

Learnability and the role of transfer in the expression of Manner of motion among L2 learners of French and English

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In this paper we focus on the role of transfer in the expression of Manner of motion among British learners of French. We hope to provide evidence for the claim of Lefebvre, White and Jourdan (2006) that L1 effects will persist even in the L2 steady state if there is no positive evidence for learners in a particular domain of grammar. The aim of this paper is to show that transfer is persistent in the expression of Manner of motion among advanced L2 learners of French. We focus on the expression of Manner because British learners of French face an interesting learnability problem in this area, as there is no positive evidence in the input that can help them to acquire the boundary-crossing constraint (Slobin and Hoiting 1994) in French. Verb-framed languages such as French only license the use of a manner verb as a main verb if no boundary-crossing is predicated. Thus in English one can say *stagger out of the room* but in French this is expressed as *sortir de la pièce en titubant* “exit the room staggering”, whereas **tituber de la pièce* “stagger out of the room” is not grammatical. Thus, the argument structure properties in the L2 form a subset of the corresponding L1 properties (White 1991; Inagaki 2002) and there is no positive evidence for the learners to acquire the target-like expression of Manner in French.

Level three students (N=20) in our study prefer expressing manner of motion in the main verb, just like level one learners and a British native speaker control group (N=28) over expressing manner in an adjunct, as do French native speakers (N=23). A comparison with French native speakers learning English (N = 17) is made to see if any acquiring Manner is easier if positive evidence is available.

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