Ultimate Attainment at the Syntax-Discourse Interface: The Acquisition of Object Movement in Dutch

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1. Introduction

An important issue in the field of Second Language Acquisition concerns the question of whether native-like ultimate attainment in the L2 is possible and, if not, which parts of the grammar are difficult, or even impossible to acquire. A large amount of current research focuses on the acquisition of linguistic phenomena at the interfaces, as opposed to phenomena that belong to one of the core modules, such as Syntax, Phonology or Semantics. Interface phenomena connect different pieces of information within the linguistic system and are therefore argued by some to be more difficult to acquire than intra-modular rules. A particular focus has been placed on the syntax-discourse interface, as this domain is argued to be particularly prone to non-convergence. The Interface Hypothesis (Sorace & Filiaci, 2006; Sorace, 2011) has been proposed to capture the incomplete mastering of syntax-to-discourse mappings as opposed to mappings of internal interfaces such as the syntax-semantics interface, in near-native L2 learners and other bilingual groups such as heritage speakers. Studies that have tested whether near-native speakers behave like native speakers on phenomena that require integrating syntax with discourse report conflicting findings. For example, while Belletti et al. (2005) show that English near-native speakers of Italian show non-native performance on the realization of topic and focus in Italian, Slabakova et al. (2012); Mendez & Slabakova (2011), among others, show that L2 learners of Spanish can acquire these subtle differences. In principle, these contradictory findings already suggest that we should be wary of treating all phenomena that pertain to the same interface alike (see White (2011)), as these findings suggest that it cannot be the case that the syntax-discourse interface is difficult per se. However, additional studies on ultimate attainment at the syntax-discourse interface can provide more insights into what is particularly difficult about the syntax-discourse interface.

A related question within this debate is whether non-target performances by L2 learners result from bilingual processing difficulties in integrating discourse information to syntax in the L2, and is thus independent of the L1 of the learner,
or from cross-linguistic influence from the L1, resulting in representational differences between the Interlanguage Grammar and the L2, or a combination thereof. Within the field of generative research, L1 transfer plays an important role. Following the Full Transfer hypothesis (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996) as the initial basis for L2 acquisition, the learning task of the L2 learner differs depending on their L1. The picture that emerges from the literature is that L2 learners whose L1 matches the L2 in the realization of a grammatical feature, perform like native speakers in the L2, as they do not have to acquire anything new. Native-like mastery at the syntax-discourse interface is predicted for at least those speakers whose first language matches that of the second language (Belletti, 2005). Processing accounts, on the other hand, attribute the unsuccessful acquisition of phenomena at the syntax-discourse interface to processing difficulties for L2 and bilingual speakers in integrating multiple pieces of information. Sorace (2005) suggests that the computational effort that is required in mapping discourse information to the syntactic structure when processing a second language, leads to non-native like performance. Several studies support the claim that L2 sentence comprehension is different from that of native speakers as a result of difficulty with integrating multiple sources of information (e.g. Hahne (2001); Hopp (2006); McDonald (2006)). It has been suggested that even when the first language matches the target language on a grammatical feature at the syntax-discourse interface, L2 learners persist in performing below the native range (Serratrice et al., 2011). However, these suggestions have been rejected by studies in the monolingual field who found that the syntax-discourse mapping on the phenomenon under investigation, was not the same for the two languages of the bilingual, attributing these effects to L1 transfer (Kraš, 2008; Filiaci, 2010; Filiaci et al., 2013; Romano, 2016).

This paper aims to contribute to a larger variety of studies at the syntax-discourse interface to investigate what exactly is problematic to acquire for L2 learners. Specifically, this paper directly tests the Interface Hypothesis and the effects of L1 transfer at the Syntax-Discourse Interface. The Interface Hypothesis as described in Sorace (2011) predicts that the external syntax-discourse interface is problematic for L2 learners, while the internal syntax-semantics interface is not. This paper investigates the acquisition of discourse constraints on object movement in Dutch by directly comparing the syntax-discourse to the syntax-semantics interface where a single syntactic operation is both constrained by discourse and semantics, similar to Slabakova et al. (2012).

