

The Issue of Morphological Variation in Adult L2 French*

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1. Introduction

Recent research on the nature of interlanguage (IL) grammars has focused on the issue of variability in the production of inflectional morphology by second language (L2) learners, namely the fact that main verbs may be used in either a finite or nonfinite form. The question is whether morphological variability reflects some kind of grammatical deficit in underlying grammars. According to the Impairment Representation Hypothesis (IRH), it is indeed the case. Under a global view of impairment, Universal Grammar (UG) is not available to (adult) L2 learners (Meisel 1997). In particular, the fact that problems with morphology are persistent in L2 acquisition (even in advanced stages), in contrast to L1 acquisition, is taken as an indication that L2 acquisition is fundamentally different from L1 acquisition. If IL and L1 grammars are different in nature, then this suggests that functional categories, features, and feature-checking mechanisms are lacking in L2 systems (Prévost and White 2000b). According to a local view of impairment, only (finite) feature strength is impaired (Beck 1998; Eubank et al 1997). This means that verb placement is not related to feature checking. A verb, regardless of its form (finite or nonfinite), could appear in a finite position (e.g. above negation, or with a clitic or DP subject) or a nonfinite one (e.g. following a preposition, a negative adverb, or another verb). In short, inert finite features result in morphological variability.

In contrast to the IRH, some researchers have proposed that adult IL grammars are not impaired (Epstein et al 1996; Prévost and White 2000a,b; Schwartz and Sprouse 1996). Directly addressing the issue of variability, the Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis (MSIH) holds that abstract properties may be present in the underlying grammar without being systematically realised morphologically (Haznedar and Schwartz 1997; Lardiere 2000; Prévost and White 2000a,b). More specifically, L2 learners may have problems accessing the relevant morphology or mapping morphology and syntax. According to this view, infinitival forms are used as default finite forms, which means that verbs that look nonfinite on the surface may occur in finite positions. Under the Truncation Hypothesis (TH), the production of nonfinite forms instead of finite verbs is structurally determined (Prévost and White 2000a). It is held that the root of declarative clauses may vary: it can be CP, IP, or VP (see Rizzi 1993/1994). On this view, a root infinitive (RI), namely a root declarative whose main verb is either an infinitival form or a past

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participle, is a VP-clause, which means that RI verbs are truly nonfinite. Both the MSIH and the TH adopt the idea that morphology and syntax may develop independently, i.e. it is not the case that problems with inflectional morphology reflect the lack of acquisition of underlying categories and features.

Results reported in research on morphological variability in the early stages of L2 French acquisition by adult learners support the MSIH (Herschensohn 2001; Prévost 2003a; Prévost and White 2000a,b). However, most data investigated so far come from longitudinal studies and are based only on a few learners, which makes it difficult to evaluate the scope of their conclusions. For instance, Prévost (2003a) reports that for one of the 4 adult learners he investigated over a one-year period, the incidence of finite forms in nonfinite positions is quite high in most interviews (around 20%). In contrast, the ratio is below 10% for the other learners. However, it is hard to tell whether this represents an isolated case or not. In this paper, I further investigate morphological variability in cross-sectional production data from English native speakers learning French in Quebec City. I examine some of the predictions made by the hypotheses sketched above pertaining to the types of verbs (tensed or not) that are expected to appear in finite and nonfinite positions.

2. The data

The data were gathered from 21 English-speaking learners of French enrolled at Laval University Language School. The participants were placed into 4 groups based on their proficiency level (from beginner to high intermediate) which was established via a local placement test (see Table 1). The learners received 4 hours of daily instruction on (and in) French, including formal instruction on grammar.

