

**The Advanced Learner:
Poor Relation of the Second Language
Acquisition Family?¹**

Although a relatively new domain of study, research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has nonetheless dealt with a wide range of issues which first arose during the early days of research. The numerous studies carried out in a relatively short period of time, have amply described the mechanism(s) behind the production of learner utterances, that is to say, the immediate manifestations of the human language capacity. Thanks to the important work carried out within the ESF Project (Perdue 1993) and the ZISA Projekt (Clahsen et al. 1983), crosslinguistic studies of the vast data gathered have begun to unravel the system at work in the early stages of interlanguage (IL) development, by checking for universal tendencies as well as the effect for a particular source language (L1) or target language (L2). However, these studies in particular, but many studies in SLA in general, have focused only on learners in the early stages of acquisition. For example, the immigrants used as subjects in the above-mentioned studies were learners whose contact with the L2 was spread over a short period of time, and was, in general, based on informal contact with the L2 in the target language (TL) community. There is, however, another type of learner who demonstrates learner characteristics which are quite different: the advanced learner. Bartning (1997b) suggests that the advanced learner has had a high level of formal contact with the L2 through instruction, normally in secondary school and thereafter at university. Informal contact with the L2 tends to be in the form of limited stays in the TL community. As a result of this learning route, the advanced learner tends to demonstrate high metalinguistic knowledge, in contrast with the learner living in the TL community whose metalinguistic knowledge is quite low. Perhaps as a result of differences in their input environment, but also to differences in their learner characteristics, e.g. social circumstances / background, motivation / reasons for learning the L2, it is suggested that the advanced learner is engaged in *foreign language learning*, as opposed to the *second language acquisition* which takes place in the TL community.

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The difference between learners in both types of study is quite important. In the ESF studies in particular, the number of learners who began to use grammatical morphology in a productive way is limited. In fact, as testimony of the robustness of their learner variety, i.e. the pre-basic and basic varieties, most of these learners manage to communicate adequately without using grammatical morphology at all. Due to the general dominance of early-level learners as subjects in these studies and others besides, our understanding of the language mechanism at work in the learner tends to apply in the main to learners in the early stages of acquisition, that is to say, learners whose IL has not progressed beyond the pre-basic or basic varieties. Whilst these varieties have been amply described in the literature, there is a general dearth of studies which focus on the advanced variety, as demonstrated by the learner who has proceeded from communicating under the inefficient constraints of the discourse-pragmatic plane to achieve greater communicative freedom by productively using the morpho-syntactic devices of the L2.

In contrast with the early-level learner, the productive use of morpho-syntactic devices is highly characteristic of the advanced learner. Given the high amount of formal input to which they have had access, spread over a long period of time,² the advanced learner is quite aware of the range of morpho-syntactic devices available in the L2: at this level, it is rare to find such a “naked” IL as that demonstrated by the pre-basic and basic varieties. However, whilst they may normally use such devices, it is the specifics of their actual use which pose problems for advanced learners. Although they tend not to make frequent overt errors, advanced learners tend to use morpho-syntactic devices within a more narrow range of values, rather than using forms within the full range of values available, e.g. Kihlstedt (1998) shows that the advanced learner of French has a tendency to use tense forms such as the *imparfait* to express just some of the aspectual values it denotes, rather than expressing all the aspectual values it can denote. Given that the advanced learner seems to prioritise certain functions or values associated with a form, whilst rarely manifesting other values, there seem to be two major characteristics which are symbolic of this level: *variability* and *selective fossilisation*.

² Towell (1987) suggests that the advanced learner has usually had nine years' contact with the L2.

Although SLA research has identified variability and selective fossilisation as characteristic, our knowledge of how both concepts actually apply to the advanced learner is less forthcoming: the advanced variety tends to be unknown territory within the wider SLA field in general. In contrast to the important information on the pre-basic and basic varieties, information on the advanced learner is based on a limited number of important studies, notably Bartning (1997a) and Coleman & Towell (1987). As such, many questions which have been answered for the pre-advanced learner are now being posed for the advanced learner. Such questions centre specifically around the issue of “level” in SLA research.