2. Discourse Driven Object Movement in L2 Germanic

Of particular relevance to the current paper are studies investigating the acquisition of the discourse conditions under which an object (can) move out of its canonical position in Dutch and German. Bohnacker & Rosen (2008) examined the use of the verb-second (V2) construction in German by native speakers of Swedish and focused in particular on which constituents are allowed in the first
position of a V2 clause. Although both German and Swedish are V2 languages, the authors found that the frequency of prefield constituent types differs between the two languages: whereas Swedish prefers to place topics and constituents with low informational value such as expletives in the first position, German more frequently occupies this position with constituents that carry new information. This means that in both languages a declarative sentence with a canonical word order would place the subject in first position and in both languages the subject is most often the topic of the sentence. Yet subject-initial clauses are more frequent in Swedish than in German and object initial clauses are more frequent in German than in Swedish. For example, the object is fronted more often in German when this constituent is the focus. Bohnacker & Rosen (2008) collected both written and oral data from second language learners of German in Sweden varying in level from beginner to advanced. The authors find evidence for L1-transfer of information structure. This leads to a non-idiomatic word order as the learners apply the word order patterns from Swedish in their German constructions. Thus, the effect of placing new information later in the sentence, which is common in Swedish, is applied to the L2 grammar. No near-native speakers were included in this study and it is thus not clear if L2 learners of German with Swedish as an L1 actually can acquire the German syntax to discourse mapping patterns. In addition, this study does not provide information on whether discourse constraints on the placement of objects in the prefield are acquirable by learners whose first language is not a V2 language. The current study will partially fill this gap by looking at English learners of Dutch.

Hopp (2009) investigates the acquisition of object scrambling in the German middle field. In this study L2 learners of German were asked to judge the acceptability of sentences with object over subject scrambling in the middle field. In German, objects can be placed in front of a subject when the scrambled object is the topic of the clause and the preverbal subject is focused (Lenerz, 1977; Höhle, 1982), as shown in (4-a). However, object scrambling is not possible in structures with object focus, as the infelicity of (2-a) shows.

(1) a. Wer hat den Vater geschlagen?/ Who hit the father?
   b. Ich glaube, dass den Vater der ONKEL geschlagen hat.
      I believe, that the father the uncle hit has.
      ‘I believe the uncle hit the father.’

(2) a. Wen hat der Onkel geschlagen?/ Who did the uncle hit?
   b. #Ich glaube, dass den VATER der Onkel geschlagen hat.
      I believe, that the father the uncle hit has.
      ‘I believe the uncle hit the father. (Hopp (2009), example 4.)

Hopp (2009) compared three groups of learners with different L1’s: English, Russian and Dutch. While Russian and Dutch both allow scrambling, Dutch does not allow scrambling of the type in (4-a) in the same discourse contexts while Russian behaves the same as German on this construction. English does not allow...
this syntactic construction at all. The results of an Acceptability Judgment test showed that both advanced and near native speakers of German with Dutch as their L1 do not accept object scrambling in sentences like (4-a). L1 English near-native speakers (but not advanced speakers) and L1 Russian speakers performed on target. In addition to the Acceptability Judgment task, Hopp (2009) conducted a self-paced reading task to investigate whether L2ers use Information Structure in online processing the same way as native speakers do. In a situation where the syntax matches the context, processing times are expected to be lower than in contexts where the syntax does not match the context (e.g. (2-b) against context (2-a)). The results showed that this effect was true for the German native speakers and the Russian learners of German but also for the English near-native speakers of German (although not for the advanced learners). The L1 Dutch group however, does not show any differences in reading times between the contexts. These results indicate that phenomena at the syntax-discourse interface may not present insurmountable difficulty in adult L2 acquisition and that processing between L1’ers and L2’ers is not necessarily dissimilar. Furthermore, from the differences found between the L1 English and the L1 Dutch group, Hopp (2009) concluded that L2 ultimate attainment is not per se constrained by the L1. However, the different outcome for the English and Dutch group can be a result of L1 transfer, the conditions for which require further investigation.

3. Object Movement in Dutch

This section focuses on the discourse and semantic restrictions on object movement investigated in this paper. We focus on movement to the first position and movement across adverbs. Dutch is a V2 language, as the tensed verb of a main clause always moves to the second position of a V2-clause. A common assumption is that no argument is base generated in the first position of a V2 clause, the prefield. Following Frey (2010), I assume that there exists an Ā-position in Dutch, as in German, that optionally hosts contrastively focused constituents. I furthermore assume that in a V2 clause, where the verb has moved to the C position, the prefield, which is the SpecCP, is obligatorily filled. Frey shows that an unmarked word order is the result of moving the highest element in the middlefield to SpecCP; this is why a subject or an adverb, see (3), can occur in this position without any problems (Frey (2010), based on Bhatt (1999) for Kasmari).

