



## **WHERE GRAMMAR MEETS CONTEXT: TEACHING PRAGMATICS IN L2 FRENCH**

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### **Abstract**

Language teaching traditionally focuses on grammar, often ignoring the effects of the context within which it is used. A recent study (Work, 2010) of the interaction of discourse context (pragmatics) with the selection of appropriate grammatical structures (syntax) shows this to be a source of problems for learners. This paper presents cross-sectional and cross-linguistic classroom data from 143 instructed English-speaking second language (L2) learners of Spanish and French of different proficiency levels as well as from 13 native speakers (NS) examining null and postverbal subjects in Spanish, subject dislocation and *c'est* clefts in French and object clitic left dislocation (CLLD) in both languages. The results indicate that the interface structures investigated were vulnerable, that is, particularly subject to learner error. Overall, learners showed significant differences from NS in the production and perception of these structures. Even advanced learners demonstrated a wide range of discourse-pragmatic proficiency. Contact with the target language alone has not been found to be sufficient to acquire accurate language use in context and instruction in pragmatics has been found to be successful (Bouton, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1994; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kasper, 1997, 2001). Based on this research and current theories of L2 acquisition, and in an effort to connect theory with practice, instructional units of integrated and sequenced classroom activities for improving pragmatic competence were developed. These units are composed of awareness activities, plentiful authentic language input, interpretation and analysis, and finally production activities.

**Keywords:** L2 acquisition, syntax-pragmatics interface, teaching, French

## Introduction

Studies in monolingual (L1) and bilingual (2L1) language acquisition (Allen, 2000; Clancy 1993, 1997; Grinstead, 2000; Müller & Hulk, 2001; Paradis & Navarro, 2003) have for some time focused on the syntax-pragmatics interface, the locus where grammar interacts with discourse-pragmatics. More recently, this integration of syntactic information with the appropriate discourse framework has also shown to cause difficulties for second language (L2) learners.

Argument realization in Spanish and French is an area where grammar and discourse-pragmatics interact. In general, the term *topic* has been used to refer to the point of departure of a sentence: what the sentence is about, the information that is known by a speaker and listener, what is given. *Focus*, in contrast, entails the informative part of a sentence: the emphasis or new information. Despite the fact that the discourse notions of topic and focus seem quite general and universal, their linguistic mapping varies from language to language. Languages differ with respect to how the information structure of an utterance is represented. It can be manifested in aspects of prosody, in special grammatical markers, in the form of syntactic constituents, in the position and ordering of such constituents in the sentence, in the form of complex grammatical constructions, and in certain choices between related lexical items. English, a so-called intonation language, mainly uses intonation to mark information structure, but also has syntactic mechanisms like Topicalization, Focus Preposing, clefts, and passives at its disposal. Due to the less flexible character of accentuation in the Romance languages, mechanisms other than intonation are typically at work such as word order variation. Since both Spanish and French are S-V-O languages, this word order is the unmarked one in both languages with subjects being generally topics and objects generally focus.

## Subject and object realization in Spanish and French

In Spanish, a [+null-subject] language, the subject position can be empty due to its rich verbal morphology. These so-called null subjects are interpreted as discourse-old, active topics (1).

- (1) Pepe no vino hoy. \***Pepe** /# él / Ø estará enfermo.  
 Pepe no came-3SG today. Pepe/?he-TONIC-3SG/ Ø will be-3SG sick.  
 'Pepe did not come to work today. He must be sick.'  
 (Montrul, 2004, p. 176)

A subject can also be realized postverbally in Spanish, resulting in the word order V-O-S or V-S.

- (2) Q : ¿Quién compró el coche?  
 Who bought-3SG the car?  
 'Who bought the car?'  
 A: Compró el coche María.  
 Bought-3SG the car María.

'MARÍA bought the car'  
(Zagona, 2002, p. 215)

In this position, the subject represents the new information and is the focus of the sentence.

In French, a [- null subject] language, the subject position can never remain empty and a subject has to always be expressed overtly in a sentence. Subjects can be dislocated either to the right or the left periphery of the sentence, as illustrated by (3) and (4), respectively.

- (3)   Moi, je suis contente [...]  
      I-TONIC-1SG, I-CL-1SG am-1SG happy  
      'I am happy.'
- (4)   Oui, il est gentil, Monsieur X  
      Yes, he-CL-3SG is-3SG nice, Mister X  
      'Yes, he is nice, Mister X.'  
      (Ashby, 1988, p. 204)

These dislocations have a tonic pronoun or a lexical NP in the dislocated position and require the use of a resumptive pronoun in canonical subject position. Interestingly, French is becoming more and more a topic prominent language (Antes, 1995). As a result, speakers increasingly stress the topics of their sentences, generally by employing dislocations instead of using simple subjects and objects to express topics as in written or more formal language (Sleeman, 2004). Thus, these dislocated subjects are interpreted as discourse-old topics.

Subjects can also be expressed by means of a *c'est* cleft. These cleft constructions consist of a matrix clause introduced by *c'est* and the selected clefted constituent (NP or tonic pronoun), followed by a subordinate clause with the relative pronoun *qui* in the case of a clefted subject.

- (5)   C'est moi qui l'admire.  
      It is-3SG I-TONIC-1SG who him-CL-ACC-3SG admires-3SG  
      'It's me that admires him'.  
      (Hollerbach, 1994, p. 407)

Discourse-pragmatically, these *c'est* clefts are interpreted as focal, representing the new information of a sentence.

