

Syntax and Discourse in Near-Native French: Clefts and Focus

Bryan Donaldson

The University of Texas at Austin

This study examines aspects of the syntax-discourse interface in near-native French. Two cleft structures—*c'est* clefts and *avoir* clefts—are examined in experimental and spontaneous conversational data from 10 adult Anglophone learners of French and ten native speakers of French. *C'est* clefts mark focus, and *avoir* clefts introduce new discourse referents. Although previous research on the syntax-discourse interface has revealed residual difficulties in near-native speakers, the near-natives in the present study evinced nativelike behavior on a range of measures, a finding that suggests complete acquisition of aspects of the syntax-discourse interface.

Keywords French; clefts; information structure; syntax-discourse interface; near-nativeness; prosody; conversation data

Introduction

Although any speaker who endeavors to learn a second language (L2) eventually reaches an endstate in his or her acquisitional process, many learners ultimately fall short of anything approaching nativelike mastery (Bley-Vroman, 1989). In this article, the concern is specifically with those learners who arrive at a level of mastery that invites comparison with that of native speakers. Nativelike mastery can be common among individuals who learned their L2 from a very early age, but documentation exists to show that some late learners also converge on the performance of native speakers, at least in some areas of the grammar, for example narrow syntax (Birdsong, 1992; Birdsong & Molis, 2001; White &

For their detailed discussions and comments, I would like to thank Julie Auger, Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig, David Birdsong, Barbara Bullock, Laurent Dekydtspotter, Rajka Smiljanic, Albert Valdman, the audience at the Second Language Research Forum 2009, and the anonymous *Language Learning* reviewers. Thanks to Nicholas Bacuez for assisting with the phonetic analysis.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Bryan Donaldson, Department of French and Italian, The University of Texas at Austin, Homer Rainey Hall 2.114A, Mailcode B7600, Austin, TX 78712. Internet: bdonaldson@austin.utexas.edu

Genesee, 1996) and phonology (Abu-Rabia & Kehat, 2004; Ioup, Boustagui, El Tigi, & Moselle, 1994). Such L2 speakers have been referred to as near-natives.

Recent research on the endstate in L2 acquisition has highlighted the possibility of long-term difficulties in certain areas of the grammar where information must be integrated across separate modules of linguistic knowledge (e.g., Sorace, 1993, 1999, 2000, 2003; Sorace & Filiaci, 2006; Sorace & Serratrice, 2009; Tsimpli & Sorace, 2006). One such example is the coordination of syntax and discourse structure, and the present study examines how near-native speakers of French use *c'est* and *avoir* clefts to structure the flow of information in discourse. More specifically, it examines how they mark the focus of an utterance and introduce new referents into the discourse. French, particularly spoken French, has recourse to syntactic manipulations of word order to accomplish these discourse functions. This study contributes to the debate on the L2 acquirability of the interface between syntactic and discursive knowledge.

Near-Nativeness and the Syntax-Discourse Interface

Although near-natives have been shown to evince nativelike behavior in some areas of the grammar, numerous studies have revealed infelicitous behavior and divergent or indeterminate intuitions on interface phenomena in reportedly near-native populations. Infelicity should be contrasted with ungrammaticality: Whereas ungrammaticality involves a violation of the grammatical rules of a language, infelicity involves an utterance that, although correct from a purely grammatical perspective, is inappropriate in the context in which it was uttered. Infelicity therefore represents a failure to pair a syntactic choice with an appropriate discourse situation, or vice versa. (By convention, infelicity is indicated by #, analogous to the convention to indicate ungrammaticality by *.)

Languages often signal the focus of an utterance via syntactic means. To produce utterances that sound nativelike in context, L2 learners must acquire these strategies, which may differ from those of the first language (L1). Belletti, Bennati, and Sorace (2007) showed that their population of near-native speakers of Italian, despite targetlike narrow syntax, behaved differently than native speakers of Italian with respect to the relationship between syntax and focus (and in their use of overt and null subject pronouns). In the near-natives' L1 English, focus is signaled primarily via prosodic prominence. In Italian, however, with certain verb types, a speaker can mark narrow focus on a lexical subject by placing the subject in postverbal position. In Belletti et al.'s study, the near-natives produced felicitous examples of postverbal focused subjects,

but they did so at a significantly lower rate than the native controls in the same contexts. In this case, the near-natives demonstrated a nonnativelike underuse of postverbal subjects to signal focus, accompanied by an infelicitous strategy of *in situ* prosodic emphasis of the preverbal subject, directly traceable to the L1 English. In other words, although the near-natives evinced sensitivity to the Italian strategy of postverbal focus and even produced felicitous examples of it, the Italian postverbal strategy did not replace the L1-based *in situ* prosodic strategy in their grammar. The authors' reporting of the data suggests that the (felicitous) postverbal focus strategy existed as an occasional strategy alongside the dominant L1-based (infelicitous) prosodic strategy.

Bohnacker and Rosén (2008) examined advanced Swedish learners of German. Swedish and German are both verb-second (V2) languages but differ in their treatment of focus. The V2 grammar of both languages places the finite verb in the second clausal position in matrix declarative clauses. The preverbal position is flexible and hosts a variety of constituent types (e.g., subject, object, adverbial or prepositional phrase, and so on). Furthermore, the preverbal constituent can represent either focus information or old information (topic). The relevant distinction between Swedish and German concerns native speakers' preferences for topic versus focus information in the first position. Bohnacker and Rosén demonstrate that in German, the first position is preferentially—but not exclusively—reserved for focus. In Swedish, on the other hand, although the narrow syntax of the V2 grammar closely resembles that of German, native speakers prefer to delay the placement of focus information until later in the clause. As a result, in the preverbal position, the preference is not for focus—as in German—but rather a topic or an expletive. This information structure pattern, reproduced in the Swedish learners' L2 German, yielded grammatically correct but pragmatically odd utterances.

The data reported in Belletti et al. (2007) and Bohnacker and Rosén (2008) point to the pervasive role of L1 transfer in L2 focus-marking strategies, even at advanced and near-native levels. The findings are compatible with the observation that the syntax-discourse interface represents an area of residual difficulties for L2 speakers; as Sorace and Filiaci (2006) stated: “interface properties involving syntax and another cognitive domain may not be fully acquirable” (p. 340). Tsimpli and Sorace (2006) and Sorace and Serratrice (2009) distinguished *internal* interfaces (e.g., syntax-semantics) from *external* interfaces (e.g., syntax-discourse). Whereas violations at internal interfaces lead to outright ungrammaticality, violations at external interfaces result in infelicity but not actual ungrammaticality. In Sorace and Serratrice's view, adult L2 learners fare better with internal interfaces than with external interfaces, perhaps

because ungrammaticality is more salient and easier for the L2 learner to attend to than utterances that are merely pragmatically odd. The present study examines aspects of the external interface between syntax (clefts) and discourse structure.

Information Structure, Focus, and French Clefts

Discourse is developed by combining novel information with information already mentioned or discussed. Early functionalist studies (Chafe, 1974; Kuno, 1972) distinguished between old and new information, which roughly translated to whether a discourse referent represented an entity that had been mentioned in prior discourse or not. Prince (1981) offered a more nuanced view of information in discourse: Her taxonomy included the familiar notions of new (*brand-new* in her terminology) and old (*evoked*) as well as *inferrable* and *unused* information. Inferrable referents have not been evoked in prior discourse but are nonetheless easily understood from the context of the discourse. Similarly, unused referents have not been previously evoked but are assumed to be generally known to the hearer (e.g., names of major cities, friends, politicians).