(3) \([CP[Gisteren], [_{C}\text{heeft }_{V}\text{pt}, \text{Bas de vis vergeten}]]\].

Yesterday has \(t_{i}\) Bas the fish forgotten.

‘Bas forgot the fish yesterday.’

True Ā-movement on the other hand is associated with a contrastive interpretation of the moved constituent. Crucial for the purposes of the current study is that objects that have undergone ‘true’ Ā-movement, are obligatorily interpreted contrastively and thus sentences with long distance moved objects are only
felicitous in a limited set of discourse contexts.

Word order variation of adverb-object and object-adverb sequences in the Dutch middle field are for a large part determined by discourse anaphoricity. Neeleman & Koot (2007, 2008) argue that discourse anaphoricity triggers A-scrambling. As shown in (4), the scrambled word order in (4-b) is more felicitous than the unscrambled word order in (4-b), as *our old teacher* is discourse anaphoric.

(4) Komt *onze ouwe leraar* nog op het feestje?
‘Will our old teacher be coming to the party?’

   a. #Nou, ik heb gisteren *onze ouwe leraar* een uitnodiging gestuurd.
   Well, I have yesterday our old teacher an invitation sent
   b. Nou, ik heb *onze ouwe leraar* gisteren een uitnodiging gestuurd.
   Well, I have our old teacher yesterday an invitation sent
   ‘Well, I invited our old teacher yesterday’.
   (Neeleman & Koot (2008): example 54)

Scrambling across adverbs also has semantic effects. It is a well known fact that scrambling of indefinites leads to a semantic shift, as scrambled indefinites can only receive a specific/referential interpretation. From this it follows that if the indefinite does not pick out a salient discourse referent from the context, it cannot be scrambled. An example of the impact of scrambling on the specificity of the noun is shown in the comparison between (5-a) and (5-b). In (5-b) the object has scrambled over the adverb *now* and the indefinite is interpreted specifically, the speaker has a specific person in mind. This is not the case in (5-a), where the object is not scrambled.

(5) a. Ik denk dat ik nu *iemand* de klas uit ga sturen.
   I think that I now someone the classroom out go send
   b. Ik denk dat ik *iemand* nu de klas uit ga sturen.
   I think that I someone now the classroom out go send
   ‘I think I’ll send someone out of the classroom now.’

In this paper we investigate the performance of near-native L2 speakers in all three constructions.

4. The Experiments
4.1. Participants

A total of 56 adult subjects participated in this study, of which 15 were native speakers of Dutch, 16 native speakers of German and 25 native speakers of English. Cloze test scores for the native speaker group ranged between 32 and 38 (max = 38). Only participants from the L2 groups who performed within the native-like range were included in the analysis, 15 for the L1 English group
and 16 for the L1 German group. Furthermore, the data from Experiment 2 were excluded for two English L2 learners of Dutch because of a response bias.

4.2. Experiment 1: A’-movement
4.2.1. Materials and Procedure

In the first experiment we tested whether L2 learners of Dutch have a native-like knowledge of the discourse constraints on object movement to the prefield. The experiment consisted of 24 target items interspersed with 8 filler items. There were four conditions in a Latin Square design varying the factors Context and Word Order. The factor Context had two variables, Wide Focus and Object Focus. The items were presented either in a canonical SOV word order or the non-canonical OSV order where the object was A'-moved to the first position. Each question-answer pair was introduced by a short context question\(^1\). To illustrate, for the item shown in (6) to (9), the introduction sentence was ‘A conversation at the market’. It was ensured that the introduction sentence did not trigger a different Question Under Discussion than the one presented in the target item. For example, an introduction sentence saying A conversation about Bas at the market could more easily lead the participant to think that the Question Under Discussion is about what Bas buys at the market. Participants were instructed to first silently read the context sentence and the question-answer pair. Subsequently, they read the question and the answer out loud and had to judge how natural the answer sounded as an answer to the question by choosing a number between 1 and 6, where ‘1’ indicated that the answer to the question sounds ‘very unnatural’ and 6 ‘very natural’. Subjects completed two practice questions before completing the test part.

(6) A: What did Bas buy? B: Bas heeft **appels** gekocht. Bas has **apples** bought ‘Bas bought apples.’