Subject realization in English differs from that in Spanish and French. Preverbal lexical NPs can refer to discourse-new or contrastive topics like in Spanish or French, but also to discourse-old elements. Since English is a [-null subject] language, discourse-old, active topics cannot be expressed by null subjects, but are rather expressed by a full

pronoun. In general, the focus position in English is sentence-final. Since in English subjects cannot occur postverbally, like in Spanish, other mechanisms are employed to mark their focal nature. These include prosodic marking, but also the use of passives, which can place the subject at the active end of the sentence and clefts. If prosody is the marking of choice, a preverbal focal subject is intonationally prominent in English, a strategy that does not exist in French and Spanish.

Below is a summary of subject realization in Spanish and French paralleled with the learners' L1 English.

Table 1. *Summary of subject realization in Spanish, French and English*

	<b>Spanish</b>	<b>French</b>	<b>English</b>
Discourse-new topic; contrastive topic	Preverbal subject	NP; Dislocated subject	NP
Discourse-old topic	Null subject	Clitic; Dislocated subject	Pronoun
Focus	Postverbal subject	Clefted subject ( <i>c'est</i> cleft)	Preverbal subject; Prosody

In terms of object realization Spanish and French behave similarly. Because they are both S-V-O languages, an object in its in situ (postverbal) position is considered focal, presenting the new information in a sentence.

Clitic Left dislocation (CLLD) in Spanish consists of an object in the left periphery of the sentence with a resumptive clitic pronoun in clitic position (6).

- (6) Las maletas las dejé en el aeropuerto.  
 The suitcases them-CL-ACC-3PL left-1SG in the airport.  
 'I left the suitcases in the airport'  
 (Montrul, 2004, p. 189)

This CLLD construction is non-focal and can either be contrastive or discourse-new. It also exists in French and is syntactically and discourse-pragmatically identical to its Spanish counterpart.

- (7) Les actrices de cinéma, le public les adore.  
 The actresses of movies, the public them-CL-ACC-3PL adores-3SG  
 'Movie actresses, the public adores them.'  
 (Hollerbach, 1994, p. 415)

Object realization in English has more in common with Spanish and French than is the case with subject realization. In the same way that a subject tends to be topical in S-V-O languages like English, French and Spanish, an object in its unmarked, postverbal,

position tends to be focal. Similar to Spanish and French, English discourse-old topics are expressed by pronouns. In Spanish and French, these pronouns are preverbal clitics whereas in English, they are expressed by tonic pronouns in postverbal position. Dislocated objects with a resumptive clitic are non-focal in Spanish and French and can either be contrastive or discourse-new. This is similar to English dislocation structures; however, instead of a resumptive preverbal clitic like in the Romance languages, a resumptive pronoun in postverbal position is used. Even though the syntax of CLLD and English left-dislocation is different, the interpretation of the dislocated element is similar.

Object realization according to their discourse functions in Spanish and French with comparison to English are summarized below:

Table 2. *Summary of object realization in Spanish, French and English*

	<b>Spanish</b>	<b>French</b>	<b>English</b>
Discourse-old topic	Preverbal clitic	Preverbal clitic	Postverbal pronoun
Discourse-new topic; Contrastive topic	CLLD	CLLD	Left Dislocation/ Topicalization
Focus	Postverbal NP	Postverbal NP	Postverbal NP

### **Syntax-pragmatics interface in L2 acquisition**

In L2 Spanish acquisition studies, researchers generally discovered that learners use inversion (V-S word order) less frequently than native speakers (NS) would in the same contexts. Belletti and Leonini (2004) and Hertel (2003) found that learners rarely used V-S order for presentationally focused subjects; Lozano (2006), Dominguez and Arche (2008) and Dominguez (2007) noticed the optional use of V-S and S-V orders in these contexts. Dominguez and Arche (2008), furthermore, observed that the acceptability of the V-S word order is in correlation with proficiency level. Dominguez (2007) found in her study that learners preferred S-V-O over V-O-S structures and that the optionality that was attested declined with higher proficiency level. Rothman (2009) found in his study that advanced learners are more or less target-like in terms of their use of null and overt subjects. His intermediate learners, however, once they reset the Null Subject Parameter, have not yet acquired the pragmatic conditions regulating the use of null vs. overt subjects in Spanish. Belletti, Bennati and Sorace (2007) discovered that the near-native learners in their study produced felicitous examples of postverbal focused subjects, but did so at significantly lower rates than native controls. Furthermore, several researchers attested the overuse of overt subjects in their learner data (Margaza & Bel, 2006; Montrul & Rodríguez Louro, 2006; Tsimpli & Sorace, 2006). Finally, Valenzuela (2004, 2006) noticed the overgeneralization of clitic left dislocation structures in her learners; in Dominguez' (2006) data advanced learners did use dislocated topics with resumptive clitics, but without subject inversion. Slabakova, Rothman, Campos, Leal Méndez and Kempchinsky (2011) and Slabakova, Kempchinsky and Rothman (2012)

found that the near-native L1 English learners of Spanish were able to acquire the syntax-discourse properties of CLLD and CLRD constructions.

