such learner-internal factors interact with the external in terms of other factors at play in the learning experience. For example, that learning experience is also influenced by other actors who serve as interlocutors in various ways, be they other learners, instructors, or members of a host community, who shape the learner’s engagement with the language. On the latter count, activities are carried out through the language where the learner is called on to interact in the language in various ways, be it in the foreign language classroom or in the target language host community. The learner’s characteristics and their experiences of such activities at a micro and macro level interact in various ways to mutually shape each other, such as learner motivation giving rise to motivated engagement with host interlocutors or negative host experiences negatively impacting learner attitudes



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and agency. The complex interplay between such learner characteristics and external factors has foregrounded the individualised nature of the learning experience, making it often difficult to make generalisations across learners.

A final area of pivotal focus in relation to external factors has been the attention given to the role of input and interaction matters. Their role has a long-standing place in the SLA enterprise, such as through Michael Long's Interaction Hypothesis and the conceptualisation of input and interactional modifications, along with the vast sub-field that is instructed second language acquisition. In the latter regard, the field benefits from wide-ranging studies which track the relationship between different instructional input types, such as varying degrees of explicit and implicit treatment of grammar, and learner development on different grammatical and other linguistic features. Building on such work, since the 2000s, there has been increased acknowledgement of the need to better understand the role of input. Developments have seen increased focus on the relation between learner perception and noticing of input features, parsing and processing, and subsequent intake and use of those features in the learner's language system.

Beyond the different thematic lenses referred to, other innovative work has further complemented our understanding of L2 acquisition, with other approaches in evidence in eye-tracking studies, reaction time studies, neurolinguistic approaches, sociolinguistic approaches, biographical analyses, and social network analyses, among others. Taken together, the significant body of existing work highlights the diversity of approaches, issues and questions that prevail among learners with different L1–L2 combinations and in different learning contexts, from instructed learning to naturalistic learning, including immersion and study abroad, for different purposes and with different statuses, such as the case of migrants whose choice of L2 is often imposed, and at different levels in their learning trajectory, from beginner to near-native. Against this background, this special issue aims to capture recent work which broadly spans the three-fold thematic lens we have presented concerning linguistic development, language input, and individual factors with specific reference to French as an L2.

The focus on French complements a range of previous volumes which have brought together collections of studies, or in some cases, have constituted single manuscripts, such as [Bartning \(1997\)](#), [Dewaele \(2005\)](#), [Guijarro-Fuentes et al. \(2015\)](#), [Labeau and Myles \(2011\)](#), [Lindqvist and Bardel \(2012\)](#), and [Myles and Towell \(2004\)](#) in the former case, and [Perdue \(1995\)](#), [Prévost \(2009\)](#), and [Véronique \(2009\)](#) in the latter case. Others, such as [Ayoun \(2013\)](#), [Leclercq and Howard \(2015\)](#), [Forsberg Lundell \(2008\)](#), [Howard and Ågren \(2019\)](#), and [Mougeon et al. \(2010\)](#), have respectively drawn on French to explore specific features, such as tense-aspect-modality, collocational language, the sandhi phenomenon of liaison, and sociolinguistic competence. Indeed, a further edited volume by [Dewaele and Mougeon \(2002\)](#) has contributed to the latter area with a collection of studies on French. Such collections reflect the long-standing buoyant work of SLA researchers working on French, which has constituted a pivotal language within significant international research projects since the outset of the field. Examples include a European Science Project on language acquisition in crosslinguistic perspective among naturalistic migrant learners initiated in the 1980s, leading to multiple publications in areas such as temporality, spatiality, and utterance structure (see for example [Perdue 1993](#)). Another case in point is the Canadian body of studies on French language acquisition in an immersion education context in that country, allowing insight into the role of age and different manipulations of immersion configurations (see [Harley 1992](#)). Other work on Canadian French immersion learners has also considerably illuminated our understanding of the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence in that language, situated within the sociolinguistic wave of studies that emerged in the early 2000s (see [Mougeon et al. 2010](#), who collated a range of specific studies of different sociolinguistic variables). A further case in point is the body of work stemming from the InterFra project among Swedish university learners, which has contributed to our understanding of the advanced learner variety (see [Bartning 1997](#)), and has further led to investigations at more advanced stages of acquisition with reference to near-native speakers

and native speaker competence (see [Forsberg Lundell and Bartning 2015](#)). Other efforts have been within the area of corpus linguistics, where the FLLOC corpora (French learner language oral corpora [see [Myles 2005](#)]) constitute a database which collates different corpora collected among learners of French in different contexts.