What a speaker predicates about a topic is known as focus. Focus represents the part of the utterance that conveys something new (Kuno, 1972), moves the discussion ahead (Firbas, 1992), and is the most informative (Rochemont, 1986). When a speaker focuses a referent or phrase, he or she emphasizes this segment as more important and newsworthy than the rest of the utterance. The focused referent does not itself have to be new to the discourse. As Chafe (1976) pointed out, focused referents are often evoked information (see also Carter-Thomas, 2009); what is new is the relation of this referent to the predication of the utterance.

***C'est* Clefts in French**

French presents a test case for the acquisition of the syntax-discourse interface because speakers rely heavily on syntax to signal information structure, in large part because of the language's rigid prosodic constraints. In French, stress falls phrase-finally and cannot be placed elsewhere in the phrase—for instance, on a sentence-initial subject—to convey focus (Calvé, 1983; Lambrecht, 1994).

To signal focus, French (and particularly spoken French) has recourse to a *c'est* cleft, a semantically noncompositional biclausal proposition (Katz, 2000; Lambrecht, 1986) in which the copular expression *c'est* “it is” is followed immediately by the referent to be clefted, in turn followed by a nonrestrictive

relative clause introduced by relative *qui* or *que*. The clefted referent or phrase serves as the subject or object of the relative, as in (1) and (2):

(1) *C'est lui qui part ce soir.*

“It’s him who leaves this evening.”

(2) *C'est lui que j'ai vu.*

“It’s him that I saw.”

In both (1) and (2), the tonic pronoun *lui* is focused. Focused referents have often been evoked previously (Chafe, 1976); consequently, *c'est* clefts frequently contain known information. The fact that the focused segment is realized as a pronoun rather than a lexical noun phrase in (1) and (2) follows from the referent’s status as evoked information. Most of the subcategories of discourse function (e.g., the corrective *c'est* cleft) discussed by Katz (2000) fall under the overarching function of focus marking, and nearly every use of *c'est* clefts involves contrast (Rouget & Salze, 1986). One use of *c'est* clefts neither marks focus nor contrast: A *c'est* cleft can introduce a proposition in an event-reporting fashion, with the goal of marking the entire proposition as a reported fact (Rialland, Doetjes, & Rebuschi, 2002). Such uses of *c'est* clefts are most common in writing or formal discourse; they do not occur in the native or near-native data in the present study and are not discussed further. Finally, it is germane to point out one common discourse function that cannot be accomplished with a *c'est* cleft: Introducing new referents into the discourse (Katz, 2000; see further discussion subsequently).

***It* Clefts in English**

The English *it* cleft, composed of the copular expression *it is*, a clefted referent or phrase, and a nonrestrictive relative, represents a structural counterpart of the French *c'est* cleft. According to Prince (1978), noun phrases, adverbials, and prepositional phrases—but not verb phrases or full sentences—can be *it* clefted. Like its French counterpart, the *it* cleft signals focus, as in (3), where *his keys* is focused:

(3) It was his keys that John lost. (Prince, 1978, p. 883)

In a corpus-based comparative study of French and English, Carter-Thomas (2009) examined similarities and differences between *c'est* clefts and *it* clefts in written discourse. She found that, although both types of clefts signal focus, English used *it* clefts most often with adjuncts (e.g., temporal) rather than arguments. Notably, English used *it* clefts only rarely with subjects, whereas French often *c'est* clefts subjects.

Prosodic Focus-Marking in English

Although *it* clefts mark focus in English, they are not the default focus strategy; it is more common to mark focus prosodically than syntactically in English. This observation represents a crucial difference from French (Bullock, 2009; Gess, 2009). Typically, when an English speaker wishes to signal focus, he or she simply emphasizes it prosodically (Ladd, 1996). Unlike French, English can place *in situ* prosodic emphasis on any constituent, regardless of its position in the phrase. Consider (4) through (7), from Archibald (1997, p. 265):

- (4) MY brother hates dogs.
- (5) My BROTHER hates dogs.
- (6) My brother HATES dogs.
- (7) My brother hates DOGS.

In each case, the placement of (prosodic) focus corresponds to a different discourse context with different presuppositions; each example is felicitous when paired with an appropriate context.

Focus in French and English

French and English possess syntactically comparable *c'est-* and *it* clefts whose discourse functions overlap in the marking of focus. On the other hand, there are crucial differences in how *c'est-* and *it* clefts behave and in how French and English mark focus. Globally, *c'est* clefts are used more frequently in French than in English (Bullock, 2009; Gess, 2009; Katz, 2000), and overuse of *it* clefts by French learners of English would sound infelicitous (see Katz, 2000). In particular, subjects are not clefted as often in English as they are in French (Carter-Thomas, 2009). In English, clefts are more common in writing than in speech (Roland, Dick, & Elman, 2007), unlike in French. Focus-marking strategies differ between French and English, in that spoken English prefers *in situ* prosodic emphasis, with some use of *it* clefts, whereas the constrained prosodic patterns of French favor recourse to the *c'est* cleft.

Introducing New Discourse Referents

C'est clefts typically encode information that has already been evoked in the discourse; they do not introduce new discourse referents. In spoken French, this task is left to the *avoir* cleft, a semantically noncompositional biclausal proposition composed of the phrase *il y a* “there is” or another finite form of the verb *avoir* “to have” followed by a noun-phrase referent and a nonrestrictive relative (Lambrecht, 1986; Sleeman, 2004), as in (8):

- (8) *Il y a Jean qui s'est cassé la jambe.* (Lambrecht, 1986, p. 115)
 “There is Jean who broke his leg.”

Avoir clefts introduce new referents to the discourse (Lambrecht, 1986). In this capacity, *avoir* clefts are compatible with proper names, as in (8), unlike restrictive relative clauses. The *avoir*-clefted referent typically shows “a very low degree of cohesion” with prior discourse (Barnes, 1985, p. 79), unlike the referents of most *c'est* clefts. Structurally, the *avoir* cleft allows a speaker to avoid placing an unrecoverable referent in sentence-initial position, which is reserved for recoverable topics (Li & Thompson, 1976; Reinhart, 1981). To cast a new referent as the grammatical subject, an *avoir* cleft is used; new referents are strongly dispreferred in canonical subject position (Lambrecht, 1986, 1987). Like *c'est* clefts, *avoir* clefts can be used for event-reporting, although this function is rare compared to the presentational function.

The closest English correlate is the *there*-existential phrase or *there*-presentational (Prince, 1996), whose function can be to mark information as discourse-new. Unlike in French, the *there*-presentational can be deictic in English (Lambrecht, 1986). Otherwise, English, on account of its flexible prosody, can introduce new discourse referents without syntactic manipulations.

C'est clefts and *avoir* clefts are variant word orders that share the same truth value as their canonical nonclefted counterparts (Lambrecht, 1986). Clefts are a common—even preferred—strategy to mark information structure, but they are not *stricto sensu* obligatory (De Cat, 2004). Nonetheless, an L2 learner who wishes to speak French authentically and naturally must master these and other variant word orders (Katz & Blyth, 2007; Magnan & Tochon, 2001, cited in Gess, 2009).

L2 Acquisition of Focus-Marking in French

Watorek (2004) examined discourse structure in L2 French picture narrations and spatial descriptions. Her participants included beginning, intermediate, and advanced Polish learners of French. Although her main focus was not on *c'est* clefts, her data demonstrated that the learners used *c'est* clefts infelicitously to introduce new discourse referents, as in (9), where an *avoir* cleft would be preferred:

- (9) *#et c'est beaucoup l'arbre à la place*
 “And it's lots of tree on the square.”