In French, some studies attested the early use of topic promoting devices (such as dislocations) by L2 French learners (Trévisé, 1986; Perdue, Deulofeu, & Trévisé, 1992). Hendriks (2000) found that learners avoided using dislocations for newness and detected no transfer of marking devices from the L1. Ferdinand (2002), however, argued that the use of left dislocations by her learners must have been due to transfer of a personal style of topic marking. The left dislocations were, however, used less frequently by learners than by NS. Several researchers attested the use of *c'est* clefts instead of *avoir* clefts in their studies. Watorek, in his (2004) study of beginning, intermediate and advanced Polish learners of French, noticed that *c'est* clefts were infelicitously used to introduce new discourse references instead of *avoir* clefts. Along the same lines, Bartning's (1997) advanced Swedish learners of French used *c'est* clefts instead of *avoir* clefts in later stages of acquisition. Trévisé (1986) also observed that *c'est* clefts emerged before other variant word orders such as dislocations. Finally, Sleeman (2004) found that obligatory one-to-one interface rules (*c'est* cleft) are more easily acquired than optional one-to-more interface rules (dislocations, *il y a* cleft). In their recent studies of near-native learners of French, both Donaldson and Reichle attested no differences between near-native and NS. Donaldson (2011) investigated *c'est* clefts and *avoir* clefts in near-native French and found no differences between near-natives and natives. Reichle (2010) found with his low and high proficiency L1 English learners of French near-nativelike processing of *c'est* cleft focus in French. Donaldson (2012) investigated L1 English near-native speakers of French who have lived in France and found that they used *c'est* clefts the same way as natives to mark focus. He did not find any L1 prosodic transfer, and no overuse or underuse of the clefts by the near-natives in production.

In general, researchers seem to agree that morphosyntactic knowledge is acquired earlier and more easily than discourse-pragmatic knowledge. Learners acquire the latter type of knowledge later and their sensitivity to discourse-pragmatics becomes more and more fine-tuned over time.

### **The study**

The study (Work, 2010) was designed to determine if the syntax-pragmatics interface is indeed vulnerable and if so, if there is a difference between Spanish and French L2 acquisition. In order to investigate argument realization in these two languages the following structures were tested: null subjects, postverbal subjects, and CLLDs with postverbal subjects in Spanish, subject dislocations, *c'est* clefts, and CLLDs with *c'est* clefts in French. To this end, two mostly parallel questionnaires were designed - one in Spanish and one in French - each consisting of three activities: (1) a grammaticality judgment task, (2) a syntax and discourse rating task, and (3) an elicited production task.

Activity 1, the grammaticality judgment task, consists of 24 tokens (grammatical and ungrammatical) testing the syntactic knowledge of argument realization. Each test item consists of a short context and a follow-up sentence in the target language. The students were asked to circle *possible* (POSS), *impossible* (IMPOSS), or *don't know* (DK) depending on their judgment of the follow-up sentence. This activity only contains grammatical and ungrammatical sentences, all of which are discourse-pragmatically appropriate. The following is an example from the Spanish questionnaire:

- (8) **Marco necesita el cuaderno y la pluma.**  
 'Marco needs the notebook and the pen.'  
**La pluma no encuentra.**                      **POSS**                      **IMPOSS**                      **DK**  
 The pen not find-3SG  
 'The pen he doesn't find.'

When judged *impossible*, students were asked to underline the incorrect part of the sentence and to offer a correction. This production component was included in order to see more clearly whether the structures to be tested did actually exist in the students' interlanguage, i.e. that students did not simply guess and rate a follow-up sentence as ungrammatical without having knowledge of the correct form.

Activity 2, the rating task, tests students' pragmatic knowledge of the structures and consists of 14 tokens, each containing a context and two grammatically correct follow-up sentences, one of which is the more pragmatically felicitous response. Informants were asked to rate each follow-up sentence on a Likert scale from -2 (completely unacceptable) to +2 (completely acceptable). If informants were unsure about whether a sentence is acceptable or not, they could choose 0 (unable to decide). Informants were allowed to assign the same rating to each of the two follow-up sentences in a given context. The following is an example from the French questionnaire:

- (9) **Pierre adore la physique ?**  
 'Pierre likes physics ?'  
 -- **Non, la physique, il la déteste.**                      **-2**                      **-1**                      **0**                      **+1**                      **+2**  
 'No, physics, he hates it.'  
 -- **Non, il déteste la physique.**                      **-2**                      **-1**                      **0**                      **+1**                      **+2**  
 'No, he hates physics.'

Activity 3, an elicited dialogue completion task, focuses on students' production of the tested structures and contains a dialogue to be completed in the target language and a table with information needed to fill the blanks in it.

The main study was conducted with learners enrolled in different level Spanish and French courses at Wayne State University during the Winter semester of 2007, yielding a total of 156 informants in the two languages. Based on their results on an independent



proficiency test modeled after the University of Wisconsin (1998), the 75 Spanish subjects were grouped into the following proficiency levels: 26 low-intermediate, 25 high-intermediate, and 16 advanced as well as 8 NS. The 81 French subjects were grouped into the following proficiency levels: 27 low-intermediate, 32 high-intermediate, and 17 advanced subjects as well as 5 NS.

### Results

In line with previously mentioned L2 research, the results of this study indicate that the syntax-discourse interface is vulnerable and that learners have problems acquiring structures that require the integration of syntax and discourse-pragmatics. This cross-sectional and cross-linguistic study of Spanish (a [+ null subject] language) and French (a [- null subject] language) found similar problems for learners regardless of the language learned.

The Spanish data reveals that the informants have problems in all three activities with the syntax-pragmatics interface constructions investigated (i.e. null subjects, postverbal subjects, and CLLD constructions).

