

ACQUISITION OF PRAGMATICALLY MOTIVATED SYNTAX IN L2 FRENCH

by

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(Under the Direction of Diana L. Ranson)

ABSTRACT

This thesis compares the accuracy and appropriateness of presentational structures and left- and right-dislocation in L2 speaker monologues in the Salford Corpus to native speaker norms. The results show that students successfully acquired the syntax and pragmatics of presentational structures, the syntax of subject left-dislocation, and certain pragmatic functions of left-dislocation (coding of brand-new, inferred and textually evoked referents and topic shift) and right-dislocation (coding of new and evoked referents and clarification). Students did not produce passive or middle voice presentational constructions, object dislocations, or right-dislocations communicating contrast or turn closing. For all other structures and functions analyzed, student use conformed to native speaker norms during their study abroad experience, but regressed when classroom instruction resumed.

INDEX WORDS: French, Second Language Acquisition, Preferred Argument Structure, Presentational Syntax, Clefts, Dislocation, Syntax, Pragmatics

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In describing communicative competence, various authors have included in their frameworks what they call discourse competence or pragmatic competence (Jordà 2005). By including these aspects of communicative competence, the authors recognize that the simple formation of grammatically correct utterances will not allow the second language learner to communicate effectively; these utterances must also be made at conversationally appropriate moments. In spontaneous discourse, speakers use various communication strategies to make themselves understood. Whereas these strategies are often unnecessary in written discourse because the reader can always backtrack or reread an unclear message, spoken discourse exists in the here-and-now and it is up to the interlocutors to construct language that is immediately recognizable and understandable.

1.1 Guiding Principles: Preferred Argument Structure (PAS)

Studies of the preferred argument structure (PAS)¹ of the French language, have shown that speakers consistently produce language structures that adhere to five *soft constraints*² rooted in pragmatics and syntax. The first four soft constraints are derived from Lambrecht (1987, 1988) and Ashby and Bentivoglio (1993)³ while the fifth derives from Helkkula-Lukkarinen (1991), Lambrecht (1980, 1981, 1987, 1988) and Morel (1992):

¹ According to Du Bois (2003:33) PAS “represents a hypothesis that in spontaneous discourse, certain configurations of arguments are systematically preferred over other grammatically possible alternatives.”

² The term *soft constraint* indicates that, although the vast majority of utterances follow the patterns of PAS, deviations from these patterns do not result in ungrammatical utterances.

³ The soft constraints proposed by Lambrecht (1987, 1988) and Ashby and Bentivoglio (1993) are in turn based on the theories of Du Bois (1985).

- Constraint 1: “Avoid more than one lexical core argument.” – In other words, a transitive verb should be accompanied by either a lexical noun phrase (NP) as subject or object, but not both. One of these verbal arguments should be represented by a pronoun.

EITHER: *Ils aiment les souris.*

OR: *Les chats les aiment.*

BUT NOT: *Les chats aiment les souris.*

- Constraint 2: “Avoid more than one new core argument.” – Should a transitive verb be accompanied by lexical NPs in both subject and object position, only one of those should be new to the conversation. The other NP either should have been mentioned previously or should be physically present in the communication setting. In the sentence, *Les chats aiment les souris*, either *les chats* or *les souris* should have been previously mentioned.
- Constraint 3: “Avoid lexical subjects of transitive verbs.” – The subject of a transitive verb should be represented by a pronoun.

PREFERRED: *Ils aiment les souris.*

NOT: *Les chats les aiment.*

OR: *Les chats aiment les souris.*
- Constraint 4: “Avoid new subjects of transitive verbs.” – If the subject of a transitive verb is not represented by a pronoun, that subject should not be new to the conversation. In the previous examples, should one decide to enunciate the noun phrase *les chats* in subject position, that noun phrase should not be new to the conversation.

- Constraint 5: “Make topic precede comment.” – If *topic* is defined as “ce dont on parle” and *comment* as “ce qu’on en dit” (Helkkula-Lukkarinen 1991:372), a speaker should first announce the sentence or discourse topic and then comment upon that topic.

Les chats, ils aiment les souris. (Topic – *les chats* – precedes comment *ils aiment les souris* – while *les chats* avoids subject position)

Les souris, les chats les aiment. (In this sentence, the topic is now *les souris* and the comment explains that *les chats les aiment*.)

Speakers of French utilize a number of syntactic devices beyond the canonical subject-verb-object structure that adhere to the soft constraints of PAS. Among these are several presentational and left-dislocated structures. Presentational syntax serves an initial purpose of introducing (or presenting) new discourse referents into the conversation and also aids in the preservation of the topic-comment structure when followed by a subordinate clause. As it allows for the extraction of an NP from its normal sentential position to a pre-clausal position, left-dislocation preserves the topic-comment relationship, permitting, for example, direct objects to serve as sentence or discourse topics as shown in the example *les souris, les chats les aiment*. Right-dislocation, on the other hand, expressly breaks with PAS, providing a marked comment-topic structure and is included in this thesis as a counterexample.

1.2 Purpose and Hypotheses

In this thesis, the link between the syntactic forms and pragmatic functions of the French language is of utmost importance. Specifically, studies on native speaker French (NS) show that new noun phrases are commonly introduced via presentational syntax (Ashby 1995; Herschensohn 1982; Lambrecht 1988; Ocampo 1993) while given noun phrases are promoted to

topic status through the syntactic device of dislocation (Ashby 1988; Barnes 1985; Cadiot 1992; Helkkula-Lukkarinen 1991; Lambrecht 1980, 1981, 1987; Morel 1992). In each chapter, NS use of these structures based on previous studies (Ashby 1988, 1995; Barnes 1985) will be compared to that of foreign language learners of French (L2). It is the aim of this study, therefore, to determine whether native French speakers and French L2 learners use the same syntactic strategies, i.e. presentational syntax and dislocation, to introduce new discourse referents and promote prior discourse referents to topic status.

From my experiences as both an L2 learner of French and as a teacher of French as a second language, it has come to my attention that explicit instruction in the link between pragmatics and syntax is generally avoided in the L2 classroom. While students are often taught the grammar of presentational syntax (sometimes indirectly), they are not taught the pragmatic functions of these structures. Neither the syntax of dislocation nor the pragmatic functions it communicates are explicitly taught in the L2 classroom. However, following Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis, I believe that these language features can be acquired without explicit instruction through frequent exposure to authentic language, both in and out of the classroom. Specifically, this study follows a group of L2 students of French through three different learning scenarios. They begin in the classroom, participate in an internship in a francophone county, and then return to the classroom. While I believe that student use of pragmatically motivated syntax that adheres to the soft constraints of PAS will exist at each phase of study, I also believe that over time student language use will continue to evolve, such that student language will most closely resemble NS use following the internship abroad when students have returned to classroom instruction.

1.3 Corpus

The following analyses are based on Hawkins, Towell, and Bazergui's (2006) Salford corpus, one of several corpora of L2 French speech freely available to researchers via the French Learner Language Oral Corpora website.⁴ The corpus contains recordings of 12 undergraduate students from the University of Salford made over a period of four years, including a six-month stay in a francophone country toward the end of the second and beginning of the third years of university study. The authors provide the following description of students in the corpus:

L2 subjects were selected from an original cohort of 23 students. They were selected in the first year of an honours degree course in Modern Languages on the basis of scoring in the range 17/50 – 25/50 on a pre-study cloze (gap filling) test. Age range at the beginning of the study was 19 – 23. There were 8 females and 4 males. All subjects had had 7-8 years of predominantly classroom exposure to French at the beginning of the study and were classed notionally as 'intermediate-level' learners (Hawkins, Towell and Bazergui 2006).

Students were recorded while performing a variety of tasks that elicited narrations, descriptions, and dynamic conversations with an interviewer.

1.4 Methodology

For the purposes of this study, I divide the recordings from the Salford corpus into three categories, a) pre-internship abroad, b) internship abroad, and c) post-internship abroad, in order to study the students' various stages of acquisition. Ashby (1995:94) describes the speech samples from his Tours corpus of native speaker French as "monologues with minimal intervention by the interviewer." Since L2 speech data will be compared with data derived from the Tours corpus (Ashby 1988, 1995), only recordings from the Salford corpus that manifested themselves as narratives in monologue or near monologue format are used in the present study. Table 1 specifies which experimental tasks are analyzed for each stage of acquisition.

