On the relationship between sociolinguistic and grammatical development. A longitudinal case-study of L2 French

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Abstract

While SLA studies on the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation have primarily illuminated the impact of social and socio-biographic factors on such development, this paper is a response to the need for studies of the relationship between sociolinguistic development and other components of the learner's L2 linguistic repertoire, such as grammatical development, which is the focus of this study. With the aim of exploring the hypothesis that grammatical development is a pre-requisite to sociolinguistic development, the study presents quantitative findings which compare longitudinal development on a number of grammatical and sociolinguistic features in the case of Irish university learners of French. Findings suggest that while grammatical development may be important, it may be not enough, such that it is naturalistic exposure which provides the necessary impetus for such sociolinguistic development. Moreover, the extent of grammatical development in terms of the range of grammatical features which are productively used within the learner's linguistic repertoire is a further factor which complexifies the issue.

Introduction

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research has in recent years seen a new wave of research emerge on the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation in a second language (L2), where the focus is placed on the learner's variable use of two or more sociolinguistic variants

which express the same meaning in context. Classic examples concern the phonological alternation between /ng/ and /n/ and t/d deletion in English, or *ne* and /l/ deletion in French, as exemplified respectively in (1)-(4):

(1)   I'm watchin(g) TV.

(2)   I rea(d) the book.

(3)   Je (ne) comprends pas.

        'I don't understand.'

(4)   I(l) sort souvent.

        'He often goes out.'

Such variation relates to the horizontal axis, where at a particular moment, the speaker, be (s)he a native or L2 speaker chooses either variant, reflecting the speaker's sociolinguistic competence. Sociolinguistic competence involves choosing a variant that is appropriate in context depending on a range of socio-stylistic factors such as the speaker's interlocutor, topic of conversation, place of interaction and speech style. In his concept of communicative competence, Hymes (1974) assigns integral status to sociolinguistic competence as a component of the speaker's overall communicative competence, be (s)he a native speaker or an L2 speaker. (See also Labov's 2001 work, whose original conceptualisation of linguistic variation as an integral aspect of our language use was a reaction against the generative paradigm of theoretical linguistics which ignored such variation to focus solely on the

invariant.) Such variation whereby our language usage differs according to the specificity of the social context is not a communicative luxury, but rather characterises all languages.

While native speakers are most adept at making the appropriate sociolinguistic choice, the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation poses a particular challenge to the L2 speaker. In contrast, while sociolinguistic variation may not be a feature of the L2 user's speech repertoire until quite an advanced stage of acquisition, linguistic variation relating to the vertical axis of L2 development is highly characteristic of L2 speech. Such variation relates less to the choice made between two native-like variants which carry a differential sociolinguistic value in the target language. Rather, it relates to the learner's use of a non-native-like form before the native-like form emerges, reflecting the learner's grammatical development over time in the L2. (For discussion of the distinction between the horizontal and vertical axes in L2 acquisition, as introduced by Corder 1981, see Ellis 1985; Young 1988.) Examples of such variation abound, such as in the case of negation in L2 English where the learner uses pre-verbal 'no' before 'don't' emerges in his/her language system. A further example concerns past time marking, where the learner uses the present form in past time contexts before the simple past emerges. However, even when the native-like form emerges, the learner may continue to use the non-native-like form in alternation with the native-like one, before use of the latter wanes. Such variation on the vertical axis recedes as the learner gains increasing control in his/her use of native-like forms over time. Indeed, in the case of some linguistic variables characteristic of L2 acquisition, such a period of variation continues into the very late stages of acquisition, such as in the case of the marking of past time, aspect, and gender, with non-native-like forms still observable, although their presence may be less tangible than in the less advanced stages of acquisition.

Linguistic variation, as opposed to sociolinguistic variation, has been the focus of attention over a relatively longer period in SLA research, where early studies date back to the 1970s (see for example Adamson 1988; Dickerson 1975; Tarone 1988; Wolfson and Judd 1983). On the one hand, such study has focused on the emergence of the L2 morpho-syntactic forms over time (see, for example, Bardovi-Harlig 1999; Dietrich et al. 1995; Giacalone Ramat 1992; Housen 2002; Larsen-Freeman 1975, 1976; Myles 2005). On the other hand, SLA research has also focused attention on the patterns of variation underlying L2 morpho-syntactic usage when the various forms have emerged such as in the case of the use tense-aspect morphology, the expression of number and person through verb morphology, gender attribution and agreement, and plural marking (see for example Bardovi-Harlig 2000; Bayley 1996; Dewaele and Véronique 2001; Howard 2006a; Young 1989).

Acquisition of sociolinguistic variation

While linguistic variation is evident from the early stages of L2 acquisition, the emergence of sociolinguistic variation is generally seen to be a later phenomenon, requiring stability on use of the L2 morpho-syntax. For example, citing Young (1988), Adamson and Regan (1991:2) write: "second language learners must progress along the vertical continuum before they can progress along the horizontal continuum". Evidence in support of such a claim is partially provided in the findings of this body of SLA research on the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation, which particularly point to the underuse of informal sociolinguistic variants by the instructed L2 learner, who in turn, overuses formal variants compared to native speakers. Even after many years of learning the L2, some studies report the case of learners who simply do not use the informal variant, but instead rely solely on the formal variant. Regan's (1996)

study of Anglophone university learners who had been learning French for seven years prior to the commencement of the study, is an excellent case in point. Focusing on variable *ne* deletion as an aspect of the expression of negation in French, the author reports that even with extensive educational input, *ne* deletion was clearly missing from their sociolinguistic repertoire. This is in spite of the fact that the more formal variant of 'ne' retention was structurally the more complex form, involving both a pre-verbal and post-verbal marker. As one of the earliest studies in this wave of sociolinguistic study, Regan's work has been complemented by a range of studies which confirm her findings across a range of sociolinguistic variables for learners in different learning contexts. (See, for example, studies of phonological variables by Howard et al. 2006 in the case of /l/ deletion in French and Uritescu et al. 2004 in the case of schwa deletion in French, Dewaele and Regan 2002 and Nadasdi et al. 2008 in the case of lexical variation, and Mougeon et al. 2010 in the case of a range of variable types, including other grammatical and discursive ones.)