Table 3. *Null subjects in L2 Spanish*

		<b>Activity 1</b>	<b>Activity 2</b>	<b>Activity 3</b>
Low intermediate	Mean %	72.12	59.62	55.13
	Mean diff. (NS)	-27.88	-18.51	-40.70
	Sig. (NS)	.001*	.253	.007*
High intermediate	Mean %	90.00	69.00	70.00
	Mean diff. (NS)	-10.00	-9.12	-25.83
	Sig. (NS)	.484	.797	.161
Advanced	Mean %	98.44	76.56	91.67
	Mean diff. (NS)	-1.56	-1.56	-4.16
	Sig. (NS)	.997	.999	.989
NS		100	78.12	95.83

\*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.



Table 4. *Postverbal subjects in L2 Spanish*

		Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3
Low intermediate	Mean %	35.58	25.00	14.10
	Mean diff. (NS)	-64.42	-53.12	-73.40
	Sig. (NS)	.000*	.000*	.000*
High intermediate	Mean %	46.00	47.00	10.67
	Mean diff. (NS)	-54.00	-31.12	-76.83
	Sig. (NS)	.000*	.049*	.000*
Advanced	Mean %	81.25	87.50	60.42
	Mean diff. (NS)	-18.75	9.38	-27.08
	Sig. (NS)	.504	.878	.079
NS		100	78.12	87.50

\*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5. *CLLD with postverbal subjects in L2 Spanish*

		Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3
Low intermediate	Mean %	35.26	29.81	3.85
	Mean diff. (NS)	-39.74	-20.19	-10.73
	Sig. (NS)	.000*	.112	.492
High intermediate	Mean %	36.00	32.00	10.00
	Mean diff. (NS)	-39.00	-18.00	-4.58
	Sig. (NS)	.000*	.189	.931
Advanced	Mean %	43.75	42.19	25.00
	Mean diff. (NS)	-31.25	-7.81	10.42
	Sig. (NS)	.000*	.843	.575
NS		75.00	50.00	14.58

\*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Difficulties with these constructions occur in all areas, i.e. when acquiring their syntax (Table 3), their discourse-appropriateness (Table 4) and their production (Table 5), as the overall percentages per activity per construction indicate. Some significant improvement was attested for certain structures between certain proficiency levels, but even advanced learners seem to exhibit vulnerability.

The French data shows similar results because the informants also have difficulties with all syntax-pragmatics structures studied (i.e. subject dislocation, subject clefts, and CLLD constructions).

Table 6. *Subject dislocation in L2 French*

		Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3
Low intermediate	Mean %	37.78	73.61	--
	Mean diff. (NS)	-6.22	-13.89	
	Sig. (NS)	.940	.558	
High intermediate	Mean %	49.38	79.69	--
	Mean diff. (NS)	5.38	-7.81	
	Sig. (NS)	.959	.877	
Advanced	Mean %	61.18	89.71	--
	Mean diff. (NS)	17.18	2.21	
	Sig. (NS)	.437	.997	
NS		44.00	87.50	

\*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 7. *Subject clefts (c'est clefts) in L2 French*

		Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3
Low intermediate	Mean %	48.77	57.41	4.94
	Mean diff. (NS)	-47.90	-27.59	-45.06
	Sig. (NS)	.002*	.034*	.000*
High intermediate	Mean %	60.42	58.59	14.06
	Mean diff. (NS)	-36.25	-26.41	-35.94
	Sig. (NS)	.024*	.042*	.003*
Advanced	Mean %	92.16	69.12	38.24
	Mean diff. (NS)	-4.51	-15.88	-11.76
	Sig. (NS)	.986	.423	.676
NS		96.67	85.00	50.00

\*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 8. *CLLDs with cleft subjects in L2 French*

		Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3
Low intermediate	Mean %	26.54	52.78	9.26
	Mean diff. (NS)	-36.79	-32.22	-37.41
	Sig. (NS)	.025*	.045*	.002*
High intermediate	Mean %	42.19	60.94	20.31
	Mean diff. (NS)	-21.15	-24.06	-26.35
	Sig. (NS)	.340	.191	.044*
Advanced	Mean %	76.47	63.24	46.08
	Mean diff. (NS)	13.14	-21.76	-.59
	Sig. (NS)	.757	.319	1.000
NS		63.33	85.00	46.67

\*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

In French – just like in Spanish – problems arise in all areas, i.e. with the syntax (Table 6), the discourse-appropriateness (Table 7) and the production of these constructions (Table 8), as the overall percentages for all three activities indicate. Similar to the Spanish data, there was some improvement between certain levels of proficiency for certain structures. The results of the current study support previous findings where researchers found that structures at the syntax-pragmatics interface exhibit vulnerability (delay in acquisition, incomplete acquisition, lack of sensitivity to discourse-pragmatic features, etc.) in L2 acquisition of both Spanish and French (Belletti & Leonini, 2004; Dominguez, 2006; Ferdinand, 2002; Hertel, 2003; Lozano, 2006; Margaza & Bel, 2006; Montrul & Rodríguez Louro, 2006; Ocampo, 1990; Sleeman, 2004).