⁴ The French Learner Language Oral Corpora is a project of the Universities of Southampton and Newcastle. It operates under the guidelines of the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDS) Project (MacWhinney 1993).

Personal Adventures are personal stories told by the student directly to an interviewer. For the Story Continuation task, students were told the beginning of a story or given a fictitious scenario and were asked to elaborate and finish the story. In each of these tasks, there were occasional interventions on the part of the interviewer, but the vast majority of language use was in monologue format. For both the Pink Panther and Balablok in Booth tasks, students viewed short films and then recounted narrations of those films. For these two tasks, students were alone and there were no interventions on the part of an interviewer.

From these speech samples, all NP verbal arguments of finite verbs, left-dislocated (LD) and right-dislocated (RD) noun phrases, and NPs appearing in presentational structures were extracted for analysis. NP verbal arguments were coded in comparison with Ashby (1995) for syntactic role (subject of a two-argument, one-argument, or copular verb, direct, locative or oblique object) and cognitive status (new or given). LD and RD-NPs were coded according to Ashby (1988) for syntactic role (subject, direct, indirect, or oblique object, possessive or none), cognitive status (new – inferred or brand-new – or evoked – strictly given, textually evoked, or situationally evoked), topic status (sentence or discourse topic), and pragmatic function (contrast, topic shift, clarification, epithet, or turn closing).⁵

In determining the syntactic role of NPs, it is important to recognize that the learner language produced in the Salford corpus does not always correspond to native speaker norms and contains many false starts and hesitations. Every attempt was made therefore to determine the speaker's intention when coding syntactic role. For example, in (1) below, *disparaître* is a non-finite verb. However, since a subject NP accompanies it, I have chosen to interpret the form as a finite verb that the speaker failed to conjugate in line with native speaker norms.

⁵ Precise definitions of each of these terms will appear in Chapters 2 and 3.

(1) le p'tit bateau disparaître dans l' lac⁶

Additionally, students tend to fail to use prepositions in accordance with native speaker norms as in (2). From the context, it can be determined that *l'incendie* should actually read *sur l'incendie*, with a syntactic role of locative.

(2) il le placerons l'incendie

Various other errors occur in the student speech and every effort has been made to determine and code the speaker's intended language use.

In Chapter 2, I discuss both the form and function of presentational syntax in both native speaker and L2 French. Chapter 3 addresses left- and right-dislocation, and highlights the pragmatic importance of these structures to conversations in native speaker and L2 French. Each of these chapters concludes with a brief summary of student acquisition of these syntactic structures and their pragmatic functions. In a final concluding chapter, I discuss student acquisition in more detail, drawing conclusions based on the results of Chapters 2, and 3 while also offering suggestions for classroom instruction in L2 French.

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all examples come from the L2 transcripts of the Salford Corpus. Any apparent anomalies in orthography are copied directly from those transcripts and reflect L2 use and pronunciation.

Table 1. Analyzed Tasks

Pre-Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post-Study Abroad
Personal Adventure (Year 2) Story Continuation (Year 1) ⁷ Story Continuation (Year 2) Pink Panther (Year 1) Balablok in Booth (Year 2)	Personal Adventure (Year 3) Story Continuation (Year 3)	Balablok in Booth (Year 3) Pink Panther (Year 4)

⁷ Some students had trouble understanding the purpose of this task and failed to produce a narrative. The resulting data was in the form of a dynamic conversation with the interviewer. When this happened, this task was not included in the present data set.

CHAPTER 2

PRESENTATIONAL SYNTAX

Following the soft constraints of PAS, a new discourse referent would most logically be introduced into a conversation via an NP in object position of a transitive verb or as an NP in subject position of an intransitive verb. However, there are additional syntactic structures available to the speaker of French for introducing new discourse referents. These syntactic structures are considered presentational in nature; they serve to introduce, or present, a new discourse referent into the conversation. When followed by a relative clause, these structures also maintain the preferred topic-comment structure. Presentational syntax therefore provides the syntactic means to adhere to constraints 2, 4 and 5.

In the literature on presentational syntax, a general distinction is made between the cognitive statuses *new* and *evoked* (Ashby 1995, Lambrecht 1988) following the definitions of Prince (1981). In these works, a discourse referent may be considered *evoked* if is physically present in the conversation setting or if previously mentioned in the conversation. Conversely, a discourse referent may be considered *new* if mentioned for the first time and not physically present in the conversation setting. Within the category *new*, Ashby (1995) makes a distinction between *brand-new* and *inferred* discourse referents. He states that a *brand-new* referent is “both new to the discourse and unidentifiable by the hearer” whereas an *inferred* discourse referent “will be identifiable by the hearer or present at least peripherally in the ‘hearer’s consciousness” (Ashby 1995:95-96).

2.1 *Ya* and *avoir*

The first presentational construction considered is based on the lexical item *avoir*. The verb *avoir* may appear in agreement with a clitic subject pronoun followed by a new NP referent (*avoir-simple*)⁸ or in a cleft construction (*avoir-cleft*), as in (3), where the relative clause comments upon the presented NP.

(3) J'ai une camarade qui arrive. (Ashby 1995)

Additionally, the verb *avoir* may appear in the fixed expression *il y a* followed by a new NP referent, also alone (*ya-simple*) or in a cleft construction (*ya-cleft*), as seen in (4).

(4) Il y a Giscard qui veut faire un pas vers la gauche... (Ashby 1995)

Lambrecht (1988) proposes that these structures serve three distinct purposes: a) to introduce or present a new referent into the discourse; b) to present some non-topical NP as an element in some unexpected or surprising piece of information; or c) when the NP is already active⁹, to show the novelty of the whole utterance and promote it to discourse topic. Ashby (1995) verifies the first of these functions, showing that new discourse referents are most frequently introduced via an *avoir-cleft*, *ya-cleft*, *ya-simple* or in post-verbal position as a direct or oblique object.

Table 2 shows how new discourse referents are coded in the speech of L2 speakers. Data are shown for the three developmental stages under observation placed in comparison with data on native speaker use from Ashby (1995). Examples of the syntactic roles coded in Table 2 are shown in Examples (5) to (14) below:

(5) *la panthère rouge* l'a aussi donné la boîte d'allumettes (subject of a transitive verb)

(6) *l'eau* a disparu et les collines les montagnes tout (subject of an intransitive verb)

⁸ These terms are based on Lambrecht (1988) and Ashby (1995).

⁹ Lambrecht (1988:144) states, "An *active* referent is one 'that is currently lit up, a concept in a person's focus of consciousness at a particular moment'." In other words, an active referent is one that is, at the time of mention, already present without question or confusion in the hearer's consciousness.

- (7) *les petits hommes carrés* sont vraiment étonnés de voir ce petit homme.... (subject of a copular verb)
- (8) il ramasse *les déchets*.... (direct object)
- (9) ...quand il est sorti *d'la tente*.... (locative object)
- (10) ...qui a dit à *l'ours*.... (oblique object)
- (11) ...il avait *un signe* pour les dire qu'il fallait pas nagez pas là (*avoir-simple*)
- (12) il a aussi *une petite armée de fourmis* qui l'aident (*avoir-cleft*)
- (13) il y a *d'la musique triste* (*ya-simple*)
- (14) il y a *un petit homme rond* qui est différent des autres (*ya-cleft*)

The percentages in Table 2 show that at all stages of acquisition under observation students have an understanding of the PAS of the French language. Certainly this understanding is not identical to that of native speakers; however, it is obvious from the distribution of new and given referents that students recognize that subject positions are not favorable to the introduction of new discourse referents while presentational structures and object positions do favor the introduction of new discourse referents. In analyzing the developmental processes of student speakers, the pre-study abroad data show that students are more conservative in their application of the soft constraints of PAS than are their native speaker counterparts, especially with regards to the introduction of new discourse referents in subject position. During the study abroad phase of acquisition, it seems that students pass through a stage of risk taking, introducing more new discourse referents in subject position and more given discourse referents in presentational structures. During the post- study abroad phase, students seem to revert to a more conservative application of PAS, more conservative in many cases than shown in the pre-study abroad data, and in comparison with the native speaker data. I believe this occurred because student

acquisition of these structures was not yet complete at the time of their return to England.