The underuse and even non-use of informal variants by classroom learners may be explained in terms of an effect for the limited frequency of use of such variants in classroom input. For example, Rehner and Mougeon (2003) carried out a survey of sociolinguistic usage in textbooks and teacher input, finding that formal variants, as opposed to informal ones, are much favoured. However, the classroom learners in the studies conducted are generally advanced learners in a university context who have been learning the L2 for many years (see work by Dewaele 2002, 2004a, 2004b; Howard 2006b, and Regan 1995), while other studies are based on findings in an immersion context (see Mougeon et al. 2010). Moreover, while the informal variants may not be frequent in classroom input, that is not to say that they do not occur at all. Classroom learners do therefore have some exposure to them during everyday classroom interaction, especially during the native speaker conversation classes

which the learners in the university studies followed, as well as in the immersion setting in the studies carried out by Mougeon and his colleagues. Informal L2 contact outside the classroom through media resources and native-speaker friends also constitutes an important means of exposure.

As against the limited benefits of classroom input for sociolinguistic development, a highly positive effect for naturalistic exposure has been noted across the studies, pointing to its crucial impetus for the emergence of informal variants in instructed learners who avail of opportunities to spend time in the target language community, or engage actively in informal L2 contact outside the classroom through media resources and native-speaker friends (see, for example, Dewaele 2002, 2004a, 2004b; Dewaele and Regan 2002; Howard 2006b; Mougeon et al. 2010; Regan 1996). Findings suggest that learners who report such informal naturalistic exposure demonstrate higher levels of use of informal variants compared to learners who have not experienced such exposure. Mougeon et al. (2010) also report an effect for the duration of naturalistic exposure during a stay abroad, whereby learners who have enjoyed longer stays in the target language community, make more frequent use of informal variants compared to learners who have had shorter stays.

Relating sociolinguistic variation to grammatical development

While informal L2 contact, be it in the target language community or without, seems to play a pivotal role in the development of sociolinguistic variation, a curious omission within the literature on L2 sociolinguistic development is that of the relationship between sociolinguistic development and grammatical development. While previous studies report a highly positive

effect for naturalistic exposure on sociolinguistic development in the case of learners who were generally advanced in their grammatical development, it remains unclear how naturalistic exposure might bring about equally beneficial gains in less advanced learners. In other words, the role of grammatical proficiency in sociolinguistic development is a factor which remains to be investigated. Such an issue is especially glaring when we consider that early SLA studies hypothesized that a high level of grammatical development underlies sociolinguistic development. At best, some studies indicate that their learners were advanced learners, such that it is to be presumed that they evidenced a high level of grammatical development prior to the emergence of sociolinguistic variation in their language use. As an exception in the literature, Dewaele (2002) reports a correlation between his learners' morpho-lexical accuracy and their use of the first person plural pronoun *on* as opposed to *nous* as a sociolinguistic feature of L2 French. In a further study, Dewaele (2004b) similarly reports a link between their proficiency level and their use of colloquial vocabulary. However, the author cautions that "[P]roficiency seems to be a pre-requisite, but not the only factor, for actual use of colloquial vocabulary" (Dewaele 2004a: 313). In contrast, Tyne (2009) seems to call into question the hypothesis that proficiency level is a contributing factor to sociolinguistic development. With regard to wider stylistic patterns of speech, he suggests that their acquisition can be initiated quite early on.

Tyne's hypothesis is partially confirmed by work on beginner learners. For example, Marriott's (1995) work on the socio-pragmatic development evidenced by her Australian learners spending a year in Japan is especially significant. Through a pre- and post-test comparison, she finds that even her beginner learners made substantial sociolinguistic gains on their use of honorific forms in Japanese. While studies of beginner learners are particularly missing in the recent wave of SLA sociolinguistic studies, Marriott's findings in

a naturalistic environment suggest that early sociolinguistic development is possible. However, since she does not detail the learners' grammatical development, it is unclear whether such sociolinguistic development occurred in tandem with corresponding grammatical development, or in spite of limited grammatical development. Indeed, if it is possible for beginner learners to evidence sociolinguistic development quite early on in the acquisition process, at least in a naturalistic context, an interesting question concerns how such early sociolinguistic skills might impact their grammatical development. Since studies of less advanced naturalistic learners are clearly missing in the literature on sociolinguistic development, it is a question that remains to be answered.

As an area which has received little attention, and given the lack of agreement across those studies which do consider the issue of proficiency level, the study we present here aims to redress the situation. The study takes as its central focus the specificity of the relationship holding between sociolinguistic development and grammatical development, by exploring the hypothesis that grammatical development may be a pre-requisite to sociolinguistic development. A number of more specific research questions stem from this general hypothesis.