Bartning (1997) reported precisely this type of infelicity in advanced Swedish learners of French, a finding that suggests that the use of *c'est* clefts for *avoir* clefts persists in later stages of acquisition. As Watorek noted, although the advanced learners had mastered the L2 morphosyntax, their discourse competence remained noticeably nonnativelike.

Sleeman (2004) investigated advanced Dutch learners of French. In unguided story retells that involved topic introductions, topic selections, and contrastive topics, Sleeman found much higher rates of *c'est* clefts than *avoir* clefts, which suggests that *c'est* clefts appear earlier in interlanguage than *avoir* clefts. Sleeman partially attributed the earlier appearance of *c'est* clefts to their one-to-one form-function correspondence. Trévisé (1986) noted the frequent use of *c'est* (not always fully clefted) in the oral production of her L1 English and L1 Spanish learners of French. On the other hand, the English learners produced only two tokens of *avoir* clefts. Trévisé's data suggested that *c'est* emerges before other variant word orders, such as dislocations, and that learners overuse a limited repertoire of constructions. More recently, Reichle (2010a) investigated intuitions of low- and high-proficiency English-speaking learners of French regarding the felicity of *c'est* clefts in felicitous and infelicitous discourse contexts. On a felicity judgment task, some of the high-proficiency learners performed at nativelike levels. Using the same experimental design, Reichle (2010b) reported that high-proficiency L2 speakers of French produce ERP signatures that are similar—but not entirely identical—to those of native speakers, a finding that Reichle interpreted as near-nativelike processing of *c'est* cleft focus in L2 French.

Studies of *avoir* cleft usage in advanced or near-native L2 French populations are lacking. Numerous studies have examined *c'est* at a variety of proficiency levels, but Reichle (2010a) is the only one to report examples of apparently nativelike performance by advanced learners. Reichle's study relies on fairly constrained judgment data, and the findings cannot rule out the possibility that L2 French speakers—even at high levels of proficiency—overextend *c'est* clefts to contexts where they would be infelicitous in native French (Bartning, 1997), just as in earlier stages of L2 French (e.g., Sleeman, 2004; Watorek, 2004). Nevertheless, Reichle (2010b) offers evidence of similarities between native and advanced L2 processing of sentences that contain *c'est* clefts.

Even if an entirely nativelike use of *c'est* clefts to mark focus is possible in L2 French, this does not imply that all focus-marking is nativelike. The possibility remains that, in addition to (felicitous) *c'est* clefts, the L2 speaker has recourse to other, infelicitous focus strategies, such as prosodic prominence.

The possibility of a residual focus strategy based on prosody seems likely given that prosody is the dominant means of signaling focus in English and that only negative evidence (see White, 1989) against an *in situ* prosodic focus strategy is available to learners of French.

The notion of phonological transfer from L1 to L2 is not novel, and no attempt will be made here to discuss the vast literature on the subject; Major (2008) offers an overview. A number of studies have identified effects of L1 transfer in L2 prosody with specific reference to assignment of focus. Archibald (1997) documented L1 prosodic properties in the L2 English of a Hungarian learner and a Polish learner. In a sentence-reading task, both participants produced prosodic patterns in English that were directly traceable to the L1. In the case of the Polish speaker, misplaced phrasal stress led to an infelicitous disjunction between the prosodically prominent words and the true focal information of the utterance. Rasier (2006) and Rasier and Hiligsmann (2007) examined the L2 acquisition of French and Dutch prosody. Dutch, like English, allows *in situ* prosodic emphasis. Participants were advanced Dutch learners of French and advanced French learners of Dutch. Data came from a visual description task and from a corpus of speech. In the corpus data, the L1 Dutch learners of French—despite their advanced proficiency—produced Dutch-like *in situ* prosodic focus, as in (10), where infelicity is indicated by # and prosodic prominence by capital letters; the learners used pitch accent to signal narrow focus on words where it was not contextually appropriate:¹

- (10) #*Le tennis, j'ai ESSAYÉ ça l'année passée.*
 “Tennis, I TRIED that last year.”

Rasier (2006) also reported that the French learners of Dutch overused French-like cleft structures in their L2 Dutch, whereas native Dutch makes only rare use of clefts. Thus, both learner groups showed transfer of L1 focus-marking strategies into the L2, even at advanced proficiency levels.

The Present Study

Broadly speaking, this study draws on experimental and production data to identify effects of L1 transfer and evidence of nonnativeness in near-native French focus-marking, which lies at the interface of syntax and discourse. The two hypotheses that guide the study are informed by recent work on the syntax-discourse interface and by previous work on the acquisition of French clefts and focus-marking.

Hypothesis 1: the near-natives will employ *c'est* clefts to mark focus but will also retain English-like *in situ* prosodic focus marking in their L2 French. That is, *c'est* clefting will not be a unique focus-marking strategy. Specifically, it is predicted that the near-natives will focus subjects prosodically rather than via *c'est* clefts, given that English places relatively few subjects in *it* clefts (Carter-Thomas, 2009).

Hypothesis 2: the near-natives will evince difficulty in distinguishing the functional load of *c'est* clefts and *avoir* clefts. This difficulty will be reflected in nonnativelike judgments of felicity on the experimental tasks and infelicities in production data. Specifically, given that *c'est* clefts emerge early in interlanguage and appear to function as a default construction (Bartning, 1997; Trévisé, 1986), it is predicted that the functions of *c'est* clefts will be over-extended to the introduction of new discourse referents, where an *avoir* cleft would be felicitous. Furthermore, it is possible that *avoir* clefts will be used deictically (as in English) in addition to introducing new referents to discourse.

Method

Participants

All the data were collected in France during a three-month period. Highly proficient English-L1 adult learners of French were recruited via public announcements, advertisements through English-speaking clubs, and personal contacts. From the initial pool of about 20 speakers who claimed to have a “very high level” mastery of French, and who had spent at least three continuous years in France, the ten who best met the criteria of the study were retained. These L2 speakers, whom I will designate *the near-natives*, all began to learn French at the age of 10 or later and lived in France at the time of the study. On account of their age of first exposure, all are considered late learners, following the criteria in Johnson and Newport (1989), Marinova-Todd (2003), and Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam (2009). All the near-natives had completed at least a university bachelor’s degree, but no attempt was made to control for age across the group. Basic demographic information is given in Table 1.

French native speakers were recruited to serve both as an experimental control group and as conversation partners for the near-natives. Because I sought informal spontaneous interactions, I asked each near-native to nominate a French native-speaker counterpart, with whom the near-native typically spoke in French, for inclusion in the study. The ten native speakers were friends,

Table 1 Near-native speakers

	Speaker									
	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10
Sex	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	M	F	M
Age	52	40	27	39	45	70	34	26	57	52
COB	USA	UK	USA	USA	UK	UK	USA	USA	USA	UK
AOI	21	11	13	13	11	10	10	16	14	11
AOE	23	20	16	20	17	20	20	21	20	20
Educ.	BA	BA	BTS	MBA	MA	MA	JD	BA	BA	PhD
LOR	27;3	18;7	7;2	9;0	14;3	47;3	5;9	4;3	27;10	>25

Note. COB = country of birth; AOI = age of first classroom instruction in French; AOE = age of first important exposure to native speakers of French; LOR = approximate total time (in years; months) spent in France or French-speaking country or region.