Without continued frequent exposure to and communicative validation of these structures it is logical that they would not continue to produce them according to native speaker norms.

Ashby (1995:95) observes that native French speakers place new discourse referents in subject position, specifically in subject position of a two-argument verb, more frequently than would be expected following the soft constraints of PAS. He notes however, that very few of these new subjects are brand-new and contends that constraint 4 is “satisfied if one accepts that new-but-identifiable referents are at least partially given” (Ashby 1995:96). Table 3 shows student application of this soft constraint in comparison with the data provided by Ashby (1995). Unlike native speakers, students do not categorically reject brand-new NPs in subject position and in fact produce a significant number of brand-new NPs in that position. These data are interesting because they show that while students generally introduce new discourse referents in subject position with less frequency than native speakers, as shown by the low percentages in Table 2, they do not differentiate between brand-new and inferred discourse referents in the same way as native speakers. It would be interesting to continue this discussion across the object and presentational syntactic categories enumerated in Table 2; however, Ashby (1995) does not provide the data necessary for comparison.

Returning to Table 2, another apparent deviation concerns the percentage of new discourse referents in comparison with given discourse referents. Students produce a higher percentage of given lexical NPs than native speakers. This discrepancy accounts for certain variations in the data. To compensate for this discrepancy, I have restructured the data from Ashby (1995) to show the simple distribution of new discourse referents across syntactic categories, not in comparison to given discourse referents, as in Table 2, but as a unique

phenomenon. These data, as well as the data on L2 speakers, appear in Table 4. To calculate these percentages, consider, for example, new subjects of transitive verbs in the pre-study abroad category. There are 27 new NPs in this position and 658 total new NPs during this time period. A simple percentage is taken to show that of the 658 total new NPs, 4.1% appear in the syntactic role of subject of a transitive verb.

The data shown in Table 4 initially corroborate the conclusions drawn from Table 2, but also show that student speakers distribute new NPs across syntactic categories like native speakers. The most obvious discrepancies are the high student use of oblique objects and the low use of subject of copular verbs to introduce new NPs. What is important here, however, is L2 speakers' general use of presentational structures to introduce new discourse referents. While the distribution of new NPs across different presentational structures is variable, the total use of presentational structures is virtually identical between native and non-native speakers of French. Specifically the maximum difference in use between NS and L2 speakers is 3.4%.

2.2 Other Presentational Syntax

Other presentational structures have not been studied for statistical frequency but have been noted in native speaker conversations (Herschensohn 1982, Lambrecht 1988). While I will not attempt to quantify their use in the L2 data, I will attempt to identify these structures and verify their use for presentational functions:

- (15) ... tu vois les vieilles qui tombent. (François 1974:783)
- (16) Il est arrivé beaucoup d'Américains.
- (17) Il se construit beaucoup de bâtiments.
- (18) Il a été mangé beaucoup de pommes. (Herschensohn 1982:193)

Functioning the most like the *avoir* constructions described above, (15) is formed around a verb of perception such as *voir* or *entendre* (Lambrecht 1988). A verb of motion in agreement with the dummy subject *il* is used in (16) to indicate a discourse referent's first appearance in the scene. Similarly, (17) uses a reflexive verb in agreement with *il* in the middle voice.¹⁰ Finally, (18) is a purely passive construction (Hershensohn 1982).

Students produced structures such as (15) and (16) above to introduce new NPs during each of the three phases of acquisition under observation as demonstrated in (19) to (21) below:

(19) nous avons vu un homme au milieu de la rue

(20) j'ai vu un homme qui est allé dans les arbres....

(21) on voit des petits gens carrés...qui se baladent qui se promènent dans ce monde

In addition to *voir*, the verb *entendre* is used twice by speaker four during the study abroad experience as demonstrated in (22) and (23):

(22) j'ai entendu un bruit à la porte comme si quelqu'un avait un clé

(23) j'ai entendu...les pieds sur le plafond qui s'approchaient de ma porte

The verbs of motion and existence *exister*, *rester*, *arriver*, *commencer* and *resulter* are also used with the dummy subjects *il* and *ça* in presentational contexts during each of the three temporal periods as in (24-28):

(24) il existe que des carrés

(25) il ne reste qu'un homme cube

(26) il arrive un touriste, quelqu'un qui veut faire du camping

(27) ça commence une bagarre entre les personnages ronds et carrés

¹⁰ Klaiman (1991:3) states, "...the middle seems to have been conceived as a compromise category displaying characteristics of both the active and the passive. In a middle construction, the viewpoint is active in that the action notionally devolves from the standpoint of the most dynamic (or Agent-like) participant in the depicted situation. But the same participant has Patient-like characteristics as well, in that it sustains the action's principal effects."

(28) il résulte une autre sorte de personne

Student speakers failed to produce presentational structures such as (17) and (18) where the middle and passive voices serve to highlight a sentence-final focalized¹¹ NP that would normally appear in subject position.

2.3 Discussion

The data above show three different patterns of student acquisition. The first pattern of acquisition indicates mastery of the distribution of a syntactic structure or pragmatic function. The data clearly show that students can produce utterances with both the syntax and pragmatic function of presentational structures based on the verb *avoir*, and verbs of perception, motion, and existence. The second pattern consists of misunderstanding or lack of knowledge about a topic. Not surprisingly students did not produce the complex syntax of passive and middle voice constructions as in (17) and (18) above. The final pattern consists of mastery at the study abroad phase, which is then lost in the post-study abroad phase.

One of the most striking observations to be drawn from these data is the importance of the study abroad experience in the creation of the students' interlanguage. For one aspect of discourse grammar associated with presentational syntax, the distribution of new and given discourse referents in conversation, student use moves through a series of phases. The pre-study abroad data generally show that students have learned and studied the syntactic structures in question and that they are experimenting with the use of these structures, often to the point of overgeneralization. During the subsequent study abroad experience, student use tends to align itself with native speaker use of these structures. One can imagine that during this phase of acquisition, students are receiving input from native speakers on a daily basis and are intuitively

¹¹ Moreno-Cabrera (1987:706) defines *focus* as “la palabra o constituyente sintáctico más sobresaliente o relevante de la oración, aquél sobre el que se centra informativamente la misma.” In other words, the focus is the most informative part of the comment.

molding their speech patterns to match those of the native speaker community. Finally, during the post-study abroad phase, student use tends to regress, so that their speech more closely resembles their own pre-study abroad interlanguage more than native speaker use. Specifically, it follows from the raw data in Table 2 that in native speaker discourse, given and new discourse referents are coded at a ratio of 1:2.70 (based on data from Ashby 1988), and study abroad students code these referents at a ratio of 1:2.13. These ratios are very similar and contrast greatly with the pre-study abroad ratio of 1:1.27 and the post-study abroad ratio of 1:0.96.

Table 2. Distribution of New Lexical NPs in Relation to Total NPs

Syntactic Role	Observed Frequency New NPs / Total NPs				% of New NPs to Total NPs			
	Pre- Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post- Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1995)	Pre- Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post- Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1995)
<u>Subject</u>								
A	27/129	6/15	6/77	28/48	21%	40%	8%	58%
S	50/165	11/23	28/108	40/60	30%	47%	26%	67%
X	15/64	11/19	5/49	78/144	23%	58%	10%	54%
<u>Object</u>								
O	215/320	118/160	153/244	355/445	67%	74%	62%	80%
L	129/202	55/98	62/125	95/158	64%	56%	50%	60%
obl	79/117	34/47	52/83	35/40	68%	72%	63%	88%
<u>Presentational</u>								
<i>ya</i> -simple	60/83	18/28	35/50	121/148	72%	64%	70%	82%
<i>ya</i> -cleft	33/36	12/12	39/52	39/46	92%	100%	75%	85%
<i>avoir</i> -simple	40/48	50/62	8/13	33/43	83%	81%	62%	77%
<i>avoir</i> -cleft	10/11	7/7	6/6	18/19	91%	100%	100%	95%
TOTAL	658/1175	322/471	394/807	842/1151	56%	68%	49%	73%
A = Subject of a two-argument verb			X = Subject of a copular verb			L = Locative object		
S = Subject of a one-argument verb			O = Direct object			obl = Oblique object		