Research questions

A first general question underlying the study aims to explore grammatical development in relation to sociolinguistic development with a view to tracking how grammatical development may emerge to a greater or lesser extent than sociolinguistic variation.

A second issue concerns the relationship between use of specific grammatical features and sociolinguistic development. For example, how extensive does grammatical development need to be in terms of the range of grammatical features that the learner uses in order for sociolinguistic development to occur? Such a question allows us to be more specific as to what type of grammatical development facilitates sociolinguistic development.

Thirdly, while the issue of grammatical development has been presented in early research as a pre-requisite to sociolinguistic development, more recent research has identified naturalistic and informal L2 exposure as an important impetus for sociolinguistic development. The question therefore arises as to whether naturalistic exposure may be a more important factor than the learner's level of grammatical development in the emergence of sociolinguistic variation, or whether the impact of naturalistic exposure on sociolinguistic variation may require extensive grammatical development in the first instance.

Finally, while we know that naturalistic exposure is highly conducive to sociolinguistic development, we also need to consider the impact of such exposure on grammatical development. A comparison of grammatical and sociolinguistic development is important as a means of elucidating whether sociolinguistic variation may be more susceptible to development in a naturalistic context than grammatical competence.

Study

Participants and data elicitation

The study is based on a quantitative analysis of longitudinal spoken data elicited from five university learners of French in Ireland. Prior to the study, the learners had previously been learning French for six years at secondary school, and for two years at university where they were specialising in French as part of their undergraduate degree programme. For their university programme of study in French, the learners followed a language programme which involved a twice-weekly one-hour written language class, and a weekly one-hour oral class. Their written language course required extensive writing and reading of authentic documents, and aimed to develop a high level of proficiency in the target language through translation, free writing and grammar exercises. The learners' spoken class was conducted by a native speaker, and was based on discussion of contemporary topics relating to the francophone world. A number of content courses relating to French literature and society complemented the learners' language course. These courses required extensive reading and discussion of French literary works.

The learners volunteered to participate in the project, but were not aware of its aims. For the purposes of the project, data were elicited using Labov's (1984) sociolinguistic interview which aims to elicit natural, spontaneous discourse. The interviews lasted one hour, and were conducted by the author who demonstrates near-native proficiency in the target language. The interviews were not formal, where formal speech features befitting a more formal style would be expected. Rather, informal conversational topics were especially useful in guiding the learners to speak in an unmonitored style, and were chosen to reflect the learners' interests such as hobbies and pastimes, vacations, and visits to France. More formal topics such as studies, career, and franco-Irish relations were only introduced towards the end of the interviews. Labov's famous 'Danger of death' and 'Premonitions' modules were also included, where the learners were invited to speak about events where they were personally

emotionally involved, thereby further minimising the speakers' attention to their speech. A further strategy adopted was Labov's Principle of Tangential Shifting, whereby the interviewer followed the direction taken by the learners in introducing new content in the conversation. Following their elicitation, the data were transcribed into standard orthography following the transcription conventions proposed for French by Blanche-Benveniste and Jeanjean (1987).

The data were collected at two intervals, immediately before and after the learners had spent a year abroad in France. The year abroad was an optional component of the learners' programme of study, and involved studying at one of a number of partner universities in France under the Erasmus exchange programme in Europe. While there was a small number of other Irish students in each university, the learners in this study did not attend the same university. During their stay in France, the learners were accommodated in the university halls of residence, which facilitated contact with native speaker students, as well as with other international students, although they lived alone as individuals. For their programme of study in France, they were required to follow courses similarly taken by their native speaker counterparts. These focused on French literature and culture, translation, as well as courses in the students' other subject area, such as history, geography, and economics. The learners were therefore fully registered within their subject departments, and were required to successfully complete course assessments in the same way as native speaker students.

In order to gain further insight into the learners' L1 and L2 contact during their period of residence abroad, an ethnolinguistic questionnaire complemented the insights gained during the sociolinguistic interview with each learner. The learners reported frequent contact with

native speakers of the target language, both in terms of active participation in social networks with L2 native speaker peers, as well as in the form of more passive engagement with the L2 input through reading and media outlets. Moreover, in terms of the type of native speaker contact, the learners reported frequent participation in interactional encounters such as conversations with native speaker friends, as opposed to mere transactional encounters of a routine nature that occur in everyday situations, such as in a café or business enterprise. Such contact was confirmed for each learner by specific examples such as membership of a local soccer team, visits to the family homes of native speaker friends, spending time at friends' apartments, following TV series, and participation in various social activities as part of a native speaker social network.

Notwithstanding, it is important to note that our learners by no means abandoned their L1 social network, but rather this was complemented by active participation in an L2 network. This is unsurprising, given that none of the learners attended the foreign university as a sole student, but rather travelled in small groups of 2-3 students. Moreover, in each university, there was a large foreign student community, including anglophone speakers from other countries. This foreign student community constituted a further social network for the learners.

In sum, the learners reported regular opportunities to access the target language through various activities within the different social networks that they became members of. That access was quite varied, ranging from an academic context to more informal interaction with their peers. In the latter case, contact extended to a familial environment which they were

invited to visit on occasion, although their residence in the student halls obviously differed from a home-stay or apartment-sharing environment.