The non-exhaustive sample of studies referred to highlights the long-standing contribution of French in a field where there is a consistent need to provide studies that go beyond the ever-increasing focus on English, which is generally seen as holding global lingua franca status for many. Indeed, given the status of English, the need to test and apply theories and constructs to other languages is increasingly acknowledged, whereby the specificity of other languages may be such that those theories and constructs can be nuanced as a reflection of their applicability to languages other than English (LOTes). As [Oakes and Howard \(2019\)](#) noted in the case of the dominance of studies of learners of English within research on the role of motivation in L2 acquisition, “[W]hile this might seem understandable given the latter’s rise as the new global lingua franca, the fact that the field has undergone such a profound paradigm shift prompted by the learning of one very particular language is potentially problematic. Like basing sociolinguistic theory on the language usage solely of men, there is a real risk of generalising to all FLs [foreign languages] the very specific motivations for learning EFL [English as a foreign language].” For example, in the case of the study of L2 motivation as a factor in L2 acquisition, and specifically with regard to the predominant motivational model proposed by Zoltán Dörnyei in his L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), [Boo et al. \(2015\)](#) noted that during the period 2005–2014, over 70% of studies were conducted on learners of English, making for a bias in the data available. In that case, the reasons why learners choose other languages, and the makeup of motivational factors that drive their acquisition are crucial to our understanding of language acquisition when the target language is not English. While French is undoubtedly a global language, though to a lesser extent than perhaps English, [Oakes and Howard \(2019\)](#) highlighted the need for more nuanced interpretation of the L2MSS to learners of French in so far as their motivational makeup emerges as more complex than studies of English have previously suggested. In a global world where English dominates, the authors’ findings highlight how the field can benefit from the contribution of studies of languages other than English.

Against this background, the studies presented here offer a timely update on a range of areas within contemporary research on the acquisition of French as an L2, advancing the hard-won insights that previous collections focusing on French have provided to the field. This special issue presents a series of 12 articles which, as we noted, broadly span the three-fold thematic lens of linguistic development, input and interaction matters, and the role of individual factors. Taken together, they offer innovative perspectives on different contemporary issues within each, drawing on investigations of learners at different stages of acquisition, in different learning contexts and with a wide range of L1 backgrounds. The focus on linguistic development explores different linguistic features spanning verbal and nominal morphology, such as tense-aspect-modality, spatial movement, agreement, and determination, as well as discourse cohesion and scope particles, syntax, and lexis. Moving beyond linguistic development, the consideration of input matters includes a focus on instructional input and learner outcomes, as well as naturalistic acquisition. Other articles explore individual factors, namely motivation in an instructed setting, as well as other individual factors and their impact on learner success in a naturalistic setting.

In the case of learner development on different linguistic features, Dalila Ayoun presents an article entitled ‘A longitudinal study in the L2 acquisition of the French TAM system’. Within a generative paradigm, the author presents an extensive longitudinal study of university learner use of different verb morphological features for the marking of tense-aspect-modality on the verb in French. While the findings highlight the systematic morphological distinctions made in the learners’ written language production, they also point to ongoing fragile zones on some features, reflecting conceptual entities that hold particular difficulty in advanced stages of French learner language.

The article by Pascale Leclercq, entitled ‘Future or movement? The L2 acquisition of *aller* + V forms’ continues the focus on tense-aspect-modality, but more specifically in relation to the expression of futurity and movement, reflecting the different spatial, temporal, and modal values of the specific form under investigation. The author considers such differential conceptual expression in the language production of learners at different proficiency levels, thereby tapping into the emergence and use of the form to express its polysemantic values. The quantitative findings offer a developmental profile of the form-function relations underpinning the specific form in the L2 learner’s language system.

In a further study of verb morphology, Malin Ågren, Sonia Gerolimich, Cyrille Granget, Pascale Hadermann, Marie-Eve Michot, and Isabelle Stabarin explored the fragile zone of subject-verb agreement in their article entitled ‘“Les copains *dit au revoir”: On subject-verb agreement in L2 French and cross-linguistic influence’. Their quantitative analysis of four different source-language learner groups allows rich consideration of the potential impact of crosslinguistic influence on the acquisition of this feature of French, whereby those source languages differ on the feature concerned to varying degrees from the target language. The comparative nature of the findings across two proficiency levels allows the authors to identify how such a factor contributes to the nuanced crosslinguistic influence pinpointed.

While the previous articles focus on the verb, a further article focuses on the noun phrase in an article entitled ‘The emergence of determination in French L2 from the point of view of L1/L2 comparison’ by Marzena Watorek, Pascale Trévisiol, and Rebekah Rast. As its title indicates, the study presented especially focuses on the determiner system in French, and is based on a longitudinal case-study analysis of spoken data elicited from two adult naturalistic learners. The learners come from two different L1 backgrounds, where the results point to both similarities and differences between the learners in the characteristics of their evolving expression of determination over the course of the study. The analysis also draws on previous work on child L1 acquisition, pointing to an important effect of the learners’ source language in a way that clearly distinguishes them from child L1 development.

A remaining article explores discourse cohesion issues in relation to the expression of addition, focusing on the additive particle ‘*aussi*’ among German learners of French. Entitled ‘Additive linking in L2 French discourse by German learners: syntactic embedding and intonation patterns’, Sandra Benazzo, Fabian Santiago, and Christine Dimroth followed a developmental perspective across two proficiency levels and considered the characteristics of use of the particle in the learners’ language production, from three perspectives, namely frequency of use, syntactic placement, and L1 prosodic effects. The cross-sectional findings allow a characterisation of the learners’ use of the particle, which points to some learner-specific tendencies compared to native speaker discourse, as well as offering insight into putative crosslinguistic effects which are not supported by the findings presented.