Table 3. Brand-New NPs in Subject Position

Subject Role	Observed Frequency Brand-New NPs / Total New NPs				% of Brand-New NPs to New NPs			
	Pre- Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post- Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1995)	Pre- Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post- Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1995)
A	5/27	1/6	1/6	0/28	19%	17%	17%	--
S	9/50	4/11	8/28	2/40	18%	36%	29%	5%
X	4/15	2/11	0/5	4/78	27%	18%	--	5%
A = Subject of a two-argument verb								
S = Subject of a one-argument verb								
X = Subject of a copular verb								

CHAPTER 3

DISLOCATION

One of the most widely used syntactic devices for communicating “aboutness”¹² and other topic-related concepts is dislocation, which may be defined as the displacement of a discourse referent from its normal sentential position to a pre- or post-clausal position, often but not always accompanied by the appearance of a redundant anaphoric pronoun in the main clause. The two phenomena will henceforth be referred to as left-dislocation (LD) and right-dislocation (RD), respectively.¹³ Blasco (1997) points out that almost any sentential element may appear in dislocation and she offers examples of dislocated semi-lexical pronouns, lexical NPs, locative adverbs and adjectives. This study, however, considers only lexical NPs.

Blasco (1997:7) identifies three major types of dislocation with an anaphoric pronoun and offers these examples:

(29) les femmes s’y prêtaient à *ce jeu* (Blasco 1997:8)

(30) quand tu vois que *les Indes ils*¹⁴ sont pas loin de un milliard de gens (Blasco 1997:11)

(31) dans un monde tellement bousculé *nos enfants* on doit pas *leur* demander de rendement
(Blasco 1997:11)

In (29) both the anaphoric pronoun and the dislocated element are marked for the syntactic role of oblique object, since here the NP is accompanied by the preposition *à*. Blasco (1997:7) refers

¹² According to Bosch (1983:57-58), “within a discourse, the most salient object at any point is always the object the discourse at that point is about...”

¹³ Many different terminologies have been used to describe this syntactic feature. Lambrecht (1980, 1981) uses the terms *topic* for LD and *antitopic* for RD; Barnes (1985) and Cadiot (1992) refer to *detachment*.

¹⁴ Although Blasco (1997:11) chooses to italicize both *les Indes* and *ils*, she states these elements exist “sans relation évidente de corréférence entre élément disloqué et pronom clitique.”

to this, for obvious reasons, as *double marquage*. In (30) and (31), we find that the LD element is not marked for syntactic role, but does in fact express the topic (*les Indes* and *nos enfants*) of the following comment (*ils sont pas loin de un milliard de gens* and *on doit pas leur demander de rendement*). Blasco (1997:11) distinguishes the two, noting that in (31) the LD and the pronoun are truly anaphoric, while in (30) the pronoun does not refer back directly to the LD element. Ashby (1988:209) and Barnes (1985) would consider (30) to be an example of a Chinese-style topic, in that it follows the topic-comment structure of that language, and would not link *les Indes* with *ils*, opting instead to consider this a case of zero-anaphora. In the discussion that follows, I will first summarize the use of dislocation in native speaker French and will then compare to L2 speech each aspect of dislocation studied in Ashby (1988), i.e. syntax, cognitive status, topic status, and pragmatic function.

3.1 Native Speaker Left-Dislocation

Lambrecht's (1980, 1981) use of the term "topic" to refer to LD structures reflects his belief that such structures should somehow communicate the "aboutness" of the clause to follow. He states in fact that:

by using a topic (rather than e.g. an anaphoric pronoun) the speaker announces the domain of his discourse, or a shift in the domain of his discourse, and expresses the desire to establish a communicative agreement as to the importance of the referent of the topic for the discourse (Lambrecht 1981:67).

Lambrecht (1981) also sets forth four criteria for the selection of an LD element: a) it is not the focus of new information, b) it communicates "aboutness," c) it is referentially definite (including generic indefinites and partitives), and d) it receives secondary prosodic stress. The first two elements set forth by Lambrecht (1981) will be observed in the discussion that follows. As for the second two elements, both Barnes (1985) and Ashby (1988) make reference to the definite status of LD-NPs, but neither mentions secondary stress as a requirement for LD topics.

As stated previously, a dislocated NP may be copied or not by an anaphoric pronoun in the main clause. The most common cases of anaphora occur, according to data put forth by both Ashby (1988) and Barnes (1985), when the LD element is copied in subject position:

(32) Oh, mais *les substitués*, *c'*est horrible. (Barnes 1985:55)

(33) *Les dents de sagesse*, *ça* pousse ou *ça* pousse pas (Barnes 1985:58)

(34) *Le garçon*, *il* travaille avec moi. (Barnes 1985:60)

In (32) we find a dislocation of the type NP *c'est*. According to Barnes (1985), where *ce* is the normal and accepted anaphoric pronoun and the verb *être* is used, an LD is quasi-obligatory. Closely related to the NP *c'est* construction, is the NP *ça* V construction shown in (33). As seen in both (32) and (33), a plural NP may be used in dislocation with impersonal *ce* or *ça*, which take a third person singular verb. In (34) the pronoun is personal and agreement exists between the NP, the pronoun, and the conjugated verb. In qualifying the cognitive status of these subject NPs, Barnes (1985) and Ashby (1988) observe that no brand-new¹⁵ referents are coded in LD; however, inferred, textually evoked and active referents appear freely in these positions. Barnes (1985) notes that situationally evoked referents appear in this position, although infrequently, while Ashby (1988) does not find any examples of situationally evoked referents reprised in subject position.

In observing, therefore, the textually evoked referents, Barnes (1985) notes that most occur to promote very recently mentioned¹⁶ or recently mentioned discourse referents to topic-

¹⁵ In the following discussion on dislocation, I use the nomenclature of Ashby (1988) to discuss the cognitive status of discourse referents. Definitions for the cognitive statuses of brand-new and inferred referents are found in Chapter 2. Here it is necessary here to add the several types of evoked discourse referents: active (also strictly given), textually evoked, and situationally evoked. A *strictly given* referent is one that appears in a sentence “where an anaphoric pronoun apparently would have sufficed to identify the referent” (Ashby 1988:211). A *textually evoked* referent has already been mentioned in the conversation, but is not strictly given while a *situationally evoked* discourse referent is unmentioned but physically present in the conversation setting.

¹⁶ Barnes (1985:64) considers a discourse referent to be of *very recent mention* if prior mention occurs in “the same or the preceding utterance.” A discourse referent of *recent mention* occurred “within a few utterances.”

status. There is generally some ambiguity between this discourse referent and another and so the LD also serves to clarify which referent is the new topic. The second most frequent function of textually evoked LDs is to recall or reintroduce a topic that has become inactive. Finally, when the textually evoked LD is already active, the topic structure is used to provide special emphasis to a structure already under discussion and appears frequently in answers to questions.

With regards to new discourse referents, Barnes (1985) notes that these are most commonly proper names, definite NPs that are familiar to the listener, or definite or indefinite generic NPs. As mentioned, Lambrecht (1981) specifies that an LD-NP should not be the focus of new information; however, Barnes (1985:75) attributes the acceptability of these new discourse referents to “other factors which assure cohesion and which are independent of the information statuses of the LD-referent”. Also noted is the overlap between the introduction of new discourse referents by LD and the *ya*-cleft: “when the *ya*-cleft introduces a definite NP (new-[inferable]) it differs pragmatically from LD in that there is generally a very low degree of cohesion between the *ya*-cleft utterance and the preceding discourse” (Barnes 1985:79). In summary, therefore, new NPs cannot appear in LD unless something in the conversation, other than the NP itself, provides the cohesion necessary for all interlocutors to understand the conversation. When this cohesion does not exist, the NP would not appear in LD, but in a presentational structure, since both LD and presentational clefts allow speakers to maintain the preferred topic-comment structure.