Table 2 Native speakers

	Speaker									
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10
Sex	F	F	F	M	M	F	F	M	F	F
Age	46	40*	31	42	55	62	31	34	65	54
COB	FR	FR	FR	FR	FR	MO	FR	FR	FR	FR
Educ.	HS	BA	MA	PhD	BA	MA	BA	BA	BA	PhD

Note. COB = country of birth; FR = France; MO = Morocco; HS = High School diploma (French equivalent); *Estimate: Speaker F2 opted not to provide this information.

co-workers, or spouses of the near-natives. Although no effort was made to control for age, sex, or level of education, the demographics of the native speaker group (see Table 2) are similar to those of the near-natives. Some possessed knowledge of an L2, but none reported being bilingual from birth.

All participants were offered modest compensation for their participation in the study.

Partial Replication of Birdsong's (1992) Grammaticality Judgment Task

The objective of the study was to investigate highly advanced L2 speakers that were comparable to learner populations that have been qualified as near-native in previous research. To establish whether or not it was appropriate to characterize the nonnatives in the present study as near-natives, a replication of the grammaticality judgment task (GJT) in Birdsong (1992) was administered. The

76 items of Birdsong's GJT examine seven areas of French grammar. On the basis of his results, Birdsong argued that his population of English-L1 adult learners of French performed like natives on the task; in the present study, the near-natives matched the native response patterns more closely than in Birdsong's study. The rationale of replicating Birdsong's GJT was not to examine the near-natives' grammatical competence per se but rather to establish that, as a group, the near-natives in the present study performed comparably to a population deemed to be near-native in previous research on L2 French. It should be noted that, although the recruitment criteria targeted highly accomplished speakers, the near-native group does not represent a painstakingly vetted elite of anomalously successful learners; rather, it is intended to present a cross-section of adult learners who use their L2 French extensively in their personal and professional lives in France. The study did not investigate whether the near-natives are perceived as native speakers or whether their linguistic performance is globally nativelike.

Questionnaires

The near-native speakers completed a background questionnaire before beginning the study and a language use questionnaire at the conclusion of the study. The native speakers completed a short background questionnaire at the beginning of the study.

Experimental Tasks

Two experimental tasks were administered to both participant groups. To avoid alerting participants to the goals of the study, the tasks were administered after the conversational recording, which is discussed subsequently. Both tasks were designed in collaboration with native speaker consultants.

Task 1

Task 1 was a paper- and audio-based felicity judgment task that contained 60 items; 10 items each tested intuitions about the felicity of left-dislocations, right-dislocations, *c'est* clefts, and *avoir* clefts, and 20 items were distracters. Only the cleft data are discussed. Narrow-focus contexts designed to favor the use of a *c'est* cleft were crossed with responses that contained either a *c'est* cleft (felicitous) or an *avoir* cleft (infelicitous). Similarly, contexts that necessitated the introduction of a new discourse referent were crossed with responses that contained either a *c'est* cleft (infelicitous) or an *avoir* cleft (felicitous). Table 3 details the distribution of the items that tested clefts in Task 1.

For each item, participants heard a short context followed by a proposed response via audio CD. The entire task was also presented on a paper response

Table 3 Task 1 items

Context	Evaluate felicity of:	Anticipated response
favors <i>c'est</i> ($k = 10$)	response with <i>c'est</i> ($k = 5$)	felicitous
	response with <i>avoir</i> ($k = 5$)	infelicitous
favors <i>avoir</i> ($k = 10$)	response with <i>c'est</i> ($k = 5$)	infelicitous
	response with <i>avoir</i> ($k = 5$)	felicitous

Note. k = number of items

sheet. After each item, participants indicated whether the proposed response was felicitous or not, given the context. A response of “I don’t know” was also available. The item shown in (11) below was intended to be felicitous, as it presents a new discourse referent via an *avoir* cleft. Three randomizations of Task 1 were used, and all participants saw all 60 items.

- (11) Sophie, une étudiante à l’université, vient de sortir de son dernier cours du jour. Un de ses camarades de classe lui demande:

—*Tout à l’heure on va prendre un café, ça t’intéresse de venir?*

Sophie lui répond:

—***Je peux pas, y a mon copain qui arrive à la gare dans une demi-heure.***

La réponse (***en gras***) vous semble-t-elle naturelle dans ce contexte?

OUI NON je ne sais pas

[Sophie, a university student, has just come out of her last class of the day. One of her classmates asks her:

—*In a few minutes, we’re going to get a coffee. Would you like to join us?*

Sophie responds:

—***I can’t, there’s my boyfriend who’s arriving at the station in half an hour.***

Does the response (***in bold***) seem natural to you in this context?

YES NO I don’t know]

Table 4 Task 2 items

Context	Choose between:	Anticipated response
favors <i>c'est</i> ($k = 10$)	a. response with <i>c'est</i> b. response with <i>avoir</i>	a
favors <i>avoir</i> ($k = 10$)	a. response with <i>c'est</i> b. response with <i>avoir</i>	b

Note. k = number of items

Task 2

Task 2 elicited forced preferences about the acceptability of left-dislocations versus right-dislocations and *c'est* clefts versus *avoir* clefts; only the cleft data are reported. Like Task 1, Task 2 included 60 items. Twenty items tested preferences for *c'est* clefts versus *avoir* clefts; in 10 of these items, the context was designed to favor the *c'est* cleft, and in the remaining 10 items, the context facilitated the *avoir* cleft. Twenty items tested dislocations, and there were 20 distracters. Each item consisted of a short context followed by two possible responses. The responses formed a minimal pair, differing only by the use of a *c'est* cleft versus an *avoir* cleft (see Table 4).

Each item was presented aurally via audio CD as well as on the paper response sheet. Participants indicated which of the two responses they preferred, and a response of “I don’t know” was also provided. Three ordering randomizations of Task 2 were used, and each randomization had two versions that counterbalanced the order of the responses. The item shown in (12) below was intended to favor the narrow focus response with a *c'est* cleft (b).

(12) Item intended to favor response B (with *c'est* cleft)

Un couple marié, Jean-Luc et Alexandra, est en train de discuter de voitures françaises. Jean-Luc dit:

—*Faut dire que Citroën fait recette avec la Mégane!*

Alexandra lui répond:

- a. *Mais y a Renault qui fait la Mégane!*
- b. *Mais c'est Renault qui fait la Mégane!*

Laquelle de ces réponses est *la plus naturelle* dans ce contexte?

A B je ne sais pas

[A married couple, Jean-Luc and Alexandra, are in the middle of a discussion about French cars. Jean-Luc says:

—You gotta admit that Citroën really got it right with the Mégane!

Alexandra responds:

- a. *But there's Renault that makes the Mégane!*
- b. *But it's Renault that makes the Mégane!*

Which of these responses is *the most natural* in this context?

A B I don't know]

Conversational Data

Spontaneous conversational data were obtained by pairing each near-native with his or her native speaker acquaintance. Each dyad conversed informally for between 45 and 58 minutes. The researcher was not present at the recording sessions except to set up and dismantle the recording equipment (Macintosh PowerBook with external microphone). To facilitate as informal a speech register as possible, no discussion topics were prescribed, and participants were instructed simply to enjoy the chance to visit with a friend. When possible, the recordings were conducted in participants' homes; otherwise, a lounge at a local university was used.