While the focus of the previous articles has been placed on the grammatical dimensions of L2 acquisition, the area of lexical development is the focus of Christina Lindqvist’s article on ‘Vocabulary knowledge in L3 French: A study of Swedish learners’ vocabulary depth’. In this case, the participants are less advanced third language (L3) learners in an instructed setting, where the author offers a cross-sectional comparison of aspects of their lexical knowledge in a written production task. The quantitative analyses highlight the scope of the concept of lexical knowledge with a focus on orthography, form-meaning, and word components. The findings, thus, document different facets of lexical development which are shown to be differentially more/less developed at different stages among the learner cohorts within their educational trajectory.

Amanda Edmonds and Aarnes Gudmestad continued the focus on lexical development, but in this case, within a study abroad context. Entitled ‘Collocational development during a stay abroad’, the article presents a quantitative longitudinal investigation of noun-adjective collocations in the written productions of British university learners before a year-long stay in France, at the end of the stay, and eight months post-study abroad. The

findings do not show evidence of an impact of the stay abroad on the frequency of the collocations. In contrast, a positive impact was found on collocational strength over time in the case of one of the measures used, but not for the other, suggesting an effect of lexical frequency. The findings, thus, provide a nuanced understanding of the role of study abroad as a context of learning on aspects of phraseological development.

Livia Dewaele and Jean-Marc Dewaele also focussed on learners in a study abroad context. Entitled ‘Actual and self-perceived linguistic proficiency gains in French during Study Abroad’, their article offers a mixed-methods study of proficiency development, measured through a lexical test, among British university learners of French. With three data collection times, the data capture the positive developmental gains to be made during study abroad, while also highlighting the inter-individual variation which overrides such development in a study abroad context. The authors problematised such variation in the qualitative analysis, highlighting the complexity of factors underlying the learners’ experience abroad, especially the role of initial proficiency level at the outset of such a sojourn. The findings showcase the difficulty to generalise study abroad findings across learners for whom study abroad is a highly individual experience, but, notwithstanding, point to the gains to be made oftentimes irrespective of how the experience abroad evolves.

While the previous articles by Edmonds and Gudmestad, on the one hand, and Dewaele and Dewaele, on the other, focussed on study abroad as a learning context, other articles extend to an otherwise different consideration of input issues, on the one hand, and instructional practice issues, on the other. In the first case, Anita Thomas presented an article entitled ‘Input issues in the development of L2 French morphosyntax’. She offers an overview of a selection of studies which treat the relation between input characteristics such as saliency, frequency, and regularity, on the one hand, and learner perception of and development on different morphosyntactic forms, on the other hand. The reflections presented highlight the critical role of input issues in need of greater consideration within the SLA field, and underscore the complex challenge that the learner faces in noticing such features in order to advance in their acquisition process.

A further article more specifically considers instructed learning in the foreign language classroom. Katherine Rehner, Anne Popovich, and Ivan Lasan wrote ‘How the CEFR is impacting French-as-a-second-language in Ontario, Canada: Teachers’ self-reported instructional practices and students’ proficiency exam results’, looking at the areas of foci which are in some way prioritised within the classroom instruction and the learners’ developmental outcomes. The former areas are elicited in self-report data among a cohort of teacher-participants, while the latter areas are based on results from an international proficiency test of different language skills. The quantitative findings illuminate the learners’ proficiency outcomes and the instructional input practices of their instructors, offering insight into possible instructional impact on linguistic development that remains to be explored.

A further article continues the consideration of instructional practice issues, with an article by Céline Rocher Hahlin and Jonas Granfeldt on ‘Strengthening French L3 motivation: the differential impact of vision-enhancing activities’. In this case, the focus extends to individual factors in L2 acquisition, whereby the article concentrates specifically on a well-investigated factor, namely learner motivation within Dörnyei’s L2MSS. Moreover, the study is situated within L3 LOTE learning, reflecting the specific need to extend the scope of inquiry beyond English. In particular, the authors focussed on the longitudinal impact of instructional practice on development of the motivational construct of the ideal L3 self within Dörnyei’s model, along with intended learning effort, among Swedish L3 learners. While the quantitative findings point to a limited overall impact, a more positive impact is found to pertain to intended effort. The findings also highlight a gender effect underpinning learner development of both constructs.

A final article by Fanny Forsberg Lundell and Klara Arvidsson is entitled ‘Understanding high performance in late L2 acquisition—what’s the secret? A contrasting case study in L2 French’. Continuing the focus on individual factors, the authors offer a qualitative

study of a wide range of factors that they hypothesise influence success in L2 learning among long-term Swedish residents in France. They situate their study in relation to the near-native vs. passing-as-a-native quality of linguistic attainment among their participants with a view to exploring what factors might distinguish the former from the latter. The results identify both similarities and differences which offer insight into the complexity of factors underpinning ultimate success in very late, high-proficiency stages of acquisition in a naturalistic context.

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