The second most common form of LD according to both Ashby (1988) and Barnes (1985) is that where the doubled pronoun is in object position. In Ashby’s (1988) corpus, object dislocations make up 13% of all LDs, while in Barnes (1985) corpus they make up only 7% of all LDs. These numbers are strikingly low in comparison to subject dislocations and Barnes

(1985) attributes this to the inherently low topicality of non-subject arguments. In addition, Barnes (1985) observes that object dislocations generally reject new referents, encoding instead evoked discourse referents. Ashby's (1988) data are contradictory on this point; he finds that 45% of object LDs are new, of the inferred type. Barnes (1985) further observes that about half of the object LDs in her corpus have very recently been mentioned, are already a discourse topic, and are already active, and thus provide an emphatic interpretation. The vast majority of other object LDs serve to promote a referent to discourse topic and are only of recent mention rather than of very recent mention. Finally, Barnes (1985) observes that object LDs may also serve to recall a previous discourse topic that has fallen into inactive status.

The final type of LD to be observed in this study is that where an NP appears without an anaphoric pronoun. The interpretation of this structure was mentioned above as that of a Chinese-style topic as demonstrated in (30). These LDs are rather infrequent when compared to LDs with a coreferential pronoun, but nevertheless do appear. 13% of LDs in Ashby's (1988) corpus and 12% of Barnes' (1985) are of this type. Ashby (1988) finds that these are most commonly textually evoked or inferred discourse referents. Brand-new and situationally evoked referents do not appear in his corpus as LDs. Barnes (1985:100-01) adds that frequently this sort of "topic NP is interpreted adverbially, giving the appearance of a PP from which the preposition has been deleted". She adds that these NPs are pragmatically, rather than formally, integrated into the following clause and may point out a particular case or an alternative referent of a general phenomenon that was previously expressed.

Before concluding this section on LD, a few general phenomena should be addressed. First, Barnes (1985) concludes that situationally evoked referents do appear as subject LDs, although infrequently. Ashby's (1988) data, however, show that situationally evoked referents

generally do not occur as LDs, since in the whole of his corpus there is only one such example. Second, of the LDs in Ashby's (1988) corpus, 45% serve exclusively as sentence topics while 55% are discourse topics. Finally, Ashby (1988) identifies only two productive pragmatic functions for LD – contrast (21%) and topic shift (73%) – with some dislocations expressing more than one function and 23% expressing little or no pragmatic function.

Left dislocation aids in the maintenance of several constraints of PAS mentioned in Chapter 1. Subject left-dislocation allows a speaker to uphold the topic-comment relationship of constraint 5 without compromising the maintenance of constraints 1 (avoid more than one lexical core argument) and 3 (avoid lexical subjects of transitive verbs) as in (35):

(35) *la première soeur elle a rencontré un homme*

Object left-dislocation first maintains constraint 5 as in (36) and may maintain constraint 1:

(36) *les enfants il faut s'occuper d'eux*

Zero-anaphora left-dislocations serve to maintain constraint 5 as in (37):

(37) *Montréal je déteste*

3.2 Native Speaker Right-Dislocation

Unlike LD, right dislocated structures do not generally uphold the PAS of the French language in that they break constraint 5, 'topic precedes comment.' For this reason, RD structures may be considered pragmatically marked and Helkkula-Lukkarinen (1991:385) notes "le caractère 'expressif' de ce type d'inversion". This is strictly observable in the number of pragmatic functions attributed to RD-NPs in comparison to those attributed to LD-NPs. Ashby (1988) identifies five productive functions for RD-NPs versus two for LD-NPs, i.e., contrast (6%), topic shift (5%), clarification (29%), epithet (4%), and turn closing (38%). In addition 18% of RD-NPs are considered to have weak pragmatic function. These are "tokens for which no

apparent pragmatic motivation could be identified, and where the dislocation is referentially unnecessary” (Ashby 1988:224). It is interesting to note that certain of these pragmatic functions, such as epithet, have purely stylistic function in that they serve to rename or qualify a previously mentioned discourse referent when repeated mention of that discourse referent is not communicatively necessary.

According to Blasco (1997:7), the syntax of RD differs inextricably from that of LD in that only a sentence with *double marquage* like (29) is possible. That is, the RD-NP must be marked for grammatical function by means of a preposition if necessary and the RD-NP must be copied in the main predication by a coreferential pronoun as in (38).

(38) Il *en* avait peur *de cette maîtresse* (Blasco 1997:8)

While data support the second part of this argument, Ashby (1988) finds that not all RDs are in fact marked for grammatical function. In his data, there were five (nominal and pronominal) RDs in indirect and oblique object positions and of these only two were marked for grammatical function. Despite this anomaly, it can be concluded that RDs are more syntactically linked to the main predication due to the obligatory use of an anaphoric pronoun as in (38) above (Ashby 1988, Lambrecht 1981, Blasco 1997).

The distribution of the informational status of RD-NPs is very similar to that of LD-NPs. One contrast, however, is the frequent use of RD-NPs to encode situationally evoked discourse referents (Ashby 1988, Barnes 1990). In comparing Ashby’s (1988) data on LD and RD, it is interesting to note that the sole example of an LD situationally evoked discourse referent occurred when the NP was coreferential with a non-subject pronoun. Conversely, Ashby (1988) identifies examples of situationally evoked discourse referents in RD only when the anaphoric pronoun is in subject position. It is however difficult to draw any conclusions based on these

data, as there is only one example of the former and only seven of the latter. A second contrast appears in that RD more frequently codes strictly given discourse referents, a statistic that is consistent with the high proportion of RD-NPs that code discourse topics (92.5%) in comparison to sentence topics (7.5%) (Ashby 1988).

3.3 Syntax of L2 Dislocations

Before entering into a discussion of the pragmatic functions of dislocated NPs in L2 French, it is important to observe student production of dislocation as a syntactic structure. Table 5 shows the distribution of dislocations produced by students. It is obvious from this table that students 2, 4, 8 and 12 are far more comfortable producing LDs at the start of the study than are the other students. Students 3 and 9 show notable progression in their use of LD syntax by the end of the study. It is, however, more difficult to draw any conclusions regarding student acquisition of RD syntax. As would be expected due to its nonconformity with the PAS of French, native speakers use RD far less frequently than LD in native speaker language, a tendency also reflected in the L2 data. Based on the data analyzed, it is impossible to determine whether only six of twelve students used RD because only six students understood the syntax of RD or because only six students felt the pragmatic need to employ RD at the start of the study. By the end of the study, all students had produced at least one example of RD.

Beyond the simple production of dislocated NPs, it is important to observe the distribution of dislocated NPs across syntactic categories. Table 6 shows this distribution in comparison with native speaker data compiled by Ashby (1988) and Barnes (1985). Both sets of native speaker data and the L2 data show that the majority of LDs occur when copied by a pronoun in subject position as shown in Examples (39) to (41):

(39) *le campeur il commence par faire un feu*

(40) ...il parce que il sait que *J et moi nous* partons....

(41) *la pression ça* m'est passé trois fois en plus

Both Barnes (1985) and Ashby (1988) find the second most common syntactic environment favoring LD is that where the dislocated NP is not copied in the main clause. There are very few examples of this phenomenon in the L2 data; however, students employ this syntactic structure during their study abroad experience as evidenced in Examples (42) and (43):

(42) *Montréal* je déteste

(43) *moi mon frère ça* allait pas très bien

Finally, while both native and L2 French speakers dislocate object NPs to the left with low frequency, student use is even lower than native speaker use. Further, contrary to the data in Ashby (1988) but consistent with those of Barnes (1985), students do not use possessive anaphors in LD. Examples (44) to (46) show dislocated direct, indirect, and oblique objects, respectively:

(44) la dame à Londres elle m'a dit que *les bagages* on va les envoyer....

(45) le panthère rouge il dit que *aux poissons* il avait un signe pour les dire....

(46) *les enfants* il faut s'occuper d'eux

In addition to being the only example of an LD indirect object, (45) shows obvious grammatical errors and confusion between direct and indirect object pronouns.