Another finding was optionally accepting two different structures in the same contexts in Activity 2, the rating task. In Spanish, high intermediate and advanced learners as well as NS assigned a positive rating to both null and preverbal subjects in the given contexts. This result suggests that - in the interlanguage of learners - two structures (namely null and preverbal subjects or preverbal and postverbal subjects) may be used interchangeably in given contexts. This optionality has been previously reported by Lozano (2006), whose advanced subjects optionally accepted V-S and S-V word order. Dominguez & Arche (2008) and Dominguez (2007) also attested optionality in their data indicating that learners have acquired the syntax of these structures, but do not yet completely understand their discourse-pragmatic differences. Optionality was also observed in the French results. French informants (including NS) optionally accepted subject dislocations, subject clefts and subject clitics in given contexts. They did not assign the same values to each structure in a given context, but rated all three structures as possible. The same phenomenon occurred with the CLLD structures and in situ objects in a given context. These results indicate that learners might acknowledge the existence of these different subject and object types, but that they do not (yet) have the sensitivity of each structure's discourse-appropriateness.

Finally, low and high intermediate Spanish learners – when correcting given structures in Activity 1 and in the production task (Activity 3) – seemingly still prefer NPs and pronouns in preverbal subject contexts and in situ, canonical objects with different subject types in object contexts. Similar findings occurred with the French data, where low and high intermediate learners prefer NPs or clitics in preverbal subject contexts and canonical in situ objects with different subject types in terms of object realization. As proficiency level increases, fewer instances of these structures are evident and more target structures are produced in both Spanish and French. This preference for preverbal NP and pronoun subjects as well as in situ canonical objects may stem either from their syntactic and discourse-pragmatic simplicity or from the influence from the L1 English where these structures are very common. Similar findings are reported in Margaza and Bel (2006), Montrul and Rodríguez Louro (2006) and Tsimplici and Sorace (2006) who found the overuse of overt subjects in the learners they studied.

By and large, the data from both languages indicates an improvement across proficiency levels in terms of the syntax and especially the discourse-interpretation of the structures. Moreover, the following two orders can be detected: grammar recognition evolves before discourse understanding before production. In terms of the syntactic structures, generally subject dislocations / null subjects come before clefts / postverbal subjects before CLLD structures.

### **Why should pragmatics be taught?**

Before addressing the many reasons why pragmatics should be taught in foreign language classes, a definition is in order. What is pragmatics? A definition appealing to L2 pedagogy is that of Crystal (1997): Pragmatics is “the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication.” (p.301) Thus, pragmatics can be seen as the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context.

Structures at the syntax-pragmatics interface such as subject and object realization are frequently found in NS discourse (Antes, 1995; Ossipov, 2002). Yet, these areas of language and language use have not traditionally been addressed in language teaching curricula, textbooks and materials. One reason might be that pragmatic rules for language use are often subconscious; even NS are frequently unaware of pragmatic rules until they are broken. Another reason might be that adult learners do get a considerable amount of L2 pragmatic knowledge for free because (1) some pragmatic knowledge (e.g. the notions of topic and focus) is universal (e.g. Blum-Kulka, 1991; Ochs, 1996); (2) other aspects of pragmatics may successfully be transferred from the learner’s L1; (3) there may be corresponding form-function mappings between the L1 and the L2, meaning some of the forms can be used in corresponding L2 contexts with corresponding effects. Unfortunately, learners do not always capitalize on the knowledge they already have available to them. Many studies (see section syntax-pragmatics interface in L2) have found significant differences, even at higher levels of proficiency, between learners and NS in terms of production and perception of structures that are at the syntax-pragmatics interface, for example word order options (see, for instance, Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Work, 2010). Learners of high grammatical proficiency will not necessarily show equivalent pragmatic development (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). Even advanced near-native speakers are neither uniformly successful nor uniformly unsuccessful, and the range is quite wide (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). Furthermore, many researchers have found that learners on their own, without guided instruction, do not acquire pragmatics as was initially believed. Contact with the language alone has proven to be insufficient to acquire the pragmatics of the TL (Bouton, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1994; Kasper, 1997, 2001). Consequently, Bardovi-Harlig (2001) points out that many aspects of L2 pragmatics are not acquired without instruction, or that they are learned more slowly. Lastly and most important, instruction in pragmatics has been found to be successful (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Blyth, 2000).

### **How should pragmatics be taught?**

Based on findings from the recent study and other researchers' results, it seems obvious that pragmatics (just like grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation) needs to be taught in the foreign language classroom. The question then arises: how should pragmatics be taught and when?

Although there can be no universally correct single method for teaching pragmatics, I propose a model firmly founded in a communicative approach focused on learner proficiency that in turn is adaptable to a wide range of teaching styles and practices and that can complement any textbook or teaching methodology. Proficiency-based language instruction seeks to integrate the four modalities (speaking, reading, listening, writing) as well as culture into all aspects of instruction and all levels. One of the main goals is to have students communicate meaningfully, effectively and creatively in the target language for real-life purposes. To this end, authentic materials and contexts are used whenever possible. The proficiency-oriented classroom is student-centered, respects diverse learning styles and builds on what students need, already know and can do. It is based on the three components of proficiency: (1) content (the topics of communication), (2) function (the task, purpose of spoken or written communication), and (3) accuracy (correctness or appropriateness in pronunciation, writing, grammar, culture, vocabulary choice, pragmatics). Thus, the process of teaching pragmatics should entail lots of authentic language input from NS of the target language, should be a recursive process and be extended over a longer period of time. Although the proposed model is based on principles of proficiency-oriented and communicative language teaching, it can be readily adapted to various teaching styles, used with any textbook, and incorporated into existing curricula.

### **Guiding principles and sample activities**

In what follows, I am presenting five steps for teaching pragmatics in the foreign language classroom that can be embedded into any existing curriculum and enhance any teaching methodology: (1) awareness-raising / recognition, (2) interpretation, (3) analysis, (4) production / use, (5) more awareness. Within each step, original French sample activities will be presented using various authentic language materials. These activities were created for my own proficiency-oriented college French classroom to teach discourse-pragmatics in general, and subject dislocations and *c'est* clefts more specifically. The sample activities can, however, easily be adapted to other languages.