Whilst reference to various types of learner levels/varieties has already been made in this paper, namely, pre-basic, basic, and advanced, it is suggested, notably by Bartning (1997b), that these form part of continuum, which manifests the direction of progress that is possible during the acquisition process. Other stages along the continuum include near-native competence and bilingualism. The complete acquisition continuum may appear as follows:

Monolingualism < Pre-Basic Variety < Basic Variety < Post-Basic/Advanced Variety < Near-Native Competence < Bilingualism

Given such a range of learner varieties, it is necessary to identify the defining characteristics of the advanced level, which differentiate this level from preceding and subsequent levels, not just from a grammatical point of view, but within a communicative framework, taking account of the learner’s grammatical, discoursal, strategic, and sociolinguistic competence. Few studies actually compare the different varieties, but both Kihlstedt (1998) in her comparison with pre-advanced learners, and Schlyter (to appear) in her comparison with near-native learners, identify various distinguishing features which differentiate the advanced variety from the others mentioned.³

Whilst it is easy to consider the advanced variety, as a uniform stage along a progression between two others, it is important to consider the advanced variety in terms of a cycle, within which there are various sub-stages: Raupach (1987: 123) considers “progress in the learner’s language ability in terms of strictly-ordered more or less discrete stages of development”. Studies that take data from learners within the advanced cycle, show that within the cycle there are clear differences across learners (e.g. Kihlstedt 1998). Such differences are not to be considered in

³ Lambert (1997, Lambert et al. 1996) has also proposed distinguishing characteristics.

terms of the appearance of a particular morpheme, but rather as differences in the use made by different learners of such morphemes to encode different meanings. Such differences demonstrate the varying degree to which the learners' ILS may have grammaticalised all the values that may be encoded by a particular morpheme. By taking learners who demonstrate different levels of grammaticalisation, as defined in these terms, it is possible to demonstrate the possible outer limits of the cycle. The differences between the two extremes symbolise the direction of progress possible within the advanced cycle. When one considers progress in these terms, it is evident that the term "fossilisation" is quite inapt to this level. In particular, studies that make use of variationist methodology show that progress at this level must not be considered in terms of the addition of morphemes to the learner's IL, but rather in terms of the change in influence of the different constraints affecting the production of a particular morpheme (e.g. Regan 1995, 1996).⁴

Having focused on the difficulties of identifying the advanced cycle, I shall proceed by identifying some of the notable defining features, with particular reference to the expression of temporal relations, which have appeared in a preliminary study which was carried out as part of a larger study which investigates the acquisition of past time reference by Hiberno-English-speaking learners of French. It is necessary, however, to outline some of the differences in how the two languages concerned, namely French and English, encode past time reference.

Temporality in French and English

When describing temporal systems, it is important to distinguish three basic concepts, as identified by Reichenbach (1947). They are speech time (t_{sp}), situation time (t_{sit}), and reference time (t_{ref}). When speaking about an event in the past, one automatically creates a relationship of anteriority between the past and the time at which one is speaking, i.e. t_{sp} . t_{sit} and t_{ref} both refer to the event in the past. As such, the relationship between t_{sp} and the event in the past, as identified by t_{sit} and t_{ref} , is mainly a temporal one, and hence is concerned with tense. In this regard both languages concerned are quite similar, insofar as they both formally express past, present, and future tense. However, both languages

⁴ Constraints have to do with the range of influences leading to the (non-) appearance of a particular variable, e.g. the French negator *ne* tends to be deleted in informal style more often than in formal style. Formal and informal styles are both possible extralinguistic constraints on the deletion of *ne* in French.

English, has one form to express all the values of the imperfective, the *imparfait* (IMP). Examples in French are the following:

Habitual	je <i>jouais</i> au tennis chaque jour
Continuous	les enfants <i>criaient</i> quand je parlais
Progressive	elle ne <i>voulait</i> pas assister au concert
Non-progressive	à huit heures je <i>quittais</i> la maison

The fact that the past simple can be used in all of these contexts in English forces the learner to rely on context in order to distinguish whether the past simple expresses perfective or imperfective aspect (Andrews 1992). In other words the past simple in English can have different aspectual values, depending on context.

Moreover, whilst verbs in English can express imperfective or perfective aspect, e.g. I was eating v. I ate, stative verbs are rarely used in an imperfective form. In French, however, both aspects are formally possible.

perfective	j'ai su	I knew
imperfective	je savais	*I was knowing

In view of the different forms used by both languages, it is to be expected that past time reference is an area of difficulty for the learner of French. Before describing how these difficulties manifest themselves in the learner's IL, I shall first provide some background information to the study reported on here.