The syntactic distribution of RD noun phrases appears in Table 7. Learner use is compared to native speaker use from Ashby (1988). This table shows that neither native nor L2 speakers use RD indirect objects nor RD without an anaphoric pronoun. The latter of these affirmations shows that L2 speakers recognize the strong syntactic ties that exist between the main clause and a RD noun phrase as proposed in the literature on native speaker use (Ashby

1988, Lambrecht 1981, Blasco 1997). The majority of RD-NPs, both in the data from Ashby (1988) and in the L2 speaker data, are copied in the main clause by subject or direct object pronouns. The greatest correspondence exists during the study abroad period. Examples of subject and direct object dislocations can be found in (47) and (48), respectively:

(47) *ils n'étaient pas très gentilles les deux filles*

(48) *ils les jettent ces cercles de lettres*

There are no examples of oblique objects in right-dislocation.

A possible correspondence exists in the use of RD- and LD-NPs and the standard non-dislocated sentence structure. For example, subject NPs are found to the left of the verb in the standard language and appear frequently in left dislocation. Similarly, object NPs appear to the right of the verb in the standard language and appear frequently in right dislocation. In the pre- and post-study abroad periods, almost all LDs (94% and 95%, respectively) are subject dislocations while the majority of RDs (75% and 62%, respectively) are direct objects. The only difference syntactically in Examples (49) and (50) between versions (a), the produced sentence with dislocation, and (b), the standard sentence without dislocation, is the insertion of a subject pronoun:

(49) a. *ce petit rond il n'est pas content*

b. *ce petit rond n'est pas content*

(50) a. *ils les jettent les boîtes tous les papiers dans une poubelle*

b. *ils jettent les boîtes tous les papiers dans une poubelle*

It is logical that L2 learners would first acquire dislocations that more closely resemble the standard SVO sentence structure.

3.4 Cognitive Status of L2 Dislocated Noun Phrases

With regards to the cognitive status of LD-NPs, general observations may be made regarding the distribution of new and evoked discourse referents, as seen in Table 8. Student coding of new discourse referents in LD is significantly lower than that of native speakers both during the pre- and post-study abroad phases. Conversely, the percentage of evoked discourse referents is high during these phases. However, within the category of new referents, students recognize that brand-new referents (51) should not be coded in this position while it is acceptable to code inferred referents (52) in left-dislocation:

(51) ce panthère c'est *le nom* je sais pas (These sentences appear at the beginning of a student's recounting of the Pink Panther movie.)

(52) j'ai vécu des choses que *ma mère* aussi *elle* a vues (In this sentence, the speaker's mother has never before been mentioned, but her existence and inclusion in the conversation is not surprising thanks to the possessive determiner *ma*.)

Similarly, within the category of evoked discourse referents, student use resembles that of native speakers. Most evoked referents are textually evoked, as in (53). Following in frequency are strictly given referents (54), and finally situationally evoked referents (55):

(53) *la pression* ça m'est passé trois fois en plus (In this sentence, the student is speaking of a possible encounter with a ghost in her apartment in Montreal and mentions at the beginning of her narration experiencing a feeling of pressure. When asked how many times she has seen something in her apartment, she responds and then adds this sentence regarding the feelings of pressure.)

(54) ça a commencé à Pigalle. alors ça c'était la première erreur de prendre cette ligne là parce que là il y a beaucoup d'agressions je crois. et *Pigalle* c'est pas vraiment un joli

quartier. (At all times in this passage, the neighborhood and metro stop *Pigalle* are the active discourse topics.)

- (55) *l'histoire ça commence avec des petits hommes des petits carrés qui s'disent bonjour dans la rue.* (This sentence occurs at the beginning of a recounting of the Balablok movie. All persons involved in the data collection know that the narration is based on a story found in a movie which was just watched by the student.)

Again regarding the basic distribution of new and evoked discourse referents, this time in RD (Table 9), it is notable that student use closely resembles that of native speakers both during and after the study abroad experience. Within the category of new, students categorically reject brand-new discourse referents and produce very few inferred referents, as seen in (56):

- (56) *la première soeur elle a rencontré un homme.* (In this sentence the speaker is retelling the story of an old woman's life following the interviewer's prompt for the Story Continuation task. The speaker has just mentioned that the old woman had a number of brothers and sisters and then comments on the family situation of each, beginning here with the first sister.)

Within the category of evoked, student use is rather more variable and never fully resembles native speaker use. Further, the use of RD to encode situationally evoked referents (57) occurs only during the post-study abroad phase. Examples of RD to encode strictly given and textually evoked discourse referents appear in (58) and (59), respectively:

- (57) *ils se disaient qu'est ce que c'est que ça ce petit homme ronde.* (This sentence is extracted from a recounting of the Balablok movie. In this part of the story, a sphere-person has just appeared on the screen and is therefore situationally evoked for the

block-persons who were already on the screen and who are speaking to each other. In this example, the student is quoting these block-persons.)

- (58) et les carrés jettent des mots euh de leur bouche qui sont les mots sont sur l'écran en forme des des petits lettres. et ces lettres forment une cercle. ils *les* jettent *ces cercles de lettres*. ils les jettent envers les cercles. (In this example and all preceding sentences, the NP *ces cercles de lettres* is the discourse topic and continues to be the discourse topic in the example sentence and the sentence that follows.)
- (59) et mais y' a des affichages um partout où on lit pas d'en pas d'incendies, no fires. mais ça fait pas diffé de différence pour l'homme parce qu'il il cherche du bois. et il *l'utilise l'affichage* lui même pour avoir une incendie. (In this sentence, the poster is mentioned in the preceding discourse, but is not the immediate topic of conversation, and thus is textually evoked.)

3.5 Topic Status of L2 Dislocated Noun Phrases

The second pragmatic property of dislocations observed by Ashby (1988) is that of topic status. Specifically, dislocated NPs may serve either as sentence or discourse topics. According to Ashby (1988:215-16), "to qualify as a discourse topic the referent must be 'referred to in succeeding sentences.'" Some referents...are restricted to a single sentence, however; that is, they are sentence topics that do not become discourse topics." Examples (60) and (61) illustrate sentence and discourse topics, respectively:

- (60) mon première pensée c'est de je veux sortir. je veux quitter. je veux rester chez moi. je veux euh retourner à manchester. j' veux plus rester ici. j' veux aller en France.
Montréal je déteste.

- (61) *l'Italie ça me plaît beaucoup l'Italie. on est allés à Florence. là j'étais un peu déçue parce que j'avais un grand sac à dos. on avait que un seul jour. il fallait trouver le le camping et bon c'était pas c'était pas génial parce que il fallait aller partout avec le grand sac à dos. et puis il faut fallait se lever tôt le lendemain et c'était pas très. mais Vérone c'était on aimait on aimait bien parce que là....* (The conversation continues describing the visit to Italy.)

Tables 10 and 11 show the distribution of topic statuses of LD- and RD-NPs. At all phases of the study, students recognize that in native speaker use, more dislocated NPs serve as discourse rather than sentence topics. Data from the study abroad period fairly closely resemble native speaker data while more variation is seen during the pre- and post-study abroad time periods.

3.6 Pragmatic Function of L2 Dislocated Noun Phrases

Finally, Ashby (1988) addresses the pragmatic function of LD- and RD-NPs, whether to express a contrast, introduce a new topic, or do neither – a function that Ashby (1988:217) refers to as “weak”. Table 12 shows the pragmatic functions of LD-NPs. Like native speakers, students use left dislocation primarily to signal a topic shift, as illustrated in (62). In the narration that follows, the speaker is describing a time when she and a friend went to a French bar that they had never been to before:

- (62) *on n' savait pas comment entrer parce qu'il fallait sonner en fait parce que la porte était fermée. alors un autre couple est venu. et la femme elle a sonné à la porte. et le mec est venu. et il connaissait l'autre couple. alors on a fait la bise. et moi et mon ami allemand on est rentrés après les autres gens.*

In this example, there is an initial shift from the couple to the female in this couple and then a subsequent shift from the other couple and the barman back to the speaker and her friend. The

data show that students are not as adept at using LD to signal contrasts; however, the examples available very clearly signal this use. From the same narration, (63) shows an example of contrast:

- (63) alors j'étais gênée. je voulais partir tout de suite. mais *mon copain il a dit* mais c'est bien. on va peut être avoir de la bière pour rien gratuit.