**1. Awareness-Raising / Recognition.** Awareness-raising is a crucial part in the process to teach L2 pragmatics, especially because these syntactic structures are almost never taught in foreign language textbooks and their use is closely tied to discourse-pragmatics. During this phase, learners are provided with plenty of authentic input containing the structures in question either in the form of written texts or in the form of audio / video input together with a written script. Written materials can be found on the



internet (news or other articles, blogs, websites, forums, message boards), in books (novels, children's books, comic books), newspapers, advertisements, poems; their oral counterparts can be found on the internet (news or TV websites containing sound or video files), in songs, audio recordings, audio books, movies or TV shows. It is crucial, however, to carefully select these input media in order to find some that contain several of the target language structures. Once suitable authentic language samples are selected, educators need to make these structures salient in the input through highlighting or color coding them or by means of intonation. This step is important because learners need to recognize these structures in the input for awareness-raising to take place.

Below is the transcription of an authentic French language interview "jeune motard" found on the internet. The target language forms were color coded to make them more salient and noticeable in the input. Right dislocations are highlighted in green, left dislocations in yellow and clefts in light blue.

Figure 1. *Transcript of authentic French text "Jeune motard" with syntactic structures highlighted; <http://francebienvenue1.wordpress.com/2011/10/09/jeune-motard/>*

A: Parce que tu veux une grosse moto !

Ad: Bah oui, je préférerais.

A: D'accord. Et alors comment **ça se passe, ce permis** ? Qu'est-ce qu'il faut faire exactement ?

Ad: Bah en fait, c'est pas comme le permis voiture où il y a qu'une épreuve en circulation et où on voit si tu es apte à conduire avec les autres. Il y a d'abord en fait une épreuve qui s'appelle le plateau. C'est... Tu es... C'est sur un circuit... enfin une piste hors de la circulation. Et c'est... Il y a des exercices pour voir si on manie bien la moto, si on risque pas de la faire tomber, si...

A: Oui. Oui, parce que c'est un engin (2) quand même lourd et...

Ad: Oui, c'est lourd. Et c'est pas forcé [...]... Au début, c'est pas évident à manier forcément.

A: D'accord. Oui, ça peut tomber, tu peux tomber avec. Et on voit si tu as l'équilibre ou des choses comme ça, quoi, aussi.

Ad: Oui, voilà.

A: Et alors, **qu'est-ce que c'est, ces épreuves** ? Enfin, il y en a plusieurs, non, sur ce plateau, en fait ?

Ad: Alors les principales, c'est le... En fait, il y a une épreuve dite lente, à allure lente. C'est en fait... **Il y a des plots qui** sont posés, de manière à former des portes...

A: Oui, c'est comme le ski.

Ad: Et il faut pas[...]... Oui, voilà, à peu près. Il faut passer entre ces portes. Et **ces portes, elles** sont suffisamment rapprochées pour que tu... enfin... il faille (3) les passer à... à allure lente.

A: Oui, d'accord. Mais en même temps, quand c'est lent, on peut perdre l'équilibre ?

The main purpose of the selected text is to provide students with target language input and make them aware of the syntactic structures in question, and not to explicitly teach

the syntax-pragmatics structures at this stage. Thus, learners will be asked to read the text for comprehension purposes, cultural information or to start a discussion. Its secondary purpose is to present these syntactic forms and make learners aware of their existence and use. To be most effective, this text can and should be used again during later stages of the acquisition cycle.

Another type of awareness-raising activity could be looking at similar L1 forms, if they exist. Even though I am generally not a proponent of introducing English into the L2 classroom, it might be beneficial to initially provide some input in the L1 for learners to reflect upon these forms and make them aware of similar structures in their native language. This can be in the form of similar syntactic constructions, pragmatic differences or appropriateness of different syntactic forms.

(10)            So I see my youngest brother a lot too. Actually, all my brothers are pretty close by. My oldest brother is a chef, like, downtown and my middle brother lives in Jersey.  
**My youngest brother, he's a freshman at Newman.**  
 (Manetta, 2007, p. 1030)

(11)            whoever transcribes this tape's going to get really bored  
 ha ha ha ha ha ha  
**that was Timothy laughing at you**  
 (Calude, 2007, p. 160)

Example (10) shows a left dislocation structure in English whereas example (11) shows a cleft structure. The awareness of their existence in the L1 (as well as their discourse function and syntax) might encourage reflection, interpretation and analysis in the L2.

A further awareness-raising activity would be using audio and/or video material to practice another skill, namely listening, allowing learners to focus on these forms without seeing them in writing. This type of activity would come after several written recognition activities when learners are already more familiar with the structures in question and will be able to identify them while listening. The following video is an interview in French that was found on the internet and contains the structures in question. Students listen to the video and either raise their hand when they hear the structure or write down the structures they hear. Of course, learners might need to listen to the video more than once.



Figure 2. Authentic French YouTube video "Pour qu'ils en sortent";  
<http://francebienvenue1.wordpress.com/?s=POur+qu%27ils+s%27en+sortent>



This awareness-raising part of the process should most definitely not be limited to a one-time instance, but rather be followed up with more input and more recognition activities practicing various skills.

