

Development of knowledge of word order

in speakers going from a V2 first language to an SVO L2 (problem taken from Hawkins 2001, ch. 4)

Hulk (1991) tested the intuitions of native speakers of Dutch (a language with similar word order properties to German, SOV and V2) learning French (an SVO language) primarily in the classroom.

There were four groups of informants in the study: adolescents who had just started French at school (first graders), students in the following two years at school (second and third graders) and first-year university students majoring in French. The test was a 40-sentence grammaticality judgment task balanced between grammatical and ungrammatical French sentences, where some of the ungrammatical word orders would be grammatical in equivalent Dutch sentences, and some ungrammatical in both languages.

Some of the sentence types used in the test and the percentage of informants who accepted each type as grammatical, are given in the box on the other side. For illustration, the same basic sentence is used repeatedly here, although the vocabulary in the test was varied: (*Hier*) *Jean mangeait les fraises* (imperfect tense), (*Hier*) *Jean a mangé les fraises* (perfect tense), both meaning '(Yesterday,) Jean ate the strawberries.'

The languages involved here vary with respect to two parameters, the V2 parameter (which, when set "on" requires that the tensed verb be second, analyzed as movement of the tensed verb into C), and the headedness parameter (the order between the verb and object, VO for French, OV for Dutch). So the first thing we want to do is understand the methodology of the study by looking at the sentences they included and determining the extent to which each is expected to be possible given the settings for these two parameters. This is what happens in the first question. Then, we'll look at the results to see what they suggest about the setting of those parameters in the second language (French) coming from the first (Dutch).

You may wish to refer to Guasti (2002, ch. 4) for a reminder about the syntax of SOV/V2 languages like German and Dutch, and SVO verb-raising languages like French. "Verb-separation" above refers to the property of verbs and auxiliaries being separated in V2 languages (SAuxOV order).

Questions/tasks

- (1) In the data table, there are two columns, labeled “V2” and “Head,” both blank. The D and F columns indicate whether the word order given is possible in Dutch and in French, respectively. For each example: fill in the V2 cell with “yes” if the example is only possible if V2 is set “on,” “no” if the example is not possible if V2 is set, and “?” if the example does not distinguish between the “on” and “off” settings of the V2 parameter. Then fill in the “Head” cell with either “VO,” “OV,” or “?” in the same manner.
- (2) Is there evidence of L1 transfer? (Explain why there is or isn’t.)
- (3) What property of French word order appears most quickly in the learner’s grammars?
- (4) How might you account for the development over time with respect to sentence 5? (That is, why do you think learners get worse before they get better?)
- (5) How well do these results fit in with Vainikka & Young-Scholten’s Minimal Trees hypothesis? If there are problems, do the results fit any of the other theories discussed in White (2003, ch. 3)? Think in particular about how the V2 order (XP V Subject...) comes about, as in (6a) on p. 105 of Guasti (2002).

	D	F	V2	Head	word order	1st	2nd	3rd	Univ.
1.	ok	*			Jean a les fraises mangé	73	40	2	0
2.	*	ok			Jean a mangé les fraises	42	86	100	100
3.	ok	*			Hier mangeait Jean les fraises	92	50	32	10
4.	ok	*			Hier a Jean les fraises mangé	92	38	0	0
5.	*	*			Hier a Jean mangé les fraises	38	64	8	6
6.	*	ok			Hier Jean mangeait les fraises	38	80	100	100
7.	*	ok			Hier Jean a mangé les fraises	19	85	100	100

- (6) Hier Jean a mangé les fraises.
 yesterday Jean has eaten the strawberries
 ‘Yesterday Jean has eaten the strawberries.’