In general LDs with weak pragmatic function produced by students appeared in quasi-obligatory contexts, such as those seen in (64) and (65):

- (64) *Pigalle c'est pas vraiment un joli quartier*
- (65) maintenant il parce que il sait que *J et moi nous partons* il essaye de devenir amical avec les autres

Barnes (1985) highlights the quasi-obligatory nature of sentences like (64). She notes that while both are possible, the structure *NP c'est* is generally preferred over the canonical *NP est* structure. In (65) the dislocation may be considered quasi-obligatory because the speaker knows that the interpretation of *nous* will be unclear and therefore must be clarified before continuing. For each of these pragmatic functions, student language most resembles NS use during the study abroad phase, especially regarding the function of topic shift. Further, the contrast function is employed frequently, at a level approaching that of native speech, only during this phase. LDs that do not communicate any pragmatic function, and thus are considered to be weak, appear at all phrases.

Ashby (1988) shows that RD serves more pragmatic functions than LD, however, in the recordings used for this study, L2 speakers failed to produce examples of all the possible pragmatic functions for RD. As shown in Table 13, native speakers use RD primarily to provide clarification and for turn closing. The first of these functions is well understood by student

speakers as demonstrated in (66) where the dislocation is used to disambiguate the preceding subject pronoun error:

(66) *ils n'étaient pas très gentilles les deux filles*

There are no examples of the turn closing function in the L2 data. Since only monologue and near monologue texts were studied, this is perhaps a fault of the experimental situation and not of poor student acquisition. Of the other pragmatic functions set forth for RD-NPs in Ashby (1988), students produced examples of topic shifts, epithets, and dislocations with weak pragmatic function as demonstrated in (67) to (69), respectively:

(67) (discussing an allegorical film in which spheres and cubes are fighting because of their physical differences) *et les carrés jettent des mots de leur bouche qui sont... les mots sont sur l'écran en forme des petits lettres. et ces lettres forment une cercle. ils les jettent ces cercles de lettres. ils les jettent envers les cercles.*

(68) (discussing a crime at the Pigalle metro station in Paris) *c'est pas marrant ce coin*

(69) *il lui a cause de l'inverser le bateau où le pêcheur est en train de pêcher*

In the pre-study abroad data, dislocations with weak pragmatic function like (69) seem more appropriate without dislocation because the NPs are new rather than evoked. In the post-study abroad data, dislocations with weak pragmatic function occur in somewhat fixed expressions such as (70) and (71):

(70) *j'en ai des cauchemars des choses comme ça*

(71) *y'en a plusieurs ronds*

Finally, unlike native speakers, L2 speakers did not use RD to signal contrasts.

3.7 Discussion

In observing the pragmatic properties attributed to dislocated NPs, Ashby (1988) highlights their cognitive status, topic status and pragmatic function. For most of these features, native speaker use can be placed on a frequency scale. For example, in considering the cognitive status of dislocated NPs, Ashby (1988) shows that native speakers do not dislocate brand-new discourse referents, but very frequently dislocate inferred and textually evoked referents to the left and strictly given and textually evoked referents to the right. Referents of other cognitive statuses are produced, but not with the marked frequency or infrequency of those just mentioned. If one assumes that the L2 speakers would have been exposed to dislocations at a frequency similar to their production by the native speakers in Ashby's (1988) corpus, then a general tendency in the L2 data suggests that the more input student speakers receive regarding a pattern of language use, the more closely their speech resembles that of native speakers. For example, Table 8 shows that native speakers produce many textually evoked and inferred discourse referents in left-dislocated structures as do L2 speakers. With regards to pragmatic function, both native and L2 speakers use left-dislocation to encode a shift in topic and right-dislocation to encode clarification with marked frequency, as evidenced in Tables 12 and 13, respectively. A similar observation may be made when there is a categorical lack of input. For example, native speakers do not code brand-new referents in dislocation, and with very few exceptions, neither do L2 French speakers as shown in Tables 8 and 9.

In many ways, student language very closely resembles NS language. In addition to the examples mentioned in the preceding paragraph, students also produce the syntax of subject LD and use this syntactic structure to signal a shift in topic. Further, they use RD as a means of

signaling clarification, and during and following the study abroad experience students distribute new and evoked discourse referents as RDs in proportions similar to those of native speakers.

As with student production of presentational syntax, there is a pattern of experimentation, alignment with native speaker use, and subsequent regression in appropriate production that corresponds with the three phases of language study presented in this thesis. Specifically, the students produce zero-anaphora LD (Table 6) and subject and object RD (Table 7) during their study abroad experience, yet they fail to produce these structures with native-like frequency before and after the study abroad experience. A similar trend may be observed in the distribution of new and evoked discourse referents in LD (Table 8) and the distribution of sentence and discourse topics in both LD (Table 10) and RD (Table 11).

Finally, student use failed to align itself to native speaker norms in three areas. Students do not frequently produce object dislocations, with the exception of RD of direct objects. Further, students fail to produce examples of RD used to show the pragmatic functions of contrast and turn closing. It is impossible to draw final conclusions on student understanding of three additional pragmatic functions of RD – topic shift, epithet, and weak – because they produced too few tokens of these functions.

Table 5. Student Production of Dislocated NPs

Student:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
<u>Left Dislocation</u>													
Pre-study Abroad	1	9	0	9	1	1	4	7	4	5	2	10	53
Study Abroad	1	7	0	10	0	0	6	1	1	6	0	5	37
Post-Study Abroad	0	6	12	4	3	0	4	5	15	7	1	8	65
<u>Right Dislocation</u>													
Pre-study Abroad	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	2	8
Study Abroad	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	5
Post-Study Abroad	0	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	4	0	2	13

Table 6. Frequency of Different Syntactic Functions for LD

Syntactic Role	Frequency of LD					% of LD				
	Pre-Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post-Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)	NS Barnes (1985)	Pre-Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post-Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)	NS Barnes (1985)
Subject	50	30	62	281	308	94%	81%	95%	73%	79%
DO	0	1	1	32	26	--	3%	2%	8%	7%
IO	0	0	1	5	6	--	--	2%	1%	2%
Oblique	2	0	0	12	4	4%	--	--	3%	1%
Poss.	0	0	0	3	0	--	--	--	1%	--
NA	1	6	1	48	45	2%	16%	2%	13%	12%
TOTAL	53	37	65	389	389					
DO = Direct Object			Poss. = Possessive Anaphor							
IO = Indirect Object			NA = No Anaphor							

Table 7. Frequency of Different Syntactic Functions for RD

Syntactic Role	<u>Frequency of RD</u>				<u>% of RD</u>			
	Pre-Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post-Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)	Pre-Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post-Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)
Subject	2	4	5	53	25%	80%	38%	79%
DO	6	1	8	10	75%	20%	62%	15%
IO	0	0	0	0	--	--	--	--
Oblique	0	0	0	3	--	--	--	4%
Poss.	0	0	0	1	--	--	--	1.5%
NA	0	0	0	0	--	--	--	--
TOTAL	8	5	13	67				
DO = Direct Object		Poss. = Possessive Anaphore						
IO = Indirect Object		NA = No Anaphore						

Table 8. Cognitive Status of LD Noun Phrases

Cognitive Status	<u>Frequency of LD</u>				<u>% of LD</u>			
	Pre-Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post-Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)	Pre-Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post-Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)
Strictly Given	10	5	17	44	19%	14%	26%	12%
Text. Evoked	28	16	43	141	53%	43%	66%	38%
Sit. Evoked	4	1	2	1	8%	3%	3%	3%
Inferred	9	16	2	183	17%	41%	3%	50%
Brand-New	2	0	1	0	4%	--	2%	--
EVOKED	42	22	62	186	80%	59%	95%	50%
NEW	11	15	3	183	21%	41%	5%	50%
Text. Evoked = Textually Evoked		Sit. Evoked = Situationally Evoked						

Table 9. Cognitive Status of RD Noun Phrases

Cognitive Status	<u>Frequency of RD</u>				<u>% of RD</u>			
	Pre-Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post-Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)	Pre-Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post-Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)
<u>Total</u>								
Strictly Given	1	1	7	24	13%	20%	54%	36%
Text. Evoked	3	3	2	23	38%	60%	15%	34%
Sit. Evoked	0	0	2	7	--	--	15%	10%
Inferred	4	1	2	12	50%	20%	15%	18%
Brand-New	0	0	0	0	--	--	--	--
EVOKED	4	4	11	54	50%	80%	85%	81%
NEW	4	1	2	13	50%	20%	15%	19%
Text. Evoked = Textually Evoked Sit. Evoked = Situationally Evoked								

