

Task: analysis of L1 French-L2 English learners' adverb placement in English

LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND

French and English differ in adverb placement and question formation as shown below.

	Weak I (English)	Strong I (French)
Adverbs	S-Adv-V-O <i>Mary often watches TV.</i>	S-V-Adv-O <i>Marie regarde souvent la télévision.</i>
Questions	Do-S-V-O <i>Does she watch TV?</i>	V-S-O <i>Regarde-elle la télévision?</i>

The differences have been accounted for by the VERB RAISING parameter within the principles and parameters framework. The parametric difference is determined by strength of the V(erb)-features in Inflection. Finite verbs have tense and agreement features which have to be checked against corresponding V-features in Infl. If the V-features in Infl are strong (henceforth, strong I), the finite verb will be raised from the VP to I for feature checking. If V-features are weak (henceforth, weak I), there will not be overt movement.

English has weak I and thus does not have [-Verb Raising]. French has strong I and requires verb raising [+Verb Raising]. It is hypothesized that once a learner sets the parameter, the learner will simultaneously acquire all the language-specific properties associated with the parameter. In this case in particular, learners of English who have acquired the Do-S-V-O order (i.e., successfully set the parameter to the [-Verb raising] value) are expected to have acquired the S-Adv-V-O order at the same time.

METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Native Language:	French
Target Language:	English
Data Source:	Acceptability judgment
L2 learners' age:	11–12 years
Learning Environment:	Intensive ESL program in Quebec
Proficiency Level:	Beginners (5 months of instruction)

All learners were pretested on adverb placement after approximately 3 months in an English language program. Up to this point, no classes had had any instruction on adverbs.

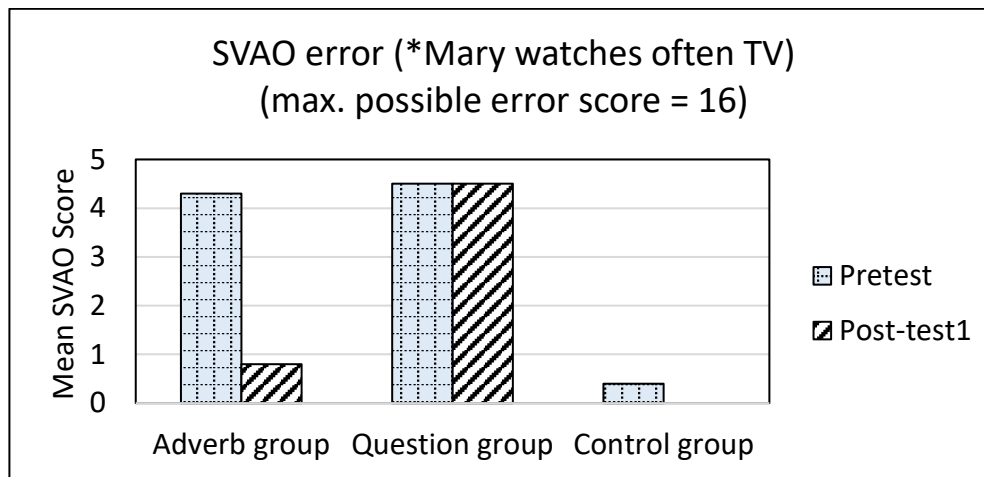
Learners were divided into two groups: one group (Adverb group) received teaching materials and activities only on adverb placement for 2 weeks, whereas the other (Question group) was taught only question formation during the same period. All classes were then retested on adverb placement (post-test). The research design is summarized below:

Table 1. Adverb Placement Study of L1 French-L2 English learners: Research Design

	Adverb Group (n = 82)	Question Group (n = 56)	Native controls (n = 26)
Grade	Grades 5 and 6	Grades 5 and 6	Grades 5 and 6
Pretest (Day 1)	Pretesting adverbs	Pretesting adverbs	Testing on adverbs
Teaching (2 weeks)	Teaching adverbs	Teaching questions	-
Post-test (Day 15)	Post-test adverbs	Post-test adverbs	-

The learners performed an Acceptability Judgment Task. They had to read a cartoon story and indicate instances of incorrect word orders. There were 33 sentences in the story broken down as follows: 16 adverb positions (both grammatical and ungrammatical), 10 grammatical distractors, 7 ungrammatical distractors.

RESULTS



QUESTIONS

1. Describe and explain the pattern of judgments of the Adverb group and Question group in the pretest and the posttest respectively.

In the pretest both groups accept sentences exemplifying the SVAO pattern, such as *Mary watches often TV*, which is ungrammatical in English. In the post-test, the patterns of responses given by the Adverb group and the Question group diverge: the Adverb group, who have been presented with explicit negative evidence about adverb placement in English, reject SVAO sentences; the Question group, who have received explicit instruction about question formation but not adverb placement, still accept SVAO as possible in English.

2. Do these findings constitute supporting evidence for parameter resetting in SLA?

No. Explicit knowledge of question formation clearly does not generalize to knowledge of adverb placement. These findings do not constitute supporting evidence for parameter resetting in SLA.

One possibility is that properties associated with the same parameter would cluster only in naturalistic, but not in instructed, acquisition.

Another possibility is that the time interval between the explicit instruction period and the post-test was too short for any generalizing effects to take place.

The third possibility is that the properties are not related after all: crucial evidence that would decide on this issue is evidence from first language acquisition, since the presence of clustering in child grammars would be powerful evidence in favour of the theory.