Data analysis

The data analysis was twofold, involving extraction of a number of sociolinguistic variables on the one hand, and a number of grammatical features on the other hand. In particular, by capturing grammatical development using real speech data, as opposed to relying on a test of general language proficiency, the study has the advantage of providing a detailed profile of the learners' use of various grammatical features. Such detail contrasts with the limited insights that a traditional language proficiency test allows by merely capturing development in terms of a single test score (for discussion, see Freed 1995). In contrast, as a case-study of five learners within a wider project on study abroad, the data elicited here aimed to provide extensive longitudinal data for each learner in the spoken domain. In particular, the choice and design of the conversational modules used in the interviews, along with the duration of the interviews conducted with each learner, ensured that a sufficient range of tokens of each variable under investigation in the study was produced by the individual learners.

The sociolinguistic variables are well-known features in French, namely *ne* deletion, /l/ deletion, variable *nous*/*on* usage, variable use of future time markers, and variable liaison realisation, as exemplified in (5)-(9). *Ne* deletion relates to the expression of negation, whereby deletion of the pre-verbal *ne* constitutes the informal variant in contrast with its more formal co-variant when it is retained, as exemplified in (5). Such retention, however, is redundant since French also requires use of the post-verbal negative particle, *pas*. Our second

variable concerns /l/ deletion, occurrence of which is generally restricted to word-final

position in the 3rd person subject pronouns *il* (he/it), *elle* (she/it) and *ils/elles* (they

[masc./fem.]), as exemplified in (6). It also occurs in word-final and word-median position in

some nouns, such as *exemple* (example). Such phonological deletion constitutes an informal

variant, in contrast with its retention. The third variable concerns alternation in use of the 1st

person plural subject pronouns, *nous* and *on* where the latter constitutes the more informal

variant. In the case of future time marking, French imposes a three-way morphological choice

between the periphrastic future with *aller* (to go) which constitutes the informal variant in

contrast with its more formal covariant of the inflected future, as exemplified in (8). A third

form used for future time reference is the present futurate. Our final variable concerns the

socio-phonological feature of liaison which relates to the variable realisation of a word-final

consonant before a following word beginning with a vowel, as exemplified in (9). Such

realisation constitutes the formal variant, in contrast with non-realisation which is deemed

more neutral.

(5) *ne* deletion

Je (ne) comprends pas.

'I don't understand.'

(6) /l/ deletion

I(l) y a.

'There is.'

(7) *nous/on* variation

On sort. vs. Nous sortons.

'We are going out.'

(8) Variable marking of futurity

Je sortirai. [inflected form] vs. Je vais sortir. [periphrastic form] vs. Je sors. [present

futurate].

'I will go out.'

(9) Variable liaison realisation

Je suis_arrivé en retard. vs. Je suis. arrivé en retard.

'I arrived late.'

The variables chosen are by no means rare in the target language. Moreover, use of their

informal variant is highly frequent in everyday conversation, and even increasingly so in a

more formal speech register, as well as in informal written discourse. For example, in the

case of *ne* deletion and use of *on*, native speaker studies increasingly report near-categorical

levels of use in everyday speech. As such, the variants are in no way marked or stigmatised,

but rather their sociolinguistic value is becoming increasingly neutral. Such characteristics of

use render the variants entirely appropriate in the conversational style elicited from our

learner-informants. In fact, given their frequency of use among native speakers, non-use of

the informal variants by our learners could be deemed inappropriate, assigning an overly

formal quality to the learners' speech which would be clearly at odds with the conversational

style adopted by their native speaker peers in everyday discourse. For the purposes of this

study, we do not therefore attempt to evaluate their sociolinguistic skills in terms of assigning

an 'appropriate/inappropriate' value to their use of the variants in context. Rather, in attempting to provide an overview of their sociolinguistic repertoire in relation to their grammatical skills, the results we will present are based on the learners' total level of use of each variant.

The grammatical features concern the learners' use of verbal morphology to express various conceptual entities, such as past time, futurity, conditionality, modality, and number and person which constitute well-known areas of difficulty for the L2 learner of French. A number of factors led us to focus our analysis on verb morphology as an indicator of grammatical proficiency. A first factor concerned its frequency in the data which contrasts with some other morphological features such as adjectival agreement which is not necessarily a frequent phenomenon. Verb morphology has also been clearly identified in SLA research on the advanced learner variety as displaying significant variation in the areas indicated, and, as such, constitutes a defining trait of this learner variety (see Bartning 1997, 2009). This is unlike other morpho-syntactic aspects of the advanced learner's grammatical development, such as the use of the present, use of articles and word-order where the learner has attained much higher levels of stability, and where the scope for development is more restricted. A final issue concerned the wide range of verb forms in target language French, such that the study of verb morphology allows considerable scope to compare development across different verb forms in the expression of wide-ranging functional values. As such, the focus on verb morphology contrasts with other grammatical features whose formal and functional range is more restricted in scope of analysis.

In the case of past time contexts, the forms concerned the learners' use of the *passé composé* (PC) and the *imparfait* (IMP) to express the (im)perfect(ive) distinction in French. However, other forms concerned the present which the learners use in past time contexts, as well as the *plus-que-parfait* (PQP), used in reverse-order reporting. Future time forms concerned the inflected form, the periphrastic form, and the present futurate which constitute at once both a grammatical and a sociolinguistic variable in target language French. Other forms explored concern the conditional form and the subjunctive, as well as the learners' overuse of singular forms in 3rd person plural contexts with irregular verbs in the present. (Unlike regular verbs, irregular verbs require a morpho-phonological distinction between 3rd person singular and plural forms.) As we previously noted, the range of morphological forms reflects our aim to explore development across various verb forms, as opposed to focusing on a single marker.