(7) A: What happened? B: Bas heeft **appels** gekocht. Bas has **apples** bought ‘Bas bought apples.’

(8) A: What did Bas buy? B: **Appels** heeft Bas gekocht. Apples has Bas bought ‘Bas bought apples.’

(9) A: What happened? B: **Appels** heeft Bas gekocht. Apples has Bas bought ‘Bas bought apples.’

4.2.2. Results

A subset of the recorded responses were listened to, to ensure that participants used natural intonations. For example, a felicitous OSV target sentence in the object focus condition requires focal stress on the object. All participants were able to shift prominence to the first position in Object Focus contexts with OSV.

\(^1\) All questions are presented in English, but reasons of space, only the English translation is given.
orders. Sentences that contained stuttering or other interruptions were removed from the analysis. All felicity ratings were analyzed using cumulative link mixed effects models (Christensen, 2014).2

**Figure 1:** Felicity rating for each condition, divided by L1 group.

Figure 1 shows the mean felicity judgment for each condition and each L1 group. Table 1 shows the results of cumulative link mixed regression models for each L1 group with fixed effects for **Context** and **Word Order** and their interaction. The random effects included intercepts and slopes for all main effects. As expected, sentences with the canonical SOV word order are rated higher than sentences with the non-canonical OSV word order. The observation that the preference for the canonical SVO order cannot be overridden by discourse context is a common phenomenon (see e.g. Meng et al. (1999); Hopp (2009)). Recall however that the main goal of including canonical SVO sentences in the experimental design, is to ensure the question-answer pairs are not unnatural for any other reason than for the effect of **Context** that was manipulated in the design. In fact, we are interested in determining whether L2 learners can differentiate between two discourse contexts in a similar fashion as native speakers of Dutch. Thus, the question at issue is whether L2 learners know which word

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2 These models best reflect the interpretation of data representing points on a Likert scale, as it does not assume that the numbers from 1 to 6 are equally spaced or that there are values possible below 1 and above 6. See also Poschmann & Wagner (2016) for further arguments in favour of the use of cumulative link mixed effect models.
orders are possible in which discourse contexts and thus whether they know that the OSV word order is marked but acceptable in the Object Focus context but not in the Wide Focus context. Table 1 shows, for each group, a significant main effect of Word Order and a significant interaction between Word Order and Context, but not a significant main effect of Context. From this we can conclude that that the difference in rating between the object vs. wide scope condition in the non-canonical word order is due to discourse constraints and not because there is a general preference for a specific context independent of word order.

Table 1: Fixed effect for models predicting Context and Word Order. Table shows model coefficient estimates \( \hat{\beta} \), standard errors and \( p \)-values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>WordOrder</th>
<th>Context:Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>(-.51 (.35), =.15)</td>
<td>(-3.37 (.47), &lt;.0001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>(.35 (.45), =.44)</td>
<td>(-3.54 (.67), &lt;.0001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>(-.13 (.39), =.74)</td>
<td>(-3.36 (.66), &lt;.0001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We are furthermore interested in the interaction between Context and Language to understand whether the difference in rating between the object and wide focus contexts differs between Dutch native speakers and the different L2 groups. We focus only on the effect of context on items with OSV order. There is no significant difference between the native Dutch control group and any of the L2 groups (\( \hat{\beta} (se(\hat{\beta})) = -3.37 (.47), p = .28 \) for Dutch-English and \( \hat{\beta} (se(\hat{\beta})) = -1.91 (.47), p = .82 \) for Dutch-German). The results from Experiment 1 suggest that discourse constraints on object \( \bar{A} \)-movement to the prefield are acquirable by English learners of Dutch.

4.3. Experiment 2: A-movement and Discourse Topics

The second experiment tests whether L1 English learners and L1 German learners of L2 Dutch have a preference for S-O-Adverb-V word orders in sentences with anaphoric objects.

4.3.1. Materials and Procedure

20 target items were interspersed with 8 filler items. Items were presented Latin Square varying the factors Context and Word Order. The factor Context contained the levels Object-Given and Object-notGiven and the factor Word Order varied in whether the object was scrambled or not. Only definite DPs were used in the target items, an example of which is shown in (10) to (11). The instructions were the same as in Experiment 1.
Scrambled word order

a. What did Wouter say? Is there any news about the secretary?
b. dat Hans [de secretaresse], binnenkort zal ontslaan.