	G1 (n=5)	G2 (n=5)	G3 (n=6)	G4 (n=5)
Level	Beginners	Interm 1	Interm 2	Interm 3
Age	29.6 (18-41)	27 (19-39)	31.8 (20-54)	28.2 (21-37)
Time since test	1.7 months	1.4 months	1.7 months	2.8 months

Table 1: Learners and interview details

Recording sessions all followed the same format, including spontaneous production, role playing, story telling, etc. Each learner was recorded for at least one hour. For the analysis of the data, I followed the methodology adopted by Prévost and White (2000a,b). In particular, an infinitival verb was considered to be nonfinite unless evidence of the contrary, namely verbs ending in [e], which is ambiguous between the infinitival marker *-er*, the past participle marker *-é* and the 2nd person plural ending *-ez*, were categorised as nonfinite if they did not appear with the 2nd person plural pronoun *vous* 'you'. Moreover, formulaic speech was disregarded (e.g. *je sais pas* 'I don't know', *c'est XP* 'this is XP', *il y a XP* 'there is XP'), as well as repetitions from the interviewer.

3. Results

3.1 Finite and nonfinite root declaratives

As indicated in Table 2, all participants used both finite and nonfinite verbs in root declaratives. Yet, the production of nonfinite forms varies greatly across the learners. For some, the incidence of RIs is relatively high, whereas for others, it is quite low. Table 2 reports the production of root declaratives for every learner, distinguishing between the incidence of lexical verbs, the copula, auxiliaries, and modals. In bold, I isolate the learners for whom the incidence of RIs is quite high compared to other group members. Since all RIs but one involve a lexical verb, I further distinguish the incidence of RIs compared to all verbs and that of RIs compared to all lexical verbs. In general, we can observe a gradual decline in the incidence of RIs across the groups. This said, nonfinite root declaratives are found at every proficiency level, as illustrated in (1).

	Finite Declaratives				RIs		%RIs	
	Lex	Cop.	Aux.	Mod.	+Lex	-Lex	/Total	/Lex vbs
G1: Ann	39	15	12	0	25	0	27.5%	39.1%
Morgan	34	5	2	3	5	0	11.4%	12.8%
George	19	14	12	0	5	1	11.8%	20.8%
Edward	62	30	3	0	3	0	3.1%	4.6%
Mark	56	18	1	3	2	0	2.5%	3.4%
G2: Mike	26	25	7	4	30	0	32.6%	53.6%
Sophie	86	39	42	22	17	0	8.3%	16.5%
Jen	58	7	5	5	6	0	7.4%	9.4%
Sue	87	24	18	15	7	0	4.6%	7.5%
Rod	112	42	43	23	3	0	1.3%	2.6%
G3: Denise	69	23	20	22	25	0	15.7%	26.6%
Rose	84	53	32	36	11	0	5.1%	11.6%
Jill	109	45	85	32	14	0	4.9%	11.4%
Nicole	86	49	15	16	5	0	2.9%	5.5%
Kate	102	33	23	22	3	0	1.6%	2.9%
Rebecca	67	25	36	11	1	0	0.7%	1.5%
G4: Dorothy	98	28	32	13	17	0	9.1%	14.8%
Sandra	59	20	22	16	11	0	7.4%	15.7%
John	95	46	50	26	3	0	1.4%	3.1%
Deborah	136	44	63	48	1	0	0.3%	0.7%
Martine	111	31	26	8	0	0	0.0%	0.0%

Table 2: Finite and nonfinite root declaratives used by the learners

- (1) a. Il boire. (Edward, G1)
 he drink.INF
- b. Il se réveiller à 7 heures. (Sue, G2)
 he self wake+up.INF at 7 o'clock
- c. Dans la nuit nous faire la cuisine. (Denise, G3)
 in the night we do.INF the cooking

- d. Il prendre des vêtements. (John, G4)
 he take.INF some clothes

In addition, some verbs appear in both the finite and nonfinite form during the same interview. This is even true for the least proficient learners. Examples of such verbs are *travailler* 'work' in Ann (G1), *voyager* 'travel' in Morgan (G1), and *étudier* 'study' in George (G1). Some pairs of finite and nonfinite declaratives exhibiting the same verb are given in (2). This suggests that verbs do not systematically make their first appearance in one form or the other. Although some verbs only occur in RIs (as *faire* 'do' in Ann, *pratiquer* 'practice' in Morgan, and *chanter* 'sing' in George), others are found solely in the finite form, such as *jouer* 'play' (Ann), *apprendre* 'learn' (Morgan), and *manger* 'eat' (George).