While the markers of past time were highly frequent, the other forms were generally less frequent, but were by no means infrequent. That is to say, in designing the conversational modules which formed the basis of the interviews conducted, we were especially careful to ensure that they would oblige the learners to produce a number of each functional context where the forms are deemed obligatory in target language French. In particular, certain topics were particularly conducive to the production of specific functional contexts where use of a specific verb form could be expected. Thus, while some learners produced a very limited number of such verb forms, they did nonetheless produce the functional contexts where those forms would be expected, pointing to the difficulty that use of such forms poses even in quite advanced stages of L2 French acquisition. Indeed, it is precisely the inclusion of such less frequent verb forms which can serve to illuminate how naturalistic exposure during study abroad may be conducive to development on more marked grammatical features compared to less marked ones.

In view of differences in frequency of use of each form, the analysis is based on a within-category analysis, whereby the results present levels of use of each form within their respective functional context, in comparison with levels of use of alternate forms in each context. That is to say, the results do not stem from an 'across-category' analysis which would compare levels of use of each form in relation to each other, thereby skewing the results in view of differences in frequency of occurrence of the various functional contexts where use of each form is deemed obligatory. By exploring use of each form within its specific functional context, it is important to note that, in identifying the forms of interest, we could not rely solely on the presence of the different forms, since their usage is subject to considerable variation within their functional contexts. That is to say, they are not used categorically, but in alternation with other inappropriate forms in context. We therefore took account of a range of contextual clues during the data extraction phase in identifying the variation underlying use of each form in its specific functional context. For example, in identifying use of the subjunctive, we looked at the wider features in context to ensure that it was a context where the subjunctive could be expected. The full range of morphological features is exemplified in (10)-(15):

(10) Past time marking

Use of present vs. past time marker

Hier je vais à Paris.* vs. Hier je suis allé à Paris.

'Yesterday I went to Paris.'

Accuracy of use of past time markers

Je sortais quand le téléphone a sonné. vs. Je suis sorti quand le téléphone a sonné.

'I was going out when the phone rang.' vs. 'I went out when the phone rang.'

(11) Reverse-order reporting

Quand je suis arrivé au restaurant, mes amis avaient déjà commandé.

Quand je suis arrivé au restaurant, mes amis ont déjà commandé.*

'When I arrived at the restaurant, my friends had already ordered.'

(12) Marking of futurity

Je sortirai. vs. Je vais sortir. vs. Je sors.

'I will go out.'

(13) Marking of conditionality

Si je gagnais au loto, j'irais tout de suite en vacances. vs.

Si j'ai gagné au loto, je vais tout de suite en vacances.*

'If I won the lottery, I would go on vacation straight away.'

(14) Use of the subjunctive

Il faut que je fasse plus de travail. vs. Il faut que je fais plus de travail.*

'I have to do more work.'

(15) Present tense marking of 3rd person irregular verbs

Ils sortent. vs. ils /sor/.*

'They are going out.'

The results to be presented are based on a quantitative analysis of the learners' use of the various forms at the two stages of the study, namely time I, before the learners left for France, and time II, following their return from France one year later.

Results

In view of the individual variation between the learners, the results are presented for each learner as opposed to the group as a whole. Moreover, so as to capture the relationship, if any, between the learners' grammatical development and their sociolinguistic usage, we present for each learner his/her use of the grammatical variables in relation to the sociolinguistic variables. In the case of the latter variables, we present use of the informal variant, with the exception of liaison where we present rates of its realisation which constitutes the formal variant. Table 1 presents the results for our first learner, Sean.

Table 1. Use of the grammatical and sociolinguistic variables by Sean

Grammatical variables

Time	Use of present in past time contexts		Accuracy of use of PC		Accuracy of use of IMP		Inflected future		Conditional		3rd person plural irregular forms		Subjunctive		Plus-que-parfait	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I	19	28	40	100	8	100	20	43	9	64	1	100	1	33	0	0

| II | 14 | 8 | 99 | 99 | 47 | 98 | 2 | 13 | 6 | 86 | 6 | 100 | 1 | 33 | 0 | 0 |

Sociolinguistic variables

Time	*ne* deletion		Use of *on*		/l/ deletion		Use of liaison		Use of *aller*	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I	49	82	25	100	14	25	36	35	19	41
II	61	88	14	87	80	71	12	10	10	67

Of the five learners in the study, Sean demonstrates one of the strongest profiles, on both a grammatical and sociolinguistic level at time I. At this initial stage of the study, he has quasi-categorical levels of accuracy on both the PC and the IMP, although he does also use the present in past time contexts. More than a quarter of his past time utterances is based on this form. With the exception of the PQP, he also demonstrates use of all the other morpho-syntactic features, including the inflected forms of the future and the conditional, and the 3rd person irregular plural form. His sociolinguistic competence is also equally developed, especially with regard to his deletion of *ne* and use of *on*. While used to a lesser extent, the other variables are also reasonably frequent, reflecting awareness of their status as sociolinguistic variables.

By time II, we note that Sean has maintained his high level of accuracy on past time marking, reducing his use of the present in past time contexts. Otherwise, there is little change in his grammatical system, with the PQP continuing not to be used, and use of the subjunctive being restricted to just one token. His use of the 3rd person irregular plural form is based on a higher number of tokens compared to time I, suggesting that this form has become more

robust in his interlanguage, while his use of the conditional has increased. We also note that his use of the inflected future has dropped, reflecting his increased use of the periphrastic form as the informal variant of this sociolinguistic variable. While his grammatical development is mixed, he has consolidated his use of the sociolinguistic variables, with some being used more than others, reflecting native speaker frequency patterns. That is to say, native speaker studies show *ne* deletion and use of *nous* to be highly frequent in everyday speech, compared to the other variants concerning the periphrastic future and /l/ deletion which are relatively less frequent, but by no means infrequent (for discussion of the issue of native speaker frequency patterns, see Regan et al. 2009).