‘Wouter told that Hans will fire the secretary soon.’

Non-scrambled word order

a. What did Wouter say? Is there any news about the secretary?
b. dat Hans binnenkort de secretaresse zal ontslaan.

‘Wouter told that Hans will fire the secretary soon.’

4.3.2. Results

Figure 2 shows the naturalness ratings for scrambled and non-scrambled sentences presented in contexts in which the object was given and contexts in which the object was not given. An overall view on the plot suggests that all sentence types are rated as fairly natural, but that, at least for the Dutch native speakers and the German learners of Dutch, a clear preference for the scrambled order over the non-scrambled order is attested in contexts where the object is discourse anaphoric. In wide focus contexts, there is no clear preference for either of the two word-orders. The analysis focuses on the question whether scrambled sentences are rated more natural than non-scrambled sentences in contexts where the Object is given, and therefore we will focus on sentences where the object is discourse anaphoric.

For each language the naturalness ratings for each of the two word orders in the object given context were placed in a cumulative mixed effect model. Each model included fixed effects for Word Order, random intercepts for item and participant and random slopes for participant. The scrambled order is significantly more natural than the non-scrambled order for Dutch native speakers ($\hat{\beta}=1.75$, $se(\hat{\beta})=0.37$, $p<0.001$) and for L1 German learners of L2 Dutch ($\hat{\beta}=0.6$, $se(\hat{\beta})=0.46$, $p<.001$). Significance was not reached for the L1 English learners of L2 Dutch ($\hat{\beta}=0.6$, $se(\hat{\beta})=0.33$, $p=.07$). The results of Experiment 2 suggest that L1 English learners of L2 Dutch generally do not share with native speakers of Dutch the preference for scrambled over non-scrambled objects in contexts with discourse anaphoric objects. However, in the second graph in Figure 2, as

There is a debate in the literature as to whether only discourse anaphoric objects are allowed to scramble and whether non-scrambled objects are always non-discourse anaphoric. The only assumption I make in this experiment, supported by my intuition, is that when the object is discourse anaphoric, the scrambled order is preferred but that non-discourse anaphoric objects are not restricted from scrambling. Namely, scrambled orders are acceptable as answers to questions in which the object is not explicitly mentioned, but when it is part of the common ground. This is also reflected in the native speaker results shown in Figure 3.
indicated with the darker lines, four participants do show a clear preference for the scrambled word order. To investigate whether the L2 groups perform like the native Dutch control group, we fitted a cumulative link mixed model, including Context and Language as group factors and with random intercepts for item and participant and random slopes for participant. As shown in table 2, the non-scrambled word order is rated higher by the L1 English learners of Dutch than the Dutch native speakers, but there is no significant interaction between Word Order and Language.

Table 2: Fixed effects for model predicting Word Order and L1 Language on the acceptability judgment of sentences with anaphoric objects. Table shows model coefficient estimates $\hat{\beta}$, standard errors and $p$-values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$\hat{\beta}$ (se($\hat{\beta}$)), p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word Order Scrambled</td>
<td>1.11 (.27), = 0***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language English</td>
<td>0.9(.47), &lt;.04*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language German</td>
<td>0.43 (.41), = .30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Order Scrambled:English</td>
<td>-0.52 (.47), =.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Order Scrambled:German</td>
<td>0.30 (.43), =.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4. Experiment 3: A-movement and specificity

An important prediction made by the Interface hypothesis is that phenomena that belong to other interfaces than the syntax-discourse interface, such as the syntax-semantics interface, will not cause residual problems in L2 acquisition. The syntactic operation of the structures tested in Experiment 3, is the same as those studied in Experiment 2: the object has moved to a position above the sentence adverb. Importantly, the difference lies in whether the object is definite or indefinite: when scrambling an indefinite object, the learner’s task is to figure out that the indefinite is interpreted specifically as opposed to non-scrambled indefinites which are interpreted non-specifically.