- (2) a. Et # cinq heures... <je n> [/] <je n> [/] je travaille pas.
 and five o'clock I I I work.1/2/3S not
 a' Une [=en?] octobre [= octobre] euh travailler euh commis. (Ann, G1)
 one in october work.INF clerk
 b. Ah je voyager <à> [/] à des États <U> [/] Unis.
 I travel.INF to to some United States
 b'. Uh uh je voyage uh Canada. (Morgan, G1)
 I travel.1/2/3S Canada

3.2 Impairment or not?

3.2.1 Negation

If IL grammars are impaired, there should be no contingency between verb type and verb placement with respect to negation: finite and nonfinite forms should appear either above or below negation. If, in contrast, underlying systems are UG-compatible, finite verbs should not be found below negation. Table 3 shows that there are only 4 negative RIs in the data (in (3)), so it is impossible to draw any conclusion from them. As for finite negatives, the vast majority display V-Neg. Out of a total of 171 finite negative roots with a lexical verb, only 7 exhibit the reverse order (4.1%). When taking all negative declaratives into account (with either a finite or a nonfinite lexical verb), 167 out of 175 (95.4%) display V-Neg. Hence, the data on negation strongly show that the learners apply verb-movement rather systematically in L2 French, which suggests that the strength of the target finite feature has been acquired. As such, the data are evidence against the IRH, according to which a higher degree of variability should be expected (since finite features are held to be at least inert in IL grammars). Interestingly enough, this finding holds for all groups of learners, including the least proficient ones.

- (3) a. Je ne expliquer pas. (Mark, G1)
 I NEG explain.ING not
 b. Il ne respirer pas. (Sue, G2)
 he NEG breathe.INF not

- c. Il ne pas essayer (Sue, G2)
 he NEG not try.ING
- d. Je ne connaitre pas. (Dorothy, G4)
 I NEG know.INF not

	Finite declaratives						RIs		
	V-Neg		Neg-V		ne-V		V-Neg	Neg-V	ne-V
	+lex	-lex	+lex	-lex	+lex	-lex	+lex	+lex	+lex
G1: Ann	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Morgan	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
George	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Edward	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mark	8	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
G2: Mike	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sophie	10	6	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Jen	11	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sue	11	6	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Rod	8	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
G3: Denise	4	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rose	8	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jill	7	12	2	0	1	1	0	0	0
Nicole	16	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kate	12	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rebecca	11	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
G4: Dorothy	7	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
Sandra	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
John	5	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Deborah	15	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Martine	10	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 3: Verb-placement with respect to negation in root declaratives

3.2.2 Agreement

If features and feature checking mechanisms are absent from IL grammars, as contended by the global view of impairment, L2 learners are expected to produce non-matching (or faulty) agreement. Non-impairment views of IL systems do not predict such mismatches. Since inflectional morphology is highly homophonous in French, I only looked at suppletive morphology (such *je suis* 'I am') and distinctive regular endings such as 1st person plural *-ons*, 2nd and 3rd person plural inflection on 2nd group verbs (i.e. forms such as *finissez* 'finish.2P' and *finissent* 'finish.3P') and on 3rd group verbs (i.e. forms like *sortez* 'leave.2P' and *sortent* 'leave.3P'). As can be seen in Table 4, there are very few agreement mismatches in the recordings, even in the data from Group 1. Errors account for less than 10% of the data for each participant, except for Sophie (22.2%). Most errors involve the use of the 3rd person singular form, as shown in (4). This is akin to the results reported by Prévost and White (2000b) on adult learners of L2 French and L2 German whose L1 is not English. In short, the problem with inflectional morphology is not one of faulty inflection, contrary to what an impairment view of IL grammars would predict. The

IRH would also have difficulties explaining why the few errors that are observed systematically involve the use of default (3rd person singular) forms.