Study

The study is based on the oral productions of six university learners, specialising in French as part of their undergraduate studies. All speakers are native Hiberno-English speakers, but they also have a knowledge of the Irish language. They have had between five and six years' instruction at secondary school. After their second year at university, the learners spent a year living in the TL community, as part of their university course, where they were engaged in studies at a French university or business school. Some also spent some time working with a French company.

On completion of their "year abroad" programme, data were collected through sociolinguistic interviews between the researcher and the individual learners, and generally lasted one hour. Interviews were as informal as possible, so as to discourage learners from monitoring their output. The length of the interview, and in particular the sequence of topics discussed, were designed to ensure that learners spoke in a range of styles. Topics of discussion were based on Labov's

(1984) network of modules used in his studies of L1 variation. As such, they were both formal and informal. Questions put to the learners ensured that they spoke in past, present and future time frames. They also completed a questionnaire which provided background information.

Data were transcribed using standard techniques based on Blanche-Benveniste & Jeanjean (1986). An analysis was then carried out which investigated all verb forms referring to past time, namely the present, the PC, the IMP, and the pluperfect. Based on this analysis, each form was identified as an area of variability, or “zone of fragility” (Bartning 1997b, Lambert 1994), for the advanced learner.⁵

Temporality: a fragile zone in the advanced variety

During the early stages of acquisition, there is a general tendency for learners to acquire present morphology before past morphology, and to use such morphology in past time contexts. Given that the advanced learner has been *taught* the forms which specifically refer to the past, it is perhaps surprising to see present forms being used with past time reference in the advanced stage. The tendency has, however, also been noted in studies by Towell (1987), Lambert (1997) and Kihlstedt (1998).

(1) Interviewer: ils se *connaissaient*

Learner: oui oui aussi il /f/ il *connaît* très bien que mon père *doit* faire un
<turn> à droite

In the example given above, there is no time adverbial which might indicate that the present carries past time meaning. Instead the learner is relying on the pragmatic principle of mutual knowledge: in this case it is understood by the interviewer that the learner is referring to a car accident which occurred in the past. This mutual knowledge, along with the interviewer’s use of a past time form establishes the temporal framework.

There is, however, another hypothesis proposed by Andersen (1994) in the form of the congruence principal, which might explain the learner’s tendency to formally mark some verbs with past time morphology and to use other verbs in an unmarked form, namely the present. The congruence principle suggests that the learner’s preference for a particular tense to be used with particular verbs, is based on a relationship between the grammatical aspect carried by a particular tense, and

⁵ For a presentation of other possible “fragile zones”, see Howard (1998a).

the inherent lexical aspect of a particular verb. Inherent lexical aspect⁶ refers to the semantics of a verb, for example verbs such as *être* and *avoir* carry an inherent durative meaning, which is clearly different from the inherent punctual quality of verbs such as *apprendre* and *vendre*. Vendler (1967) categorises the former verbs as stative verbs, whilst the latter are accomplishment verbs. Other verb categories are as follows.

telic verbs	state	<i>être, avoir, aimer</i>
	activity	<i>jouer, aller</i>
atelic verbs	accomplishment	<i>naître, mourir</i>
	achievement	<i>construire une maison, peindre un tableau</i>

When categorising verbs it is important to take account of the whole verbal nucleus. For example, *lire* is an activity verb, whilst *lire un article* is an accomplishment: unlike *lire*, the latter example does not carry inherent duration: on a semantic level, what is important is the transition that the article undergoes from being unread to being read, and not the fact that time was taken to read the article. Hence, the important characteristic of telic verbs is the transition that is inherent to their meaning, whilst atelic verbs, on the other hand, do not involve such an inherent change of state, but rather carry inherent duration.