The ten dyads yielded a corpus of about 8.25 hours of informal speech. The near-natives and natives contributed essentially equally to the conversations, meaning that the corpus as a whole is balanced in terms of quantitative dominance (Itakura, 2001). Excluding hesitations and non-lexical backchannels (e.g., *hmm*, *ahh*), the corpus contains about 77,300 words and was fully transcribed following the conventions in Jefferson (1984). All tokens of *c'est* clefts and *avoir* clefts were coded for (a) grammatical category of the clefted constituent, (b) clefted pronoun versus noun phrase, (c) information status of the clefted referent (Prince, 1981), and (d) presence or absence of focus. Only phrases composed of both a cleft and a following nonrestrictive relative were included; no restrictive relative clauses were included in the analysis, following Katz (2000) and Lambrecht (2001). Ten percent of the data were independently recoded by another researcher, with an inter-rater reliability measure of 93.1%.

Canonical subjects (both full noun phrase and pronouns) and non-phrase-final segments were checked for *in situ* prosodic emphasis in collaboration with a French native speaker informant with advanced training in phonetics. Questionable cases were analyzed acoustically with Praat (Boersma &

Weenink, 2010) and compared to baseline measures of fundamental frequency (F0) and syllable length, as discussed subsequently.

Results

Experimental Tasks

Both experimental tasks investigated intuitions regarding the preference for *c'est* clefts versus *avoir* clefts. Previous research on the syntax-pragmatics interface has revealed the possibility of differences between near-native and native intuitions, in which the near-natives either diverge from native intuitions or possess indeterminate intuitions (Sorace, 1993). Furthermore, as Bartning (1997) reported, *c'est* clefts and *avoir* clefts can be misused in advanced L2 French. If the near-natives possess indeterminate intuitions with respect to *c'est*- and *avoir* clefts, their response patterns should not demonstrate clear patterns of felicity and infelicity—in particular, they should not reliably reject items that present an infelicitous pairing of context and cleft type. Divergent intuitions, if present, would appear as preferences opposite those of the native speakers. One specific possibility is that, if the near-natives overextend the use of *c'est* clefts to include new referent introductions, as in Bartning (1997), then they should judge *c'est* clefts to be felicitous in *avoir* cleft contexts as well as in *c'est* cleft contexts.

Task 1

No systematic or generalized between-groups differences were found on Task 1. Of the 20 items that tested clefts, a significant between-groups difference in response patterns was found on one item only, $\chi^2(2, N = 6) = 6.063, p < .05$. This item was intended to be a felicitous pairing of a *c'est* cleft context and a *c'est* cleft response, as the responses of the natives confirmed, but the near-native group was less categorical in its judgments. On the remaining 19 items, no significant differences (chi-square tests, alpha = .05) were found between the near-native response patterns and those of the natives, whether or not the responses were in the direction anticipated when designing the task.

Task 2

Like Task 1, Task 2 tested intuitions regarding the use of *c'est* clefts and *avoir* clefts. Of the 20 items that tested preferences for *c'est* clefts versus *avoir* clefts, chi-square tests (alpha = .05) did not reveal significant differences between the response patterns of the two groups on any of the items.

Table 5 Production of *c'est*-clefts

	Near-native speakers										Total		
	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10	<i>k</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
<i>C'est</i>	3	2	5	5	8	5	6	5	4	6	49	4.9	1.7
	Native speakers												
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10			
<i>C'est</i>	4	13	6	4	11	15	6	4	1	2	66	6.6	4.7

Note. *k* = number of tokens; *SD* = standard deviation.

Table 6 Distribution of *c'est*-cleft referents across grammatical role in the corpus

<i>C'est</i> -cleft & grammatical role	Speaker group			
	Near-native		Native	
	<i>k</i>	%	<i>k</i>	%
Subject	32	85.1	46	86.8
Direct object	2	5.1	0	0.0
Indirect object	5	12.8	7	13.2
Total	39	100.0	53	100.0

Note. *k* = number of tokens

Conversational Data

C'est Clefts

In the spontaneous conversations, all the near-natives and natives produced at least one token of a *c'est* cleft. Individual rates of production varied in both groups, with the natives presenting a slightly wider range of production (between 1 and 15 tokens) than the near-natives (between 2 and 8 tokens). Individual productions of *c'est* clefts are given in Table 5.

Despite a slightly higher overall production of *c'est* clefts in the native group, the groups did not differ statistically in terms of raw production of *c'est* clefts, $t(18) = 1.071, p < .05$.

French places grammatical subjects in *c'est* clefts more frequently than English places subjects in *it* clefts (Carter-Thomas, 2009). To examine whether the near-natives *c'est*-clefted subjects as frequently as the natives, the grammatical categories of the *c'est*-clefted constituents were investigated. The aggregate data for both groups are given in Table 6.

Table 7 Information status of *c'est*-clefted referents

Referent status	Speaker group			
	Near-native		Native	
	<i>k</i> *	%	<i>k</i>	%
Brand new	0	0.0	0	0.0
Unused	3	6.3	2	3.0
Inferrable	11	22.9	10	15.2
Evoked	34	70.8	54	81.8
Total	48	100.00	66	100.0

Note. *k* = number of tokens. *1 token was excluded because it contained a clefted infinitive that has, by definition, no discourse referent.

Both groups showed a strong preference for *c'est* clefts to occur with grammatical subjects, and the distribution of *c'est* clefts with subjects, direct objects, and indirect objects did not differ significantly between the groups, $\chi^2(2, N = 6) = 2.78, p = .249$.

To examine how *c'est* clefts are used to structure discourse, we turn first to the information status of the clefted referents. *C'est* clefts do not introduce new referents in native French; the referents that they focus have typically already been evoked. These observations are respected in the data, presented in Table 7.

As anticipated, the native speakers placed no brand-new referents in *c'est* clefts, showing instead a preference for inferrable and evoked referents, with some unused referents. This pattern confirms that, in native French, *c'est* clefts preferentially contain evoked referents. The near-natives not only respected this constraint against hearer-new information but also neatly mirrored the native speaker pattern. No significant between-groups differences were found with respect to the distribution of referent types in *c'est* clefts, $\chi^2(2, N = 6) = 2.001, p = .368$.

A token-by-token discourse analysis confirmed that the near-natives used *c'est* clefts to mark focus and not to introduce new referents to the discourse. No brand-new referents were *c'est* clefted.

Avoir Clefts

Avoir clefts were produced by nine of the ten native speakers and nine of the ten near-natives. Among the speakers who produced *avoir* clefts, individual production ranged from 1 to 13 tokens in the native group and 3 to 13 tokens in the near-native group. Individual production data are given in Table 8.

Table 8 Production of *avoir*-clefts

	Near-native speakers										Total		
	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10	<i>k</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
<i>Avoir</i>	7	4	4	3	13	6	6	0	3	10	56	5.6	3.6
	Native speakers												
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10			
<i>Avoir</i>	4	13	8	0	8	5	4	1	1	4	48	4.8	3.8

Note. *k* = number of tokens; *SD* = standard deviation.

Table 9 Information status of referents in *avoir*-clefts: All speakers

Referent status	Speaker group			
	Near-native		Native	
	<i>k</i>	%*	<i>k</i>	%*
Brand new	13	23.2	9	18.8
Unused	11	19.6	14	29.2
Inferrable	28	50.0	17	35.4
Evoked	4	7.1	8	16.7
Total	56	99.9	48	100.1

Note. *k* = number of tokens. *Total does not add to 100.0 because of rounding error.

As with the *c'est* clefts, no significant between-groups differences were found in overall production of *avoir* clefts, $t(18) = 0.489$, $p < .05$.

Because *avoir* clefts introduce into the discourse a referent that has not been previously evoked, a large percentage of *avoir* clefts should encode referents that are brand new, unused, or inferrable; evoked referents should be infrequent. These predictions are borne out in the data for both the natives and near-natives, as shown in Table 9.