- (4) a. Mes amis a (=ont) québécois... (Morgan, G1)
 my.PL friend.PL has quebecer
 b. Beaucoup de personnes veut pratiquer ... (Sophie, G2)
 a+lot of people want.1/2/3S practice.INF
 c. Ils sort (=sortent) ensemble. (Martine, G4)
 they leave.1/2/3S together

	Correct	Incorrect	% Incorrect
G1: Ann	10	1	9.1%
Morgan	15	1	6.25%
George	7	0	0.0%
Edward	10	1	9.1%
Mark	13	1	7.1%
G2: Mike	13	1	7.1%
Sophie	42	12	22.2%
Jen	20	1	4.8%
Sue	27	2	6.9%
Rod	64	1	1.5%
G3: Denise	31	3	8.8%
Rose	88	1	1.1%
Jill	53	2	3.6%
Nicole	33	2	5.7%
Kate	40	3	7.0%
Rebecca	37	1	2.6%
G4: Dorothy	70	3	4.1%
Sandra	33	2	5.7%
John	60	2	3.2%
Deborah	80	3	3.6%
Martine	49	4	7.5%

Table 4: Correct and incorrect verbal agreement

3.2.3 Verbal forms in nonfinite positions

If learners have knowledge of finiteness, finite forms should not occur in nonfinite positions. If, on the contrary, IL grammars are impaired, this kind of mismatch is to be expected. The results are given in Table 5. As can be seen, there is a high incidence of finite forms in nonfinite positions for G1, followed by a sharp decline. In total, 48% of verb forms in nonfinite positions are finite for G1, compared to only 8.3% for G2. Moreover, the incidence of finite forms in nonfinite positions is above 10% for all G1 learners. In contrast, there are two learners in that situation in G2 (Jen and Sophie), one in G3 (Jill), and none in G4. The results of G1 and G2 go in the same direction as what Prévost (2003a) reported on one of the learners (Jane) he investigated (recall section 1), which suggests that this learner was not an isolated case. Examples of nonfinite and finite forms in nonfinite contexts are given in (5) and (6) respectively.

- (5) a. J'ai étudié heu secondaire. (Ann, G1)
I have.1S studied secondary
- b. Elle est boire du thé. (George, G1)
she is drink.INF some tea
- c. Je veux voyager un peu. (Mark, G1)
I want.1/2/3S travel.INF a little
- d. Il est prépare pour dormir. (George, G1)
he is prepare.1/2/3S to sleep.INF
- (6) a. J'ai difficile demande des questions. (Ann, G1)
I have.1S difficult ask.1/2/3S some questions
- b. Il est prépare pour dormir. (George, G1)
he is prepare.1/2/3S for sleep.INF
- c. Comment tu vas arrive à mon travail? (Jen, G2)
how you go.1/2/3S arrive.1/2/3S to my work
- d. ...qui uh j'ai rencontre à Nouvelle-Écosse (Jill, G3)
who I have+1S meet.1/2/3S in Nova-Scotia
- e. .. mais je ne peux pas parle ... (Sophie, G2)
but I NEG can+1/2/3S not speak.1/2/3S

	Prep+V	Aux+V	Mod+V	V+V	Neg+V	+Fin / Total
G1: Ann	1/2	6/12	--	0/2	--	7/16 (43.7%)
Morgan	0/1	0/2	3/4	--	1/1	4/8 (50%)
George	2/5	8/12	--	--	--	10/17 (58.8%)
Edward	--	3/3	--	--	--	3/3 (100%)
Mark	--	0/2	1/6	--	--	1/8 (12.5%)
G2: Mike	0/10	2/8	0/6	0/2	--	2/26 (7.7%)
Sophie	2/15	9/54	3/28	--	1/6	15/103 (14.6%)
Jen	0/4	2/6	4/12	--	1/1	7/23 (30.4%)
Sue	0/10	1/25	0/15	1/2	0/6	2/58 (3.4%)
Rod	1/19	2/69	0/38	0/5	0/7	3/138 (2.2%)
G3: Denise	0/13	1/26	2/27	0/3	1/4	4/73 (5.5%)
Rose	0/27	1/46	0/46	0/1	0/2	1/122 (0.8%)
Jill	13/51	13/106	7/49	1/4	2/14	36/224 (16.1%)
Nicole	1/15	1/26	0/29	0/7	0/2	2/79 (2.5%)
Kate	0/16	0/31	2/32	0/2	0/8	2/89 (2.2%)
Rebecca	0/22	0/50	0/20	0/1	0/2	0/95 (0%)
G4: Dorothy	3/51	2/42	0/20	0/4	1/3	6/120 (5%)
Sandra	0/14	1/31	1/28	0/1	0/4	2/78 (2.6%)
John	0/11	0/73	3/35	1/1	0/6	4/126 (3.2%)
Deborah	0/76	0/99	0/64	1/9	0/14	1/262 (0.4%)
Martine	0/32	0/36	0/15	0/6	0/2	0/91 (0%)