The congruence principal, as proposed by Andersen, suggests that the learner tends to use a marked perfective form with telic verbs, because they have an inherent punctual quality, with a distinct end-point. Perhaps because they are more marked punctually, it is easier for the learner to associate such verbs with a perfective form. Atelic verbs tend to be used with an unmarked form, namely the present, perhaps because their inherent durative quality renders them less prototypically perfective (or past). Examples of such tendencies can be found in the advanced variety:

(2) c'était l'expérience très. intéressant pour moi habiter dans une grande
maison et ils *ont* ils *ont* des des bonnes

Kihlstedt (1998) suggests that the use of the present form is an example of an unmarked base form in the learner's IL. Given that it generally tends not to involve

⁶ Inherent lexical aspect, also referred to as *mode d'action* or *Aktionsart*, is not to be confused with grammatical aspect, which refers specifically to perfective and imperfective aspect.

phonological morphology — all singular and third person plural forms of regular verbs in the present are phonologically identical — recourse to a present base form is cognitively simple for the learner, and avoids making an aspectual choice between the *PC* or the *IMP*. One learner actually said that when she didn't know which past form to use, she used the present because it was simpler. Use of the present in past time contexts is also common amongst native speakers, particularly in some tasks, e.g. Lambert (1997) found that native speakers consistently use the present in film retelling tasks.

However, although the use of an unmarked present certainly does appear in the advanced variety, the advanced learner does nonetheless make considerable use of marked past time forms, namely *PC* and *IMP* forms. However the learner has a tendency to overuse the *PC* with some verbs, and the *IMP* with others. It is particularly evident due to the overuse of lexical phrases or “frozen chunks”, e.g. *il y avait, c'était*. Verbs such as *être* and *avoir*, as well as modal verbs, such as *pouvoir* and *vouloir*, are notably used in their *IMP* forms, and rarely in their *PC* forms. Whilst there are instances where the *IMP* is obligatory, there are situations where the *PC* would better convey the aspectual meaning required.

(3) au début j'*avais* peur mais puis eh je *commençais* à m'énervier

In (3) the *PC* might be expected as the learner is describing a sequence of events, indicated by « *au début* », « *puis* », but by using an *IMP* form, the learner conveys imperfective meaning. It appears that the learner has acquired the *IMP* form, but has failed to fully grasp the aspectual meaning associated with this form.

The congruence principal can also explain the learner's preference to use particular verbs with a particular past tense. For reasons to do with verb semantics, as mentioned previously, it seems that the learner tends to use telic verbs with a perfective form, namely the *PC*, whereas atelic verbs lend themselves better to an imperfective form, namely the *IMP*. Such a tendency to use particular verbs with a particular aspect is at the heart of the Aspect Hypothesis, also proposed by Andersen (1991).

Whilst the aspect hypothesis may well explain the clear tendency by the advanced learner to express stative verbs with the *IMP*, it seems that the hypothesis may only apply to certain categories of verbs, and not to others. Wiberg (1996) has similar findings. In my corpus, for example, whilst it seems that stative verbs are mainly used in the *IMP*, activity verbs, although atelic, are also used with the *PC*.

(4) *je suis allé* parce que j'avais un copain qui qui habitait

Although less common, examples of stative verbs being used with the PC do occur.

(5) *je suis restée* dans la cité universitaire et tout le monde rentrait chez eux
et fermait les portes et on ne les revoyait pas pendant toute la nuit

By using the PC in both examples, the learner provides a perfective perspective, thus avoiding an imperfective aspect, which would have been more appropriate, given that the events being described were, in context, of a durative or frequentative nature. Whilst this is not an overt error, the learner clearly has not acquired these particular aspectual values of the IMP. The tendency to use the PC in contexts where the IMP would be more appropriate, can be seen with other verbs.

(6) *nous avons mangé* plutôt des pizzas

(7) *nous *avons sorti* en ville pour pour manger c'était ça me plaisait

In this latter example, the learner appears not to realise the habitual/imperfective meaning associated with the *imparfait* in the second verb form, and thus contradicts this meaning by using a perfective form in the first verb form. This is related to difficulties with tense co-ordination. Dewaele (1994) has similar findings.