No significant between-groups differences were found with respect to the distribution of referent types in *avoir* clefts, $\chi^2(3, N = 8) = 4.521$, $p = .210$. Both groups used *avoir* clefts predominantly with referents that were new to the discourse (brand new, unused, inferrable).

Prosody

Let us now return to the notion of focus and strategies for marking focus in the near-natives' conversational data. It was hypothesized that, due to transfer of L1 English prosodic patterns, the near-natives would use *in situ* prosodic

emphasis to mark focus on non-utterance-final segments. However, *in situ* prosodic emphasis occurred in the speech of only one of the near-natives, speaker A9. The fifteen most striking examples were analyzed for fundamental frequency (F0) and syllable length. As a baseline, speaker A9's average F0 and average syllable length were measured across four separate extracts from her conversational data. These samples of 84, 72, 80, and 130 seconds, respectively, were taken from near the beginning, two separate points in the middle, and near the end of the conversation and represent stretches of discourse in which A9 was speaking alone, without overlap or interruption from her interlocutor. Measures of fundamental frequency were taken every 30 milliseconds, yielding a total of 8,907 measures. Speaker A9's average F0 across these measures was 253 Hz ($SD = 87$ Hz).

Syllable length is predictable in French: The last syllable of a prosodic phrase is approximately twice as long as the other syllables (Delattre, 1949). Substantially lengthened non-final syllables could therefore provide partial evidence of *in situ* prosodic emphasis. Accordingly, A9's average syllable length was measured across 100 non-utterance-final syllables taken from the same four speech samples; A9's average syllable length was 190 milliseconds ($SD = 80$ milliseconds).

Examples in which A9 produced infelicitous *in situ* prosodic emphasis—as measured by increased F0 or syllable length, or both—occurred with lexical and pronominal subjects, finite verbs, adjectives, determiners, and lexical and pronominal objects. Of specific interest to the present study are those cases where A9's *in situ* prosodic emphasis corresponded to apparent contrastive topic or focus marking. In French, subject pronouns are weak (clitics) and by definition unable to receive prosodic emphasis. Speaker A9, however, produced multiple tokens of first-person singular *je* “I” with both elevated F0 and abnormally lengthened syllables. In one example, the length of the syllable that contains *je* is 242 milliseconds, considerably longer than A9's average syllable length of 190 milliseconds, although still within one standard deviation of the mean. More striking are the measures of F0, which in one instance of *je* reach 461 Hz, considerably higher than A9's average of 253 Hz, and well beyond 2 standard deviations higher than the mean. The prosodic prominence often carries over to the immediately following finite verb (see Lambrecht, 1994, p. 356, note 20 for a related discussion of prosody in sequences containing a subject clitic and a finite verb). In the common sequence *je suis* “I am,” the syllable that contains the verb *suis* measure in one instance 524 milliseconds, nearly three times the average syllable length of 190 milliseconds, and the F0 of *suis* in *je suis* sequences can be as elevated as 557 Hz, more than double A9's

average F0 measurement of 253 Hz. No such *in situ* prosodic emphasis was observed in the native French speakers in the corpus or in the other near-natives. Some instances of A9's *in situ* prosodic emphasis correspond to the marking of contrastive topic or of focus, as discussed in the following section. As was also observed in Archibald (1997), some of A9's instances of *in situ* prosodic emphasis do not correspond to what is ostensibly the focus of the utterance.

Discussion

Hypothesis 1 predicted that, in addition to using *c'est* clefts, the near-natives would show robust evidence of their L1 prosody in their L2 focus-marking strategies. The data do not support this hypothesis. First, in the conversational data, the near-natives did not differ quantitatively in their use of *c'est* clefts, a finding that attests to the importance of *c'est* clefts as a focus-marking strategy in the near-natives' grammars. Crucially, the near-natives *c'est*-clefted grammatical subjects as frequently as the natives, having apparently overcome any possible L1-based bias against clefting subjects (see Carter-Thomas, 2009). For all but one of the near-natives, *c'est* clefting was the unique focus strategy employed in the data, with no apparent L1 prosodic transfer in the form of *in situ* prosodic focus. The absence of prosodic transfer (at least with respect to focus) in the other near-natives is of interest. In the case of focus-marking, English allows both prosodic and syntactic marking, with prosody the dominant strategy in speech. Spoken French, on the other hand, strongly prefers syntactic focus-marking. For the near-natives to acquire a fully nativelike system of focus-marking in their L2 French, they had to abandon any initial L1-based association between prosodic stress and focus-marking. The probability of L1 influence must be acknowledged: Previous research has demonstrated transfer of L1 prosody in similar situations (Archibald, 1997; Rasier, 2006; Rasier & Hilgsmann, 2007), and A9 presents residual traces of her L1 prosodic system, despite having also acquired felicitous L2 strategies. The data from the remaining near-natives, however, suggest that these L1 effects can be overcome in the endstate L2 grammar; these near-natives have both adopted the L2's syntactic focus-marking strategy and also acquired relevant aspects of the L2 phonology—namely that, although French has stress, the realization of stress obeys different rules than in English and that stress does not map to the same discursive functions as in English.

As discussed previously, one near-native (A9) produced English-like *in situ* prosodic emphasis, via an elevated F0, syllable lengthening, or both. Some of these non-phrase-final emphases mark focus, as in the example of a stressed

subject pronoun *je* “I” in (13), where the context supports a focus reading (as opposed to contrastive topic):

- (13) *Hélène elle est revenue pour les vacances de printemps non d’hiver de ski et JE suis retournée là-bas.*

“Helen she came back for spring break no winter break of ski and I [emphasized] went back there.”

One could hypothesize that A9’s use of *in situ* prosodic emphasis stems partially from an English-based aversion to placing grammatical subjects in *c’est* clefts, but this hypothesis is unsupported. First, prosodically stressed subjects do not account for a majority of the occurrences of A9’s *in situ* prosodic focus. Second, three of the four *c’est* clefts that A9 produced in the conversational data involve subjects and are felicitous. A9’s grammar of focus-marking allows both nativelike *c’est* clefting and infelicitous L1-influenced *in situ* prosodic emphasis, including the ability to stress atonic subject pronouns. In the L2 context, similar results have been reported in the L2 French of Dutch learners (Rasier, 2006; Rasier & Hiligsmann, 2007).

Further evidence comes from a variety of French that has undergone extensive long-term contact with English, described in Bullock (2009). Like A9, Bullock’s elderly French-English bilinguals in Frenchville, Pennsylvania, lengthen and emphasize non-final syllables (e.g., *MOUlin* rather than *mouLIN* “mill”) and use *in situ* prosodic emphasis to signal contrastive focus. Just as in A9’s case, this stress may fall on any lexical item and even on ostensibly atonic subject clitics, as in (14):

- (14) *JE parlais.* (Bullock, 2009, p. 183)

“I [emphasized] was speaking.”

As with A9, the bilinguals’ *in situ* strategy existed alongside syntactic focus-marking rather than replacing it; both strategies were available to the bilinguals. Despite the different circumstances in adult L2 and bilingual language acquisition, the similar crosslinguistic influences observed here merit further study.

Hypothesis 2 predicted nonnativeness in the functional distribution of *c’est*- and *avoir* clefts. Support from the experimental data could come in the form of results such as the following. First, indeterminate responses on judgments of felicity and indications of preference (Tasks 1 and 2) would reveal an inability to pair syntax with discourse context. Second, response patterns (on Tasks

1 and 2) that diverged from those of the natives could reveal overextension of the discourse functions of either *c'est* clefts or *avoir* clefts. For example, if the near-natives' grammar infelicitously allowed *c'est* clefts to introduce new discourse referents, then *c'est* clefts should not be rejected in referent-introduction contexts that were designed to favor *avoir* clefts.