Table 5: Finite forms in nonfinite positions

The high incidence of finite forms in nonfinite contexts in some of the learners is not expected by the non-impairment approaches presented in section 1. However, it does not strongly support impairment either, be it global or local. In particular, it

is not found in all learners. Yet, according to the global view of impairment, impairment is permanent. Therefore, if impairment is the explanation for the G1 data, then it is difficult to understand why a similar incidence of finite forms in nonfinite positions is not found in more proficient learners. Moreover, the impairment account predicts overuse of finite forms across learning contexts, contrary to facts. In particular, Prévost and White (2000b) report that the ratio of finite forms in nonfinite positions is below 10% for Moroccan Arabic learners of French and for Spanish and Portuguese learners of German. Importantly, these learners were at the beginner level when data collection began, as is the case here.

It is also important to point out that no finite form occurring in nonfinite contexts displays an overt ending, such as 1st person plural *-ons*, or a suppletive form. For instance, there is no occurrence of something like *pour partons* 'for leave.1P' or *pour est* 'for be+3S' in the data. Consequently, it could be the case that the (superficially) finite forms occurring in nonfinite positions are in fact bare forms. In particular, it is quite possible that less proficient learners associate the lack of overt infinitival marker in English to the infinitive in French. This indeed seems to be the case with verbs such as *préparer* 'prepare' and *arriver* 'arrive', as in (6b-c), which are similar to their French counterparts. In other words, bare forms of this type could be default nonfinite forms. When data from learners whose L1 displays overt infinitival endings, like German, are taken into account, such results do not obtain, namely "bare forms" do not occur in nonfinite positions. It is as if the presence of overt morphology in the L1 (or the lack thereof) played a role in the provision of corresponding inflection in the L2 (see also White 2003b).

3.3 Missing surface inflection or truncation?

So far, the data suggest that the learners' IL grammars are unimpaired. Let us now see whether they support the TH or the MSIH. For this, we focus on the incidence of subjects in root declaratives and the interpretation of these utterances.

3.3.1 Subjects

Under the TH, nonfinite verbs should not be found with DP and clitic subjects since these elements entail the projection of IP. The only overt subjects that could occur in RIs are strong pronouns such as *moi* 'me' which bear default case in French. In contrast, the MSIH predicts that (superficially) nonfinite verbs can appear with any subject (except for strong pronouns) since they are considered to be finite. In the analysis of the data, I disregarded the incidence of pronouns such as *elle* 'she', *nous* 'we' and *vous* 'you+PL', which are ambiguous between clitics and strong pronouns in French. As can be seen in Table 6, there is no significant contingency between clitic subjects and verb forms for any of the learners who produced RIs, except for Ann ($X^2=5.116$, $p<.05$) and Rose ($X^2=9.975$, $p<.01$). Indeed, the ratio of subject clitics employed in RIs is at least 50% for 9 of the learners (see examples in (7)). Similar patterns are found in learners who did not use RIs productively. These results go in the direction of the MSIH.