Table 10. Topic Status of LD Noun Phrases

Topic Type	<u>Frequency of LD</u>				<u>% of LD</u>			
	Pre-Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post-Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)	Pre-Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post-Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)
Sentence	14	14	7	172	26%	38%	11%	45%
Discourse	39	23	58	209	74%	62%	89%	55%

Table 11. Topic Status of RD Noun Phrases

Topic Type	<u>Frequency of RD</u>				<u>% of RD</u>			
	Pre-Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post-Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)	Pre-Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post-Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)
Sentence	2	0	6	5	25%	--	46%	7.5%
Discourse	6	5	7	62	75%	100%	54%	92.5%

Table 12. Pragmatic Function of LD Noun Phrases

Pragmatic Function	<u>Frequency of LD</u>				<u>% of LD</u>			
	Pre- Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post- Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)	Pre- Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post- Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)
Contrast	2	6	1	79	4%	16%	2%	21%
Topic Shift	45	27	50	279	85%	73%	92%	73%
Weak	6	4	4	23	11%	11%	6%	6%

Table 13. Pragmatic Function of RD Noun Phrases

Pragmatic Function	<u>Frequency of RD</u>				<u>% of RD</u>			
	Pre- Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post- Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)	Pre- Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Post- Study Abroad	NS Ashby (1988)
Contrast	0	0	0	5	--	--	--	6%
Topic Shift	1	1	2	4	13%	20%	15%	5%
Clarification	4	2	7	23	50%	40%	54%	29%
Epithet	0	2	1	3	--	40%	8%	4%
Turn Closing	0	0	0	30	--	--	--	38%
Weak	3	0	3	14	38%	--	23%	18%

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In the preceding sections, I have attempted to show how both native and L2 speakers of French apply their intuitive knowledge of preferred argument structure to the syntax of this language. I have also attempted to summarize the data in a way that will help teachers of intermediate or advanced French courses decide which aspects of discourse grammar should be addressed in the classroom. In this final section, I place the present discussion within the context of other studies on student acquisition of pragmatically motivated syntax.

4.1 Pedagogical Implications

In discussing two of the phenomena analyzed in the present study, Kerr (2002:195) concludes that “any systematic program of instruction in the use of such features as LD and *ya*-clefts is best delayed until the advanced level of language instruction (i.e., third year of university instruction or beyond).” While I generally agree with Kerr’s (2002) conclusions on dislocation, I disagree with her conclusions regarding the *ya*-cleft based on the findings of the present study.

This study shows that students have a good understanding of presentational structures based on the verb *avoir*, including the *ya*-cleft studied in Kerr (2002), presumably without ever having been taught the specific pragmatic functions of the *cleft* construction. However, at the very early stages of French L2 instruction, the expression *il y a*, or *ya*-simple, is presented as a lexical item for the express purpose of giving students a tool for introducing new discourse

referents.¹⁷ Eventually, at the intermediate stage of learning, students are introduced to complex sentence structures, including relative clauses. Syntactically, *ya*-clefts follow the same patterns as other constructions with both a main and relative clause. I do not argue that examples of sentences using *il y a* and a relative clause should not figure into a discussion on sentence combining and relative clauses, however I do not believe that the *ya*-cleft should be presented as a separate phenomenon. As shown by the data in this study, intermediate level students are aware of the pragmatic functions of *ya*-simple and can apply this knowledge to their use of the *ya*-cleft.

With regards to dislocation, I agree with Kerr's (2002:195) claim that a "systematic program of instruction" should be limited to the intermediate or even advanced levels of language instruction. However, should we strive, as foreign language teachers, to expose students to authentic language use, it is inevitable that dislocated structures will appear in our pedagogical materials. Teachers should understand the purpose of these structures in native speaker language and should be prepared to explain their function if students ask about it. Assuming the validity of Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis, exposure to these structures from the earliest stages of language study, should lead to some level of acquisition. Even if this level of acquisition is minor, students would nevertheless benefit from developing a schema to which they can attach new knowledge of these structures.¹⁸

I would like to make one final comment on the pedagogical implications of this and other studies of pragmatically motivated syntax. This study highlights the importance of the immersion experience in the acquisition of a foreign language. Kerr (2002:191-92) also notes, "a major

¹⁷ The following college-level textbooks were surveyed: *Mais oui!* (Thompson and Phillips 2004), *Horizons* (Manley, Smith, McMinn and Prévost 2006), *Rapports* (Walz and Piriou 2003), *Chez nous* (Valdman, Pons and Scullen 2006), and *Vis à vis* (Amon, Muyskens and Omaggio Hadley 2004). One text introduced *il y a* as a lexical item in a preliminary chapter, two in chapter one, one in chapter two, and one in chapter 3.

¹⁸ In discussing the importance of schemata to the learning process, Vacca and Vacca (2002:20) state, "students position themselves to learn ... whenever they use prior knowledge to construct meaning for new material that they are studying."

factor in their acquisition is the extent of the learner's exposure to authentic L2 discourse of the registers in which such constructions are frequent." In this study, student language use aligned itself to native speaker norms during the study abroad phase, when students received frequent exposure to language in the spoken register. Unfortunately, following this experience student language actually regressed to resemble their own pre-study abroad norms more than native speaker norms. This is true for seven different language features analyzed in this thesis:

- The ratio of given to new discourse referents encoded as verbal arguments or in presentational syntax (Table 2)
- The syntax of zero-anaphora left-dislocation (Table 6)
- The syntax of subject right-dislocation (Table 7)
- The syntax of object right-dislocation (Table 7)
- The distribution of new and evoked discourse referents in left-dislocation (Table 8)
- The use of left-dislocation for signaling sentence and discourse topics (Table 10)
- And the use of right-dislocation for signaling sentence and discourse topics (Table 11)

The data suggest then that when students return to the classroom after an immersion experience their teachers should highlight the pragmatic relationships between the spoken language acquired during the study abroad experience and the standard academic language taught in the classroom, valorizing the functionality of both registers.

4.2 Conclusion

As the trends in foreign language teaching and learning move toward the inclusion of authentic language materials and the valorization of multiple registers of language, it is important to recognize the intricacies of grammar within the framework of discourse structure and communication. Native speakers use presentational syntax and dislocation for very specific

reasons and in very specific contexts to maintain the preferred argument structure of the French language. It is important for teachers of L2 French to recognize the importance of these patterns of language, both in terms of syntax and pragmatics, and the difficulties they pose for language students. This study has shown that some acquisition of pragmatically motivated syntax can occur in the classroom following a traditional scope and sequence, but that students have difficulty acquiring other aspects of discourse grammar.

Specifically students successfully acquire the syntax and pragmatics of the *avoir*-simple, *avoir*-cleft, *ya*-simple, and *ya*-cleft structures, presentational syntax based on verbs of perception, motion, and existence, left-dislocation of brand-new, inferred and textually evoked discourse referents, left-dislocation with a subject pronoun anaphor, left-dislocation to signal a shift in topic, and the use of right-dislocation for the coding of new and evoked discourse referents and to signal the pragmatic function of clarification at all phases of study.

In contrast, the data show that students are not capable of acquiring the syntax necessary for the production of passive and middle voice presentational constructions, object dislocations, and the use of right-dislocation to signal the pragmatic functions of contrast and turn closing on their own during the immersion experience.

Finally, when regularly exposed to native speaker language use, i.e. during the immersion experience, students found success in producing an appropriate ratio of given to new referents, the syntax of zero-anaphora left-dislocation, subject and object right-dislocation, the distribution of new and evoked discourse referents in left-dislocation, and the use of both left- and right-dislocation for signaling sentence and discourse topics. While the alignment of student use to that of native speaker use during the study abroad experience seems logical, the subsequent regression is problematic and numerous hypotheses may be offered as to why this regression

occurred. Contributing factors may include anything from the end of constant input available during the immersion experience to instructional factors or the use of a formal register of language in the post-immersion classroom. Since the language used for this analysis was collected by a third party and I do not personally have access to the students, I cannot make any definitive claims to answer this question. A new study would therefore need to be completed in which student experiences with French are more clearly identified and controls on classroom language use are implemented and closely documented.

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