The results of Tasks 1 and 2 revealed no widespread differences between the near-natives and the natives and do not uphold Hypothesis 2. The nativelike results obtained here are corroborated by those reported in Reichle (2010a, b).

The data from the spontaneous conversations provide insight into the near-natives' capacities when deployed in authentic spontaneous communication. In this context, nonnativeness could surface in numerous forms. First, overuse of *c'est* clefts could point to their status as a default construction, for example, overextended to new referent introductions, as reported in Bartning (1997). In this case, one would anticipate a concomitant underuse of *avoir* clefts. *Avoir* clefts could also be used deictically, like their English *there*-presentational counterparts. Finally, transfer of L1 prosody, if present, should be apparent over the course of a 45-minute conversation.

The conversational data do not support Hypothesis 2. There was no over- or underuse of either *c'est* clefts or *avoir* clefts with respect to the native speaker controls, and there were no examples of deictic *avoir* clefts. The near-natives did not introduce new discourse referents with *c'est* clefts, unlike what has been reported in earlier stages of L2 French (Bartning, 1997; Watorek, 2004). Finally, with the exception of A9, the near-natives do not use a L1-based *in situ* prosodic emphasis strategy for focus. The lack of convincing evidence for widespread residual difficulties at this area of the syntax-discourse interface forces a rejection of Hypothesis 2.

Conclusion

Effects of L1 interference and residual optionality of various kinds have been reported at the syntax-discourse interface (see references in Sorace & Serratrice, 2009). However, the possibility of long-term difficulties, even at the near-native level, does not entail that the end-state grammar of adult L2 learners will inexorably be subject to optionality (see also Rothman, 2009). A number of studies (Hertel, 2003; Hopp, 2009, 2010; Rothman, 2009) have suggested that syntax-discourse interface properties are mastered only *beyond* advanced levels of proficiency, in other words, by the admittedly small subset of learners who attain near-nativelike abilities. Existing research does not yet make clear how extensive or pervasive we might anticipate nonnativeness at the syntax-discourse

interface to be. In Belletti et al. (2007), for example, it is implied (e.g., p. 665, fn. 13) that the difficulties observed were characteristic of the entire near-native group and—by extension—that none of the near-natives included in the study converged on nativelike behavior. In contrast, the results of the present study are striking by virtue of how few of the near-natives displayed evidence of nonnativeness. Furthermore, the nativelike performance described is not limited to the use of *c'est* clefts and *avoir* clefts; for the same near-natives, similar results have been reported for the use of left-dislocations (Donaldson, 2011a) and right-dislocations (Donaldson, 2011b). This is not to claim, however, that all aspects of the near-natives' grammars—including mastery of the syntax-discourse interface—are entirely nativelike. The results reported here can only be interpreted as evidence for nativelike attainment at those areas of the syntax-discourse interface that were investigated. Nevertheless, important aspects of both the topic- and focus-marking systems appear unimpaired in the near-natives' grammar.

An enduring difficulty in investigations of advanced and near-native levels of proficiency is the lack of a standardized and objective means of describing and assessing the upper limits of L2 proficiency, or the lack of consistency across studies in the choice of available instruments, especially across different languages. As a consequence, the abilities of learners reported to be near-native are certain to vary across studies. The present study does not offer a resolution to this problem but does attempt to relate the present near-natives of French to those described in Birdsong (1992).

The present study is novel, to the best of my knowledge, in drawing heavily on spontaneous production data to examine the use of *c'est* clefts in near-native French. Conversational data are by nature unpredictable, and the counts of *c'est* clefts and *avoir* clefts both appear relatively low, especially compared to another variant word order, left-dislocation, of which the same corpus contains over 880 tokens (Donaldson, 2011a). On the other hand, the baseline is provided by the native speaker production, which was not significantly higher than that of the near-natives. The token counts obtained appear high when compared to previous studies that have sought to elicit clefts in L2 French, providing a methodological argument in favor of authentic production data. Sleeman (2004), for example, elicited only 11 *c'est* clefts from her L2 speakers and 16 from her native controls, by my count. A final argument for the inclusion of unguided production data as a complement to established experimental methods is that interface phenomena occur, by definition, in natural discourse. In the present study, the experimental and production data generally led to the

same conclusions, although in A9's case, it was only at certain moments in the production data that the presence of *in situ* prosodic emphasis became apparent.

On the whole, the results point to the possibility of nativelike mastery of aspects of the syntax-discourse interface by adult near-native speakers of French. In both experimental and spontaneous conversation data, the behavior of the near-natives mirrored that of the natives. The conversational data further suggest that, beyond the syntax-discourse interface, the near-natives mastered the three-way intersection of discourse structure, syntax, and prosody.

Revised version accepted 4 February 2011

Note

- 1 As an anonymous reviewer points out, a cleft would not be appropriate here. What is relevant is the (nontargetlike) interlanguage possibility of *in situ* prosodic emphasis.

References

- Abrahamsson, N., & Hyltenstam, K. (2009). Age of onset and nativelikeness in a second language: Listener perception versus linguistic scrutiny. *Language Learning, 59*, 249–306.
- Abu-Rabia, S., & Kehat, S. (2004). The critical period for second-language pronunciation: Is there such a thing? Ten case studies of late starters who attained a native-like Hebrew accent. *Educational Psychology, 24*, 77–98.
- Archibald, J. (1997). The acquisition of second language phrasal stress: A pilot study. In S. J. Hannahs & M. Young-Scholten (Eds.), *Focus on phonological acquisition* (pp. 263–281). Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Barnes, B. K. (1985). *The pragmatics of left detachment in spoken standard French*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Bartning, I. (1997). C'est — in native and non-native spoken French. *Studier i Modern Språkvetenskap, 11*, 13–47.
- Belletti, A., Bennati, E., & Sorace, A. (2007). Theoretical and developmental issues in the syntax of subjects: Evidence from near-native Italian. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory, 25*, 657–689.
- Birdsong, D. (1992). Ultimate attainment in second language acquisition. *Language, 68*, 706–755.
- Birdsong, D., & Molis, M. (2001). On the evidence for maturational constraints in second-language acquisition. *Journal of Memory and Language, 44*, 235–249.