- (7) a. Je parler avec administration. (Ann, G1)
 I speak.INF with administration
 b. Ils visiter moi. (Mike, G2)
 they visit.INF me
 c. On aller au centre d'achats. (Jill, G3)
 we go.INF to+the mall
 d. Il retourner à la maison. (Sandra, G4)
 he return.INF to the house

Note that clitic subjects seem to be known early on by the learners: they are found in all recordings and they rarely appear in non-clitic positions, such as following a preposition, or in coordination contexts. Furthermore, extra material (e.g. adverbs) rarely appear between the pronominal subject and the verb, and clitics never occur alone as an answer to a question; in the latter case, a strong pronoun is used instead.

	Subject clitics		DPs	
	+Fin	-Fin	+Fin	-Fin
G1: Ann	29/63 (46%)	5/25 (20%)	2/66 (3%)	0/25
Morgan	38/41 (92.7%)	4/5 (80%)	1/44 (2.3%)	0/5
George	29/39 (74.4%)	3/5 (60%)	4/45 (8.9%)	0/5
G2: Mike	32/49 (65.3%)	17/30 (56.7%)	9/62 (14.2%)	3/30 (10%)
Sophie	143/158 (90.5%)	14/17 (82.4%)	15/189 (7.9%)	0/17
Jen	49/63 (77.8%)	3/6 (50%)	11/75 (14.7%)	3/6 (50%)
G3: Denise	79/105 (75.2%)	17/25 (68%)	10/134 (7.5%)	1/25 (4.0%)
Rose	109/150 (72.7%)	3/11 (27.3%)	31/205 (15.1%)	5/11 (45.4%)
Jill	208/244 (85.2%)	14/14 (100%)	24/271 (8.9%)	0/14
G4: Dorothy	83/133 (62.4%)	9/17 (52.9%)	33/171 (19.3%)	1/17 (5.9%)
Sandra	98/110 (89.1%)	9/11 (81.8%)	8/117 (6.8%)	0/11

Table 6: Subjects of finite and nonfinite root declaratives

The incidence of DP subjects is quite low, both in finite declaratives and in RIs (Table 6). This said, for 4 of the learners for whom the incidence of DP subjects in finite roots is above 10% (Mike, Jen, Rose, and Dorothy), different results obtain when looking at their incidence in RIs. The incidence of DP subjects does not differ significantly in finite and nonfinite declaratives for Mike ($X^2=.364$, $p>.05$), it is significantly higher in RIs than in finite root declaratives for Jen ($X^2=4.851$, $p<.05$) and Rose ($X^2=6.916$, $p<.01$), whereas the opposite is observed for Dorothy. For 3 other learners who exhibit a low production rate of RIs, Sue (G2), Nicole and Kate (G3), at least 25% of the DPs they used appear in nonfinite declaratives. In short, the incidence of infinitival verbs appearing with a finite subject is relatively high in the data, which argues against the truncation approach.

Finally, only 2 strong pronoun subjects appear in the corpus. This suggests that main verbs, regardless of their forms, are finite in the adult data. It also shows that the learners have knowledge of Case marking in L2 French: where nominative case is expected, nominative case is supplied. These results are consistent with findings in longitudinal data reported by Prévost (2003a).

3.3.2 Interpretation of root declaratives

Under the TH, there should be a contingency between finiteness and future/modal interpretation. Following Hyams (2001), I assume that verbs bearing an infinitival marker usually receive an [irrealis] interpretation. Since such forms are held to be nonfinite by the TH, there should be a high incidence of RIs with a future or modal reading. Under the MSIH, since nonfinite forms arise due to access or mapping problems, there should be no particular difference between (superficially) nonfinite forms and finite forms with respect to interpretation. Results show that there is almost no significant contingency between verbal form and future/modal reading. As shown in Table 7, for 5 of the learners who produced RIs, the future/modal interpretation rate in such utterances is between 15% and 20% (see the examples in (8a-b)). For 3 of them, there is no significant difference with the corresponding ratio in finite root declaratives (Ann: $X^2=.042$, $p>.05$; Mike: $X^2=.299$, $p>.05$; Denise: $X^2=.609$, $p>.05$). For the other two, George and Sandra, the rates are much higher in the case of RIs, but the actual figures prevent the calculation of chi-square statistics. This notwithstanding, the rate of RIs with a future or modal reading is quite low compared to the child data, which is above 60% (Prévost 2003b). In general, adult root declaratives refer to present/past events, as illustrated in (8c-d). These results are once again compatible with the MSIH and with the findings in longitudinal studies.