In sum, Sean's strong grammatical and sociolinguistic profile at time I has been positively impacted through naturalistic exposure at time II, although the findings for his grammatical development are mixed in some regards.

Table 2 presents the results for the second learner, Jane, who also demonstrates a strong grammatical and sociolinguistic profile at time I.

Table 2. Use of the grammatical and sociolinguistic variables by Jane

Grammatical variables

Time	Use of present in past time	Accuracy of use of PC	Accuracy of use of IMP	Inflected future	Conditional	3rd person plural irregular forms	Subjunctive	Plus-que-parfait

	contexts															
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I	28	32	49	100	9	100	18	56	4	31	3	33	0	0	1	100
II	24	41	99	94	24	100	1	6	10	67	2	14	1	20	8	53

Sociolinguistic variables

Time	*ne* deletion		Use of *on*		/l/ deletion		Use of liaison		Use of *aller*	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I	9	13	24	69	14	23	30	29	0	0
II	52	72	85	85	55	47	36	23	11	65

Jane's strong profile at time I is evident in that she uses the full range of grammatical variables, with the exception of the subjunctive, and the full range of sociolinguistic variables, with the exception of *aller*. At a grammatical level, she is the only learner to use the PQP at time I, while she has gained categorical levels of accuracy on use of the PC and the IMP. Her use of the present to mark past time is more frequent than in the case of Sean, with one third of all past time tokens being marked in the present. Compared to her accuracy of use of the PC and the IMP, her use of the conditional and the 3rd person irregular plural form is less frequent, but she does use the inflected future to a reasonable degree. Her sociolinguistic development is especially evident in the case of *on*, which she uses to a high degree, the other variables being less frequent.

By time II, Jane has consolidated her grammatical and sociolinguistic skills. At a grammatical level, although she increases her use of the present in past time contexts, her

accuracy of use of the past time markers is maintained. She has increased her use of the conditional and the PQP, as reflected in the latter form's usage with a greater number of tokens. She also uses the subjunctive form. The only form to show some regression in use is the 3rd person irregular plural form. The significant decrease in use of the inflected future can be explained by Jane's use of the periphrastic form to mark futurity. This sociolinguistic gain is reflected in her increased use of the other sociolinguistic variables, with *ne* and *aller* showing the largest increases. Her use of liaison has decreased slightly, possibly reflecting its status as a formal variant which she uses less frequently.

All in all, naturalistic exposure has spurred on the initial sociolinguistic skills that Jane demonstrated at time I, while also impacting positively her grammatical development. Table 3 presents the results for Lisa who demonstrates a different profile compared to Sean and Jane, at both a grammatical and sociolinguistic level.

Table 3. Use of the grammatical and sociolinguistic variables by Lisa

Grammatical variables

Time	Use of present in past time contexts		Accuracy of use of PC		Accuracy of use of IMP		Inflected future		Conditional		3rd person plural irregular forms		Subjunctive		Plus-que-parfait	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I	22	25	59	100	6	75	7	28	19	86	1	20	0	0	0	0
II	45	24	111	93	16	70	4	21	1	25	5	42	0	0	0	0

Sociolinguistic variables

Time	*ne* deletion		Use of 'on'		/l/ deletion		Use of liaison		Use of *aller*	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	18	4	16
II	35	62	31	86	2	2	20	13	6	32

Lisa's less developed grammatical and sociolinguistic skills at time I are evident insofar that her accuracy of use of the IMP is more reduced at 75% compared to the quasi-categorical levels that the previous learners demonstrated. However, she does evidence categorical accuracy on the PC, but also uses the present to mark past time to the extent that one quarter of her past time utterances is with the present. Her use of the inflected forms of the future and the conditional differs with the conditional being much more frequent than the future. While she produces one token of a 3rd person irregular plural form, she does not use either the subjunctive or the PQP.

Notwithstanding some differences with the previous two learners, Lisa's grammatical profile is nonetheless reasonably advanced. In contrast, however, she does not use a number of the sociolinguistic variables, namely *ne* deletion, *on*, and /l/ deletion, and uses liaison and *aller* relatively infrequently.

By time II, while her sociolinguistic development is more noteworthy, her grammatical development is less so. Her level of use of the present in past time contexts is unchanged compared to time I, while her level of accuracy of use of the PC and the IMP decreases

slightly. Her use of the inflected future form and the conditional decreases significantly. She continues not to use the subjunctive and the PQP. The only form to demonstrate progress is the 3rd person irregular plural form. In contrast, her sociolinguistic skills have developed to a much greater extent, especially in the case of *ne* deletion and use of *on* which she had not used previously, and her use of *aller* also increases. While she uses liaison to a lesser extent, perhaps reflecting its status as a formal variant, her deletion of /l/ is minimal.

Notwithstanding the lack of progress on /l/ deletion, naturalistic exposure has had a significant impact on Lisa's sociolinguistic skills. This beneficial effect contrasts with the minimal impact evidenced in the case of her grammatical skills which have not changed radically.

Table 4 presents the results in the case of Hugo.