Although the Aspect Hypothesis does not seem to apply to all verb categories at this level, the aspect hypothesis is nonetheless supported in studies investigating the pre-advanced learner, e.g. Bardovi-Harlig (1992a), Bardovi-Harlig & Bergström (1996), Robison (1990) and Kaplan (1987). Meisel (1987) finds that the role played by aspect is marginal. However, most of these studies investigated less-advanced learners, and so it is difficult to draw conclusions about the relevance of the aspect hypothesis to the advanced learner. As previously stated, it seems that it only applies in part to some verbs produced by the learners in this study, namely over-used expressions such as *c'était* and *il y avait*. A possible explanation to such findings may have to do with the type of discourse produced by the learner. For example discourse that is of a descriptive nature lends itself better to the IMP, whilst discourse with a high-level of temporal movement is typically the domain of the PC. Such hypotheses are embodied in the Discourse Hypothesis (Dowty 1979) which suggests that there is a tendency to mark verbs that temporally move the story-line forward, i.e. verbs occurring in foreground clauses, and to leave unmarked those verbs which merely provide

descriptive background information, and which, as such, are not a necessary part of the temporal progression in the story. The latter verbs occur in background clauses:

L' <i>avion a atterri</i>	Foreground
Il <i>faisait</i> chaud	Background
Je <i>suis descendu</i> de l' <i>avion</i>	Foreground
J' <i>avais</i> soif	Background

Studies by Flashner (1989) and Bardovi-Harlig (1992b) support this hypothesis. However Kumpf (1984) has opposing findings. Véronique (1987) found that some learners mark foreground events, and others mark background events. With regard to the advanced learner, the hypothesis certainly is attractive in that it goes a long way to explaining the almost total use by learners in this study of the IMP with verbs such as *avoir* or *être*, or the lexical phrases mentioned above, which are regularly used by learners for descriptions, and hence, in background clauses. The large extent to which these particular verbs appear in the IMP category, compared with the relative infrequency of other verbs to express temporal movement, suggests that the type of text, i.e. descriptive narrative as opposed to personal retellings, etc, may be a more important factor than actual verb semantics. Wiberg (1996), in her analysis of tense choice by learners producing a variety of text types, also suggests that text type has important repercussions for the choice of tense form.

It is difficult to decide which of the two hypotheses presented here governs the advanced learner's choice of past tense form. Previous studies that have compared the aspect hypothesis against the discourse hypothesis have been extremely limited, and those that do exist have been mainly exploratory in nature (see Housen 1997, Bardovi-Harlig 1994). Indeed, given that each hypothesis simply tests for the appearance of a particular tense form, and not for the meaning or aspectual value encoded by that form, it may be more appropriate to consider the role of other factors, such as grammatical aspect, as an explanation for the variation manifested by the advanced learner. For example, although learners make few overt errors in their actual use of the IMP, the form seems not to be used with the full range of its grammatical aspectual values. Kihlstedt (1998) suggests that it is only the *very* advanced learner who acquires all the aspectual values that may possibly be expressed by the IMP. She shows that its non-progressive value is

the very last to be acquired, whereas its frequentative or progressive values are acquired earlier. The hypotheses mentioned above cannot explain such an acquisition sequence. Studies which take account of such factors certainly provide a richer description of the advanced learner's variable grammar.

The remaining form used by learners in past time contexts is the *plus-que-parfait* (PQP). Although English has an equivalent form, the past perfect, the use of both forms does not fully correspond. In English there are many contexts where the past perfect tends not to be obligatory, but rather, tends to be replaced by the past simple. In French, however, the PQP is obligatory and there are no contexts where it is facultative. The advanced learner tends to underuse the PQP, by replacing it with the PC, which is not allowed in French. Similar findings are found in Kihlstedt (1998).

(8)elle est allée au medium parce que son père *est mort*

Having briefly sketched the variable features particular to the temporal system of the advanced variety, the next section will examine the place of the advanced learner's variable grammar within current SLA research and theory.

Discussion

Whilst the features outlined in the previous section are based on a preliminary analysis of a small group of learners, other studies of the advanced variety nonetheless emphasise similar variable features, and as such, point to the universal tendency of such characteristics in the advanced variety, irrespective of any effect for a particular L1. Such findings appear in the following studies of the acquisition of French: Kihlstedt (1998), and Schlyter (1996) both working on Swedish learners of French; Bergström (1997, Bardovi-Harlig & Bergström 1996) working on American-English learners of French; and Harley (1992, Harley & Swain 1978) working on the Canadian immersion studies of French. Studies investigating learners of other TLS, also point to similar variable features in the area of past time reference: Lambert (1998) working on French learners of English; Mukattash (1986) working on Jordanian Arabic-speaking learners of English; Bardovi-Harlig & Bofman (1989) working on learners of English with various L1s; and Lennon (1991) working with German learners of English; Azevedo (1980), and Lafford & Collentine (1987) working on a Spanish database, as well as VanPatten (1987) studying the acquisition of *ser* and *estar*. These studies use various elicitation techniques which engage the learner in different

types of tasks, but little effect is found for differences across task type. Type of media also seems irrelevant. Although most of the studies mentioned above are based on learners' oral productions, similar findings are also found in studies investigating learners' written productions (notably Waller 1993).

