

Variability and future temporal reference: The French of Anglo-Montrealers

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This research investigates variability in second language French of first generation Montreal Anglophones that had access to French immersion schooling. We examine the variation between the periphrastic, the synthetic and the present variants of the future temporal reference, as illustrated in (1).

(1) Nous autres on *va perdre* notre langue (Ted, 987)
'We're gonna lose our language'

Parce que il *aura* pas le choix (Ted, 1208)
'Beause he won't have choice'

Je *pars* samedi (Liz, 171)
'I leave on Saturday'

Our analysis is based on a corpus of 29 Anglo-Montrealer informants aged 18 to 35 who were interviewed in 1993 and 1994 (Thibault & Sankoff 1997). This body of data sheds light on the acquisition of variation in a context where L2 speakers are in daily contact with the target language. This permits comparison with other situations, which are qualitatively different, as is the case for immersion students learning French exclusively in school (Mougeon *et al* 2002). To test the effect of contact more precisely, we classified the speakers of our sample according to their personal degree of contact with French in their social, as well as educational environments.

After having identified available variants for the L2 speakers, our analysis investigates all the linguistic constraints shown to exert an effect in the literature. Our research hypotheses included all the linguistic constraints already identified as influential for the future temporal reference in L1 Canadian French, (Emirikian & Sankoff 1985; Poplack & Turpin 1999), the target language in this context. In this respect, we want to test if the acquisition of L2 includes mastering linguistic constraints that are characteristic of the target language, as is the case for example for polarity. We also include factor groups that influence the variation of the apparent English counterpart of the variable - the variation between the use of *will* and *going to* (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001), in order to test the effect of the source language on the variation, in other words the transfer hypothesis.

The multivariate analysis shows that the L2 French of Anglo-Montrealers follows patterns that mirror the French L1 system. In particular, a clear parallel is emerging concerning the effect of polarity, the most influential linguistic constraint affecting the variation in Canadian French. As is the case for L1 speakers, Anglo-Montrealers favor the synthetic variant in the context of negative sentence, a constraint which seems to be unconscious even for Francophones, and not taught explicitly in the classroom. Interestingly, this result was not found in the French of Toronto immersion students (Nadasdi *et al*, in press). Otherwise, the temporal distance, which has a very weak effect in the selection of the variants in French L1, is not significant in the L2 data. Our findings challenge the claim that the variable competence model does not fit for second language acquisition (Gregg 1990). Contrarily, the acquisition of the linguistic constraints by Anglo-Montrealers reflects the sociolinguistic competence of the speakers according to their degree of contact with the target language.

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