Table 4. Use of the grammatical and sociolinguistic variables by Hugo

Grammatical variables

Time	Use of present in past time contexts		Accuracy of use of PC		Accuracy of use of IMP		Inflected future		Conditional		3rd person plural irregular forms		Subjunctive		Plus-que-parfait	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I	19	37	24	80	1	50	8	35	4	67	0	0	0	0	0	0

II	14	17	53	98	14	100	0	0	5	56	1	25	0	0	0	0

Sociolinguistic variables

Time	ne deletion		Use of *on*		/l/ deletion		Use of liaison		Use of *aller*	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I	47	90	0	0	3	12	5	10	0	0
II	42	98	27	96	20	43	19	23	11	67

Hugo is similar to the other learners at time I insofar that the subjunctive, PQP, and 3rd person irregular plural forms pose much more difficulty relative to the other forms. He does not use the former forms at all, but does use the inflected future and conditional forms. Compared to the previous learners, he differs in that he evidences lesser levels of accuracy on use of the PC and the IMP at 80% and 50% respectively. He also makes the most frequent use of the present in past time contexts at 37%. However, this relatively more restricted grammatical profile does not necessarily imply a lack of sociolinguistic development, as evidenced in the fact that he engages in *ne* deletion to a very high level, at 90%. Although he minimally uses liaison and /l/ deletion, he does not use *on* or *aller* at all.

The important impact of naturalistic exposure on both his grammatical and sociolinguistic skills is evidenced at time II. He significantly reduces his use of the present in past time contexts, and attains quasi-categorical levels of accuracy on use of the PC and the IMP. He also begins to use the 3rd person irregular plural form, albeit with just one token. While he reduces his level of use of the conditional, and does likewise in the case of the inflected future to the point of not producing it at all, he continues not to use the PQP and the subjunctive. Notwithstanding, naturalistic exposure has impacted his use of some

grammatical forms. In tandem with such development, he also evidences significant sociolinguistic development, reaching near-categorical levels of *ne* deletion and use of *on*, while two thirds of his future time utterances are with *aller*. He also increasingly engages in /l/ deletion and liaison realisation.

The final learner is Elise whose results are presented in table 5.

Table 5. Use of the grammatical and sociolinguistic variables by Elise

Grammatical variables

Time	Use of present in past time contexts		Accuracy of use of PC		Accuracy of use of IMP		Inflected future		Conditional		3rd person plural irregular forms		Subjunctive		Plus-que-parfait	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I	16	26	32	80	3	50	11	41	5	83	4	36	0	0	0	0
II	37	24	89	90	12	80	4	50	1	33	1	20	0	0	0	0

Sociolinguistic variables

Time	*ne* deletion		Use of *on*		/l/ deletion		Use of liaison		Use of *aller*	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I	0	0	1	33	1	1	11	16	1	4
II	11	33	13	93	9	13	46	30	0	0

A first remark concerns the fact that Elise's grammatical and sociolinguistic profiles at time I differ somewhat. While she demonstrates reasonable use of most grammatical variables with the exception of the subjunctive and the PQP, her use of the sociolinguistic variables is much more limited. Similar to the other learners, one quarter of her past time utterances is based on the present, while her accuracy levels on the PC and the IMP are similar to Hugo's at 80% and 50% respectively. She uses the inflected form of the conditional near-categorically, and at twice the level that she uses the inflected future form. Of all the learners, her use of the 3rd person irregular plural form is the most frequent, albeit with just over one third of irregular verbs. In contrast to her grammatical development, her sociolinguistic skills are not developed at all, with minimal use of all variables. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that she produces no tokens of *ne* deletion at all.

By time II, her sociolinguistic development is much more evident, with the exception of *aller* which she does not produce at all. Nonetheless, her use of some variables is relatively low, especially in the case of *ne* deletion at 33% and in the case of /l/ deletion at just 13%. Her use of *on* is the only variable which she uses to a highly frequent extent at 93%, while she has increased her use of liaison from 16% at time I to 30% at time II. Notwithstanding the limited range of variables which evidence development, naturalistic exposure has impacted her sociolinguistic skills to a much greater extent than her grammatical skills. Her grammatical skills evidence no real change, with the exception of her accuracy levels on the PC and the IMP which have increased. Otherwise, she has decreased her use of the conditional and the 3rd person irregular plural form, and continues not to use the subjunctive and the PQP. Her use of the present in past time contexts remains unchanged, while her use of the inflected future form has increased slightly.

Discussion

Notwithstanding the small number of participants in the study, the results presented provide a number of preliminary insights into the relationship between grammatical and sociolinguistic L2 development, in relation to the general hypothesis that grammatical stability is necessary for sociolinguistic development. Our results at time I point to the complexity of the question insofar that there is considerable variation between our learners in terms of whether they exemplify such sociolinguistic development, or not. While all our learners demonstrate reasonably strong grammatical profiles at time I, only some evidence sociolinguistic variation, while others generally do not. Thus, while some grammatical development may occur prior to the emergence of sociolinguistic variation, it is not always in itself sufficient for such variation to emerge. Moreover, some of our relatively less advanced learners evidence sociolinguistic variation on some variables, just as in the case of those learners who are relatively more advanced in the scope of their grammatical usage. However, in spite of their grammatical development, if sociolinguistic variation does emerge, it is generally restricted to a specific variable, as opposed to being a frequent phenomenon across all the variables we have looked at. Moreover, in the case of such restricted variation, it is interesting to observe that the variable evidencing variation is not necessarily similar across learners. Rather, if they have developed sociolinguistic variation, the individual learners seem to latch onto a specific variable at time I. In contrast, all the learners irrespective of differences in their grammatical development at time I evidence significant sociolinguistic gains at time II in terms of more frequent use of a wider range of variants.