- Bley-Vroman, R. (1989). What is the logical problem of foreign language learning? In S. M. Gass & J. Schachter (Eds.), *Linguistic perspectives on second language acquisition* (pp. 41–68). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Boersma, P., & Weenink, D. (2010). *Praat: Doing phonetics by computer* (Version 5.1.30) [Computer program]. Retrieved March 24, 2010, from <http://www.praat.org/>.
- Bohnacker, U., & Rosén, C. (2008). The clause-initial position in L2 German declaratives. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 30, 511–538.
- Bullock, B. E. (2009). Prosody in contact in French: A case study from a heritage variety in the USA. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 13, 165–194.
- Calvé, P. (1983). Un trait du français authentique: La dislocation. *Canadian Modern Language Journal*, 39, 779–793.
- Carter-Thomas, S. (2009). The French c'est-cleft: Functional and formal motivations. In D. Banks, S. Eason, & J. Ormrod (Eds.), *La linguistique systématique fonctionnelle et la langue française* (pp. 127–156). Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Chafe, W. (1974). Language and consciousness. *Language*, 50, 111–133.
- Chafe, W. (1976). Givenness, contrastiveness, definiteness, subjects, topics, and point of view. In C. N. Li (Ed.), *Subject and topic* (pp. 25–55). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- De Cat, C. (2004). A fresh look at how young children encode new referents. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 42, 111–127.
- Delattre, P. (1949). *Advanced training in French pronunciation*. Middlebury, VT: The College Store.
- Donaldson, B. (2011a). Left-dislocation in near-native French. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 33, 399–432.
- Donaldson, B. (2011b). Nativelike right-dislocations in near-native French. *Second Language Research*, 27, 361–390.
- Firbas, J. (1992). *Functional sentence perspective in written and spoken communication*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gess, R. (2009). Teaching presentation cleft constructions in French: When to do it and how to do it. *Southern Journal of Linguistics*, 33, 1–23.
- Hertel, T. J. (2003). Lexical and discourse factors in the second language acquisition of Spanish word order. *Second Language Research*, 19, 273–304.
- Hopp, H. (2009). The syntax-discourse interface in near-native L2 acquisition: Off-line and on-line performance. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 12, 463–483.
- Hopp, H. (2010). Ultimate attainment in L2 inflection: Performance similarities between non-native and native speakers. *Lingua*, 120, 901–931.
- Ioup, G., Boustagui, E., El Tigi, M., & Moselle, M. (1994). Reexamining the critical period hypothesis: A case study of successful adult SLA in a naturalistic environment. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 16, 73–98.
- Itakura, H. (2001). Describing conversational dominance. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33, 1859–1880.

- Jefferson, G. (1984). Transcript notation. In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social interaction* (pp. ix–xvi). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, J. S., & Newport, E. L. (1989). Critical period effects in second language learning: The influence of maturational state on the acquisition of English as a second language. *Cognitive Psychology*, 21, 60–99.
- Katz, S. L. (2000). Categories of *c'est*-cleft constructions. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics*, 45, 253–273.
- Katz, S. L., & Blyth, C. S. (2007). *Teaching French grammar in context: Theory and practice*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Kuno, S. (1972). Functional sentence perspective. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 3, 269–320.
- Ladd, D. R. (1996). *Intonational phonology*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lambrecht, K. (1981). *Topic, antitopic, and verb agreement in nonstandard French*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Lambrecht, K. (1986). Pragmatically motivated syntax: Presentational cleft constructions in spoken French. In A. M. Farley, P. T. Farley, & K.-E. McCullough (Eds.), *Papers from the parasession on pragmatics and grammatical theory* (pp. 115–126). Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Lambrecht, K. (1987). On the status of SVO sentences in French. In R. Tomlin (Ed.), *Coherence and grounding in discourse* (pp. 217–261). Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Lambrecht, K. (1994). *Information structure and sentence form: Topic, focus, and the mental representations of discourse referents*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lambrecht, K. (2001). A framework for the analysis of cleft constructions. *Linguistics*, 39, 463–516.
- Li, C. N., & Thompson, S. A. (Eds.). (1976). *Subject and topic: A new typology of language*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Magnan, S. S., & Tochon, F. V. (2001). Reconsidering French pedagogy: The crucial role of the teacher and teaching. *French Review*, 74, 1092–1112.
- Major, R. C. (2008). Transfer in second language phonology: A review. In J. G. Hansen Edwards & M. L. Zampini (Eds.), *Phonology and second language acquisition* (pp. 63–94). Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Marinova-Todd, S. H. (2003). *Comprehensive analysis of ultimate attainment in adult second language acquisition*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
- Prince, E. F. (1978). A comparison of wh-clefts and it-clefts in discourse. *Language*, 54, 883–906.
- Prince, E. F. (1981). Toward a taxonomy of given-new information. In P. Cole (Ed.), *Radical pragmatics* (pp. 223–255). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Prince, E. F. (1996). *Constructions and the syntax-discourse interface*. Unpublished manuscript.

- Rasier, L. (2006). La compétence discursive en français et néerlandais-L2: Aspects prosodiques et syntaxiques du marquage du focus. *Cahiers de l'Institut de Linguistique de Louvain*, 32, 313–331.
- Rasier, L., & Hiligsmann, P. (2007). Prosodic transfer from L1 to L2: Theoretical and methodological issues. *Nouveaux cahiers de linguistique française*, 28, 41–66.
- Reichle, R. V. (2010a). Judgments of information structure in L2 French: Nativelike performance and the Critical Period Hypothesis. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 48, 53–85.
- Reichle, R. V. (2010b). Near-nativelike processing of contrastive focus in L2 French. In B. VanPatten & J. Jegerski (Eds.), *Research in second language processing and parsing* (pp. 321–344). Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Rialland, A., Doetjes, J., & Rebuschi, G. (2002). What is focused in *c'est XP qui/que* cleft sentences in French? In B. Bel & I. Marlien (Eds.), *Speech prosody 2002: Proceedings of the 1st international conference on speech prosody* (pp. 595–598). Aix-en-Provence, France: Laboratoire Parole et Langage.
- Reinhart, T. (1981). Pragmatics and linguistics: An analysis of sentence topics. *Philosophica*, 27, 53–94.
- Rochemont, M. S. (1986). *Focus in generative grammar*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Roland, D., Dick, F., & Elman, J. L. (2007). Frequency of basic English grammatical structures: A corpus analysis. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 57, 348–379.
- Rothman, J. (2009). Pragmatic deficits with syntactic consequences? L2 pronominal subjects and the syntax-pragmatics interface. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41, 951–973.
- Rouget, C., & Salze, L. (1986). C'est . . . qui, c'est . . . que: Le jeu des quatre familles. *Recherches sur le Français Parlé*, 7, 117–139.
- Sleeman, P. (2004). Guided learners of French and the acquisition of emphatic constructions. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 42, 129–151.
- Sorace, A. (1993). Incomplete vs. divergent representations of unaccusativity in non-native grammars of Italian. *Second Language Research*, 9, 22–47.
- Sorace, A. (1999). Initial states, end-states, and residual optionality in L2 acquisition. In A. Greenhill, H. Littlefield, & C. Tano (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 23rd BUCLD* (pp. 666–674). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla.
- Sorace, A. (2000). Syntactic optionality in non-native grammars. *Second Language Research*, 16, 93–102.
- Sorace, A. (2003). Near-nativeness. In C. Doughty & M. Long (Eds.), *The handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 130–151). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Sorace, A., & Filiaci, F. (2006). Anaphora resolution in near-native speakers of Italian. *Second Language Research*, 22, 339–368.
- Sorace, A., & Serratrice, L. (2009). Internal and external interfaces in bilingual language development: Beyond structural overlap. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 13, 195–210.
- Trévisé, A. (1986). Is it transferable, topicalization? In E. Kellerman & M. Sharwood Smith (Eds.), *Crosslinguistic influence in second language acquisition* (pp. 186–206). New York: Pergamon.

- Tsimpli, I., & Sorace, A. (2006). Differentiating interfaces: L2 performance in syntax-semantics and syntax-discourse phenomena. In D. Bamman, T. Magnitskaia, & C. Zeller (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 30th annual Boston University Conference on Language Development* (pp. 653–664). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla.
- Watorek, M. (2004). Construction du discours par des apprenants de langues, enfants et adultes. *Acquisition et Interaction en Langue Etrangère*, 20, 129–171.
- White, L. (1989). *Universal Grammar and second language acquisition*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- White, L., & Genesee, F. (1996). How native is near-native? The issue of age and ultimate attainment in the acquisition of a second language. *Second Language Research*, 12, 233–265.