4.4.1. Materials and Procedure

Participants were presented with a Truth Value Judgement task. Target sentences contained indefinite objects that required either a specific or a non-specific reading depending on the position of the indefinite object relative to the adverb. The contexts were constructed such that the test sentence containing a scrambled indefinite was false under a specific interpretation and true under a non-specific interpretation. Each test item consisted of a story presenting a context (presented in Dutch), and a test sentences underneath the story, as shown in the example in (12). The task consisted of 2 practice items (1 false, 1 true), 10 test items, 5 with a scrambled indefinite as in (12-a) and 5 non-scrambled indefinites, as in (12-b)) and 6 fillers (3 false, 3 true). Note that the specific interpretation entails the non-specific interpretation. Namely, if the entertainer sang a defined set of songs regularly, it also has to be true that he regularly sang several songs. However, the opposite does not hold and thus we can test L2 learner’s knowledge on the syntax-semantics correspondence of object-adverb orderings by testing whether they correctly interpret specific indefinites in contexts where the specific interpretation is false and the non-specific interpretation is true. For this reason, the analysis will include the participant’s judgments on sentences like (12-a).

(12) For our office parties we always hire the same entertainer. He is a multitalented person. He is not only good at magic and at telling jokes, he also always sings a couple of beautiful songs. What I admire most about him is his wonderful repertoire: after all these years of performing at our company he never repeated the same song.

a. De entertainer heeft een paar liedjes regelmatig gezongen. (X) The entertainer has a few songs regularly sang.

b. De entertainer heeft regelmatig een paar liedjes gezongen. (✓) The entertainer has regularly a few songs sang.

I would like to thank Hans van de Koot for sharing his materials with me, which were originally designed for the AHRC-funded project ‘Antecedent Priming in Sentences with Neutral Scrambling: Evidence from Dutch and German’ (grant number AH/I017763/1).
‘The entertainer sang a few songs regularly.’

4.4.2. Results

Figure 3 shows the proportion of correct judgments for sentences with scrambled indefinite objects. We fitted a binary logistic regression with Language as a fixed factor and random intercepts for participant to measure the probability of the L2 groups interpreting a scrambled indefinite incorrectly more often than the Dutch control group. The L1 German learners of Dutch do not behave any different from the Dutch native speakers ($\hat{\beta}=0.16$, se($\hat{\beta}$)=0.94, $p=.86$), but the L1 English learners of Dutch do ($\hat{\beta}=-2.42$, se($\hat{\beta}$)=0.84, $p<.005$). Figure 3 also provides information on the individual results for Experiment 3. Taking 80% as the threshold for a target pattern, 10 out of 15 participants actually behave on target. These individual results show that most L1 English L2 learners of Dutch can restrict scrambled indefinites to a specific interpretation, but that there are a significant number of participants who even at the near-native level do not restrict the scrambled indefinite object to a specific interpretation.

![Proportion of Correct Responses](image)

**Figure 3:** Proportion of correct interpretations of Specific Indefinites. Left: the L1 English and German learners of Dutch and the Dutch control group. Right: each individual participant from the L1 English group.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study investigated the acquisition of two constructions involving object movement at the syntax-discourse interface: A-movement to the prefield of focused objects and anaphoric object scrambling across adverbs. In addition, we tested the semantic effects of indefinite object scrambling across adverbs. Experiment 1 yields clear evidence that near-native English learners of Dutch have acquired the correct syntax to discourse mappings that allow object movement
to the prefield. However, the L1 English group did not show a clear preference for the object-adverb word order in structures with discourse anaphoric objects. With respect to the interpretation of scrambled indefinites, the results revealed a native-like performance for most speakers, but some near-native speakers show difficulties with consistently restricting a scrambled indefinite to a referential interpretation.

Specifically, this study expanded the testing ground of the Interface Hypothesis, which predicts that L2 learners will show residual optionality in allowing focused objects to \( \bar{A} \)-move to the prefield and in their preference for scrambling anaphoric objects, but not with restricting scrambled indefinites to a specific interpretation. Our results challenge the Interface Hypothesis in two ways. First, the target behaviour of the near-native group on correctly allowing OSV orders in object focus contexts suggests that not all phenomena at the syntax-discourse interface are equally problematic. Secondly, the fact that not all speakers in the near-native group strictly assign a specific interpretation to specific indefinites, suggests that difficulties with phenomena at the syntax-semantics interface are experienced by some near-native speakers as well. The outcome of the current study supports the idea that non-target performance of near-native speakers of certain phenomena that pertain to the syntax-discourse interface cannot be generalized to the syntax-discourse interface as a whole (White, 2011). Although computational differences between L1 and L2 speakers may explain some of the differences in performance between L1 and L2 learners, the difference in performance between the L1 English and the L1 German group, in particular for Experiment 2, suggest that there is no general bilingual disadvantage.

References


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