A second question concerned the issue of how extensive grammatical development needs to be for learners to engage in sociolinguistic variation. On this count, the results indicate that the learners evidence sociolinguistic variation on some variables without necessarily evidencing development at time I on all the grammatical features we have looked at. For example, most of our learners do not use the subjunctive or the PQP, while 3rd person irregular plural forms also pose a challenge at the initial stage of the study. Their grammatical development is specific to the past time forms, and the inflected forms of the future and the conditional. Their grammatical development is therefore not necessarily extensive in scope before sociolinguistic variation emerges. In sum, based on the results we have presented, the relationship between grammatical and sociolinguistic development is not a case of 'all or nothing'. That is to say, grammatical development need not be complete, in terms of level of grammatical usage or scope of grammatical usage, for sociolinguistic development to begin. Rather, the process of sociolinguistic development can be initiated in tandem with the on-going process of grammatical development that is already in train.

Our third research question was concerned with whether naturalistic exposure might play a more important role in sociolinguistic development than the learner's grammatical development. This question is particularly important since some of our learners evidence minimal sociolinguistic skills at time I, while development among other learners is restricted to a specific variable. In contrast with such results at time I, results at time II suggest that it is naturalistic exposure that has played a crucial role in bringing about the sociolinguistic gains that the learners evidence at time II. The results show that all the learners generally use the variables we have looked at more frequently following their year abroad, reflecting a more important effect for naturalistic exposure than for classroom exposure on their sociolinguistic development. Moreover, such a wider range and increased frequency of use of the features

has generally increased across learners, in spite of differences in their grammatical development. Thus, naturalistic exposure has significantly impacted their sociolinguistic development, in spite of their limited grammatical development on some of the grammatical features we have looked at.

A final question was also concerned with precisely the impact of naturalistic exposure on the learners' grammatical development. While naturalistic exposure has played a crucial role in our learners' sociolinguistic development, its impact on the learners' grammatical development is more ambiguous, with some learners developing further some features, while others do not. That more limited effect is further evident insofar that, even after a full year in the target language community, some learners still do not evidence any development on a number of grammatical features, such as the subjunctive and PQP forms in particular.

Conclusion

Whereas previous research within the wave of research on L2 sociolinguistic development has particularly illuminated the impact of social factors on such development, this paper has sought to explore the relationship between L2 grammatical and sociolinguistic development. By drawing on data from the same cohort of learners, an approach which has not previously been adopted, the paper has illuminated the complexity underlying such a relationship. That complexity relates to a number of factors such as level of grammatical development, the type of grammatical feature, the individual variation between learners, and the relative impact of naturalistic exposure on both types of development. Taken together, the study points to the insights to be gained from a study which attempts to provide a more composite picture of the

relation holding between development across the various components of the learner's linguistic repertoire in the L2. Indeed, the need to address such an issue, not only in relation to sociolinguistic competence, but in relation to the interface between L2 complexity, accuracy and fluency is further exemplified in the collection of papers published by Housen and Kuiken (2009).

However, as a preliminary study with a limited number of participants, a number of further questions arises which should be addressed in future research on the topic. In particular, notwithstanding the longitudinal nature of our data, such that we have been able to capture development on the variables we have looked at, we did not expect to observe the frequent use by some of our learners of some of the variables at time I. As such, there is scope to include in future research less advanced learners as a means of capturing at what particular moment in their grammatical development such sociolinguistic variants emerge. For example, while some of our learners do not evidence sociolinguistic development to a significant extent at time I, others do so on some variables, such that they had developed their use of such variables before the study began. The question arises, however, as to when such development began, and more importantly at what level of grammaticalisation? On this count, future research will be particularly illuminating in pinpointing just how advanced one needs to be.

Learners whose initial exposure was in a naturalistic environment, or heritage learners would be particularly useful in illuminating the reverse question of how initial sociolinguistic competence may help in the acquisition of grammar taught subsequently in a classroom setting. Furthermore, the relationship between sociolinguistic and grammatical development

post-study abroad is particularly interesting in relation to how further classroom instruction impacts the gains made during study abroad.

A further area for future research concerns the issue of how other components of the learner's linguistic repertoire may also play a role. On this score, the hypothesis has been advanced that the development of sociolinguistic variation reflects an attempt on the learner's part to assume the guise of the native speaker by 'sounding' native-like through use of native speaker informal speech variants such as the ones we have looked at. As Regan (1997: 206) writes, the learner's attempt to "faire natif" [to sound native] reflects "une valeur symbolique d'intégration dans la communauté native" [a symbolic value of integration in the native community]. However, it remains unclear how development of such a native speaker sociolinguistic repertoire may relate to other linguistic components which also facilitate a similar guise. For example, fluency development would seem an obvious example where one wonders how the learner's attempts at sociolinguistic variation are in vain if their fluency development is lacking in terms of producing streams of continuous fluent speech. It would in particular be interesting to see how fluency develops in tandem with their use of sociolinguistic variables.

Furthermore, native speaker perceptions of such a relationship would also seem relevant. For example, in the case of learners whose fluency is less developed compared to other learners, but who may nonetheless produce informal sociolinguistic variants, it would be interesting to know how such usage may seem unbefitting of less fluent speakers. Taken together, future research along the lines we have suggested has much to contribute to building up the more

composite picture which is now required of the relationship between the various components which make up the learner's linguistic repertoire in the L2.

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