However, whilst similar features occur irrespective of a particular TL, specific differences do occur between learners of different source languages. In a preliminary study of the distribution of tense forms used by the learners of this study, it was found that they prioritised the IMP by underusing the PC (see Howard 1998b). On the other hand, Kihlstedt (1998), in her study of Swedish learners of French, finds that learners tend to overuse the PC compared with the IMP. Whilst it is difficult to conclude that such differences are a result of the learners' different L1s, they nonetheless point to the clear imbalance that is present in the learner's temporal system.

It is this imbalance that is a source of intrigue. Whilst a similar imbalance occurs during the early stages of L1 acquisition (Bronckart & Sinclair 1973, Bloom et al. 1980), the native speaker eventually attains a more balanced use of the different tense forms. It is important to consider the possible role of linguistic input in bringing about a more balanced use, which might ensure that the L2 learner expresses all the values of each tense, particularly those of the IMP. In response to the type of progress they would consider appropriate to their level, most learners suggested that more informal contact with the L2, possibly in the TL community would be desirable. Learners suggested that this would be necessary for their fluency, rather than actually acquiring more formal knowledge. Learners suggested that they knew the past time forms, but had difficulty putting such declarative knowledge into practice. This would point to deficiencies in their procedural knowledge. Such difficulties in real time planning have appeared in a study by Towell et al. (1996).⁷

Such deficiencies point to the downfalls of the formal learning route taken by these learners. Studies of learners who have had access to more informal L2 contact point to the advantages of a longer stay in the TL community for these learners, particularly in bringing about improvements in the proceduralisation or automatisisation of declarative knowledge (Freed 1995a). Linguistic theory would certainly support such an argument. Linguistic theory suggests that those who

⁷ Ringbom (1993) and Miemois (1993), working on learners of English, propose similar findings.

learn the L2 through instruction do not attain the same type of knowledge as the learner who has access to natural L2 input. Krashen (1988) suggests that contact with formal L2 input simply brings about conscious *learning* of the L2 which is of little benefit for real language use. Such real language use necessitates *acquisition* brought about by access to comprehensible L2 input which does not require conscious formal analysis of the L2 forms. Moreover, Pica (1983) suggests that, although instruction may well try to explain all the constraints surrounding the use of a particular morpheme — for example she examines the definite article in English — such input cannot possibly explain the full range of uses to which a form can be put, in the same way as authentic usage manifested by informal input. Proof for such a hypothesis can be found in a study by Ruin (1996) which investigates the written productions of advanced learners. Because the written medium is not as instantaneous as the oral medium, learners in his study had time to access their formal knowledge of the L2 before writing. Even with such time benefits, deficiencies in their written productions were evident. Their formal L2 input had failed to bring about native-like usage.

However it should be noted that although many studies emphasise the benefits of informal input over formal input, it is important to consider the limitations of the informal input available in the TL community. Studies of learners who have lived in the TL community for considerably longer than the advanced learner show that the former learners do not acquire the same TL intuitions as the native speaker. Such studies, which require learners to take grammatical judgment tests, notably Coppieters (1987) and Birdsong (1992), point to the discrepancies that remain between native intuitions and near-native intuitions. Schwartz (1993) suggests that the formal L2 input to which the adult learner has access, feeds into a different module in the brain, than the module responsible for L1 acquisition, i.e. native(-like) proficiency. Such issues point to the limitations of the TL community in bringing about target-like knowledge.⁸ On being questioned about the role of their year of residence in France as a factor in their acquisition of French, the learners in this study point to the fact that making grammatical errors of the type discussed

⁸ However, Ioup et al. (1994), in their study of the L2 learner's ultimate level of attainment, found no characteristics which might distinguish between a particular learner in their study and the native speaker. This particular learner had apparently progressed from near-native competence to attain native-like proficiency.

here tends not be of significant importance during communication in the TL community. One possible explanation is the following.