**2. Interpretation.** During the interpretation stage, the focus lies on meaning and comprehension of the structures as well as their interpretation. Questions such as "What does it mean?" and "How is this used?" will be answered. By looking at these forms in authentic input and considering the context in which they are used, learners will create hypotheses based on the aforementioned two questions. After focusing on the meaning, learners will attempt to interpret the structures. Even after initial hypotheses were made, learners will receive more authentic input to reflect upon their hypotheses and gain more awareness.

This will be easiest accomplished in the form of written samples of authentic language where the forms are initially highlighted by the instructor, or better still, when students are asked first to find the structures in question themselves and then asked to interpret them. Instructors need to ascertain that enough discourse context is provided for learners to make assumptions about the form and use of these structures.

Figure 3. *Transcript of authentic French interview "Pour qu'ils en sortent" found on the Internet with subject dislocations highlighted.*

<http://francebienvenue1.wordpress.com/2011/10/28/pour-qu'ils-sen-sortent/#more-1742>

**M:** Alors, moi, je suis avec des enfants qui ont entre 6 et 11 ans. Après, les ITEP, ça peut aller jusqu'à 20... 20 ans.

**A:** Et là donc... Et tu en as combien en fait, en charge ?

**M:** Alors, nous, on est une petite structure. Donc on a seize enfants exactement. Et on est six éducateurs spécialisés. Et donc en fait, notre travail, ça porte sur la vie quotidienne, donc les repas, les... On en a certains qui sont internes aussi, donc ils dorment. Donc moi, je fais les nuits, aussi.

After reading the text and possibly having found and highlighted the structures, learners try to answer the following questions.

- How is this structure formed? What comes before / after?
- How is it used? When is it used? In what contexts?

This can be done in small groups or individually before making a master list of possible answers. Later in the process, this same text can be recycled and the master list used to confirm or disprove previously made hypotheses.

**3. Analysis.** During the analysis phase, learners formulate clear rule(s) about the structures and their use allowing students to think critically, work at their own pace, but also work with others. This is a more inductive way of presenting the grammar rules. If necessary and/or desired, the instructor can at this point add an inductive grammar presentation or rule explanation for the whole class.

Verification of one's own rule(s) (or the whole class' rules previously collected in a master list) happens through more input. Initially, instructors can recycle some of the materials used earlier whose content is already known to students in order to verify their hypotheses. Then, new texts or audio / video materials will be introduced for learners to check their initial hypotheses and refine them, if necessary.

**4. Production / use.** Up until this point in the process, learners have not yet even attempted to use these structures, only exercising their receptive skills: reading and listening. Now learners can slowly work on their productive skills: writing and speaking. By means of different types of activities, sequenced from more guided to more open-ended, learners will engage in producing the structures. Plentiful context within each activity is needed in order to illicit not only syntactically correct, but also pragmatically appropriate forms.

The following three activities are carefully sequenced to encourage production of these structures, initially practicing only the syntax before focusing on the form and the discourse context together. In the first activity, the actual syntactic form is targeted.

Here, learners are asked to fill in the blanks to complete the dislocation structures by either providing the tonic/stressed pronoun, or the resumptive clitic pronoun.

- (12) Fill in the blank using the correct form of the pronoun  
 Moi, \_\_je\_\_ suis étudiante.  
 \_\_Lui\_\_, il est professeur.  
 \_\_Nous\_\_, on est d'accord.

The next activity is more open and learners are asked to rewrite or orally rephrase the given sentences by using subject dislocations.

- (13) Rewrite the following sentences using subject dislocations  
 Je suis sportive.                      Moi, je suis sportive.  
 Ils étudient beaucoup.              Eux, ils étudient beaucoup.

Finally, the last activity is the most open-ended and uses translation from the learners' L1 into the L2. While generally relying on translation from English for understanding and/or learning of the L2 is to be avoided and I am usually against introducing English into the French classroom, the difference or nonexistence of forms in the L1 can help in the comprehension of these challenging and complex concepts. Here, the discourse context is given in English and requires the use of the new form (namely, a *c'est cleft*). Learners can show that they understand the discourse contexts when these forms are used in the L2 and demonstrate their grasp of their appropriate use.

- (14) Translate the following text into French  
 ~ Did you see my brother at the pool?  
     As-tu vu mon frère à la piscine?  
 ~ No, I saw your sister.  
     Non, c'est ta sœur que j'ai vue.

This can be followed up by oral situations where learners spontaneously create dialogues in the L2. The prompts on conversation cards are provided in the L1 and the context is created to illicit the discourse-pragmatically appropriate use of the structure. This is one of the most open-ended activities to encourage learners to produce these structures.

**5. More awareness.** Finally, the learning continues with more awareness-raising activities. This time, the focus lies on the learners' awareness of their own use of the structures. Activities where a context is given and learners (hopefully) produce the structure in question can be used to analyze student errors (Katz & Blyth, 2007).

- (15) Context: *a student is asked with whom he went to the movies.*  
 Je ne suis pas allé au cinéma. **Mon frère** y est allé.