	Finite decl.	%Fut/Mod	RIs	%Fut/Mod
G1: Ann	7/39	17.9%	5/25	20%
Morgan	1/34	2.9%	0/5	0%
George	1/19	5.3%	1/5	20%
G2: Mike	3/26	11.5%	5/30	16.7%
Sophie	0/58	0%	0/6	0%
Jen	1/86	1.2%	0/17	0%
G3: Denise	7/69	10.1%	4/25	16%
Rose	1/84	1.2%	0/11	0%
Jill	3/109	2.7%	0/14	0%
G4: Dorothy	0/98	0%	1/17	5.9%
Sandra	0/59	0%	2/11	18.2%

Table 7: Future/modal interpretation of root declaratives

- (8) a. Ils visiter moi prochain été. (Mike, G2)
they visit.INF me next summer
- b. Je me costumer comme une servante. (Sandra, G4)
I myself disguise.INF like a servant
[S. is talking about activities to come]
- c. (Elle) chanter pour (=par) microphone. (George, G1)
she sing.INF by microphone
[G. is describing a picture]
- d. J'apprendre français. (Mike, G2)
I learn.INF French
[M. is talking about what he did after he arrived in town]

4. Discussion and conclusion

The results confirm the predictions of the MSIH. From the lowest proficiency levels on, nonfinite verbs are found along with clitic subjects - almost never with strong pronoun subjects - and they rarely receive an [irrealis] interpretation. In addition, there is knowledge of functional categories involved in finiteness, of features (as illustrated by knowledge of Case and agreement), and of feature strength (as illustrated by knowledge of verb-movement over negation). These results confirm findings in longitudinal studies on adult L2 French from English-speaking learners (Prévost 2003a) and on adult L2 French and L2 German from speakers of other languages (Prévost and White 2000a,b). In other words, there is a dichotomy between the categorial and featural contents of underlying grammars, and their (overt) morphological realisation. The results also support previous research suggesting a difference between child and adult RIs, such that child RIs are truly nonfinite whereas adult RIs have finite properties (Prévost and White 2000a).

The findings do not confirm the Impaired Representation Hypothesis. The fact that finite verbs are almost always placed to the left of negation cannot support either the global or local view of that approach. A similar conclusion is reached when looking at agreement (almost no case of mismatching is found) and when considering finite verbs appearing in nonfinite positions. As far as the latter results are concerned, not only is the incidence of finite verbs in nonfinite positions restricted to the G1 group, it was also shown not to occur in the production data of other learners whose native language is not English. The notion of global impairment can therefore not be maintained.

In order to explain morphological variability in adult L2 acquisition, I adopt Prévost and White's (2000b) account according to which infinitival forms may be underspecified for the [-finite] feature, which means that they can be inserted under nodes requiring [+finite] or [-finite] items. Moreover, suppletive forms, as well as overtly inflected verbs, are not underspecified for [+finite], which means that they cannot be found in nonfinite positions. This is indeed what was found in the present data. As for bare forms, typically 3rd person singular forms, I suggest that they are nonfinite for the learners, based on L1 influence, specifically the lack of overt infinitival markers in English. Therefore, bare forms are associated with [-finite] in the grammar, and then inserted into a nonfinite position. Alternatively, it could be that 3rd person singular forms, or bare forms, are underspecified for the [+finite] feature, which enables them to occur in [+finite] and [-finite] positions without triggering feature mismatching.

The results also suggest that L2 acquisition of syntax is independent from the acquisition of morphology, since inflectional morphology is not systematically supplied whereas syntactic phenomena such as verb-movement seem to have been acquired. This goes against the Rich Agreement Hypothesis (see White 2003a), according to which acquisition of superficial morphology triggers acquisition of functional categories, features or feature strength, as illustrated by proposals by Eubank (1993/1994) and Vainikka and Young-Scholten (1996).

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