Communication in the TL community is mainly based on the exchange of meaning: error in the morphemes attached to the forms used to express such meaning tends not to infringe upon the exchange of meaning, mainly because the morphemes we are talking about are communicatively redundant. The advanced learner's IL certainly is communicatively functional, insofar as learners can generally express quite adequately whatever they want to say. However it is this communicative functionalism which may prevent further formal development. Corder (1976:22) suggests that "when the learner's IL grammar reaches that stage of elaboration which enables him to communicate adequately for his purposes with the native speaker, his motive to improve his knowledge or elaborate his approximative system disappears". Bardovi-Harlig & Bofman (1989) also suggest that learners have less motivation for morphological development, once they achieve control over the syntactic constraints of the L2. By achieving the high level of syntactic control that they manifest, learners at the advanced stage demonstrate greater communicative freedom.

Motivation aside, but perhaps as a result of this communicative efficiency, learners also fail to consciously realise the many functions not expressed by their IL. For example, the expression of the more subtle aspectual values of the IMP tends to be the exception rather than the rule. When asked about the type of progress necessary to bring about more target-like use, the learners of this study saw future progress in terms of fluency practice, rather than any type of formal development. Because they are communicatively functional, the learners in this study seem unaware of just how variable their IL forms are, compared with target-like use. Such lack of awareness possibly results from the fact that during communication, learners must first understand the meaning of the input addressed to them, before they can notice the form used to express such meaning. Such a focus on form tends to be cognitively demanding for learners (VanPatten 1990). Such findings are all the more true when one considers the insalience of the past time morphemes. The phonetic similarity of forms such as *j'ai donné* and *je donnais* renders them quite insalient in the L2 input.

Conclusion

The issues outlined in the previous section point to the richness of the advanced variety as an area of study of the grammaticalisation process. In the past there has been a tendency to apply the concept of grammaticalisation mainly to the pre-advanced stages, as a cover term for the gradual appearance of the various L2 morphemes in the learner's IL. Such a tendency is perhaps a result of the morpheme studies which described the grammaticalisation process from such a perspective, without any insight into the specific functions of such morphemes in the learner's IL. As a result, SLA research has tended to ignore the advanced variety: this variety was considered perhaps less dynamic mainly because most of the L2 morphemes normally appear in this variety. However, grammaticalisation in the advanced variety must be considered, not necessarily in terms of the addition of morphemes, but rather in terms of a change in values encoded by the morphemes already present.

Perhaps because of the failure to reconceptualise grammaticalisation in the terms just outlined, most of the studies focusing on grammaticalisation have been carried out on the pre-advanced variety. Rather, the advanced variety has tended to lend itself to studies within a sociolinguistic or phonological framework, e.g. Regan (1995, 1996, 1997) and Palmen et al. (1997). In the case of sociolinguistics, this is possibly due to the fact that pre-advanced varieties do not lend themselves particularly well to a study of sociolinguistic competence, simply because the learner's grammatical repertoire is not particularly well developed.

However, thanks to the modern climate which is allowing more learners to achieve advanced status, studies of their variety from a grammatical point of view are now needed more than ever. With so many university students specialising in modern languages as part of their degree programmes, it is necessary to describe the problem well-known to instructors and learners alike: although they do not make overt errors, what is it about their IL that nonetheless gives it that omnipresent non-target-like quality? Such a problem calls for in-depth analyses of the various factors behind the variation manifested at this level. Thanks to more sophisticated variation methodology available, which was first used in a sociolinguistic framework, but which can be applied to the processes of grammaticalisation, we are now in a position to investigate the interrelationship between such factors. Moreover, by taking data from learners over time, such

methodology allows us to investigate the subtle changes in influence of such factors which are behind the highly dynamic nature of the advanced variety.

With such a dynamic IL, the advanced variety is attracting the interest of SLA research, which is now ready to progress from its ample investigation of the pre-advanced variety. As the field attempts to redress this imbalance, advanced learners are on their way to ridding themselves of their poor relation status, compared to pre-advanced learners, as a topic of investigation in SLA research!

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- Martin Howard
Department of French
University College, Dublin