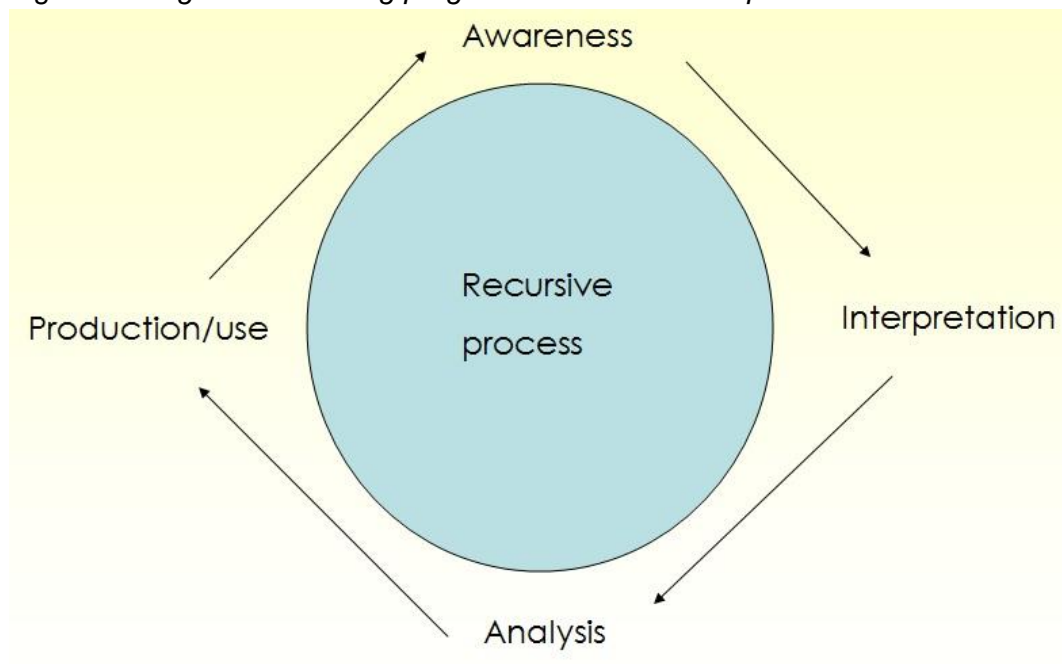
- (16) Context: *a student is asked if he likes NY.*  
 New York, je **la** déteste.

In (15), a learner used *mon frère* with intonation (which is most likely a transfer from English) instead of using a *c'est* cleft in French. Students could re-analyze the discourse context and revisit the previously formed hypotheses in order to arrive at the discourse-pragmatically correct target language structure. In (16), a learner correctly identified the context to use a dislocation structure, but used the grammatically incorrect resumptive pronoun *la*. Again, re-analysis of the form as well as revisiting the grammatical rules previously created will help learners refine their L2 syntax-pragmatics skills.

Now that learners have some understanding of what is going on and the use of the structures as well as syntactic tools to match the context, they can become aware of their use in NS samples on a new level and with greater effectiveness. To this end, some of the authentic materials from earlier in the process can be recycled in addition to new resources.

This recursive process for teaching pragmatics should prove helpful in addressing these highly challenging and generally neglected structures in the L2 classroom. The cyclic nature of the model should lend itself to aid educators in revisiting the complex issues of pragmatics instruction from unit to unit, year to year, even with different teachers, without being completely disconnected. This way, although pragmatics instruction needs to take place throughout the entire course of the language learning process, learners can tie previously acquired principles with newly appearing grammar and discourse situations.

Figure 4. *Diagram of teaching pragmatics as a recursive process*



### **Issues for educators**

Teaching pragmatics in the L2 classroom and more specifically postverbal subjects, null subjects and CLLDs in Spanish and subject dislocations, *c'est* clefts and CLLDs in French might pose several issues for language educators. First and foremost, these syntactic structures are usually not found in traditional textbooks or descriptive L2 grammars, even though they frequently occur in NS speech. Second, producing the necessary tools and materials can be very time-consuming: One must find authentic materials that contain the syntactic structures in question and are at the same time of an appropriate level for the learners. And since they are rarely found in existing teaching materials, educators have to sift through numerous existing resources in the hopes of finding something that contains the structures in question and somehow fits with the current lesson. Once appropriate material has been chosen, the educator must highlight and/or make salient the forms to be studied, prepare activities to go along with the materials and finally integrate it into the lesson and general objectives of the class. Third, the above suggested method of recursive teaching over several semesters is often difficult to orchestrate. Because textbooks do not usually contain or emphasize these structures, classes change instructors from year to year or semester to semester, and current curriculums do not emphasize pragmatics instruction or competence as a stated objective, it is extremely challenging to follow through the suggested recursive process of teaching. Finally, educators might feel insecure about these structures, especially if they are not NS of the languages they teach. Even at the near-native speaker level, learners have difficulty in using these structures (see, for instance, Work, 2010). The intuitions and pragmatic connotations associated with these syntactic forms and their discourse-appropriate use are often very difficult to explain for proficient L2 and native speakers alike since they are generally subconscious.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the demonstrated need to teach context-related word order options and the lack of focus on pragmatics in language textbooks and curricula, a recursive process to teaching over a prolonged period of time could be a viable step in resolving the problem. Awareness-raising, recognition, interpretation, analysis, production and use as well as more awareness-raising are all crucial components of this proposed teaching process. Perhaps every language educators' greatest goal is to help learners reach a point in which they are able to function effectively in real-life situations, using grammatically correct and pragmatically appropriate structures. To this end, pragmatics needs to be included into language teaching and learners need to learn to make discourse-appropriate choices. Moreover, language educators need to teach actual NS grammar and language as it is really used rather than contrived and neatly packaged language created for learners. Unfortunately that means that educators at this point need to create a lot of these activities on their own without relying on textbooks and incorporate them into their existing lessons. The abovementioned recursive teaching process can complement any method of language teaching and any textbook.

### Biodata

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