A language in focus

Recent research (2000–2006) into applied linguistics and language teaching with specific reference to L2 French

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The large and wide-ranging body of research in French as a second language has contributed significantly to the development of several branches of the broad discipline of applied linguistics. However, there have to date been few attempts to provide a comprehensive account of this literature as a distinct, language-specific body of knowledge. The present overview summarises a large number of studies published since the year 2000 under the twin broad categories of research in L2 French acquisition and research in L2 French teaching and learning. The overview of the studies, representing different epistemological approaches and targeting different research objectives, provides an up-to-date account of the main concerns of L2 French researchers working in different countries. The article also draws out salient themes that link this work (such as insights gained from analysis of the impact of different L1 backgrounds on L2 French acquisition) and highlights differences in L2 French research trends (such as different emphases and perspectives adopted in anglophone and francophone studies).

1. Introduction

There are clear signs of a resurgence of interest in research into learning and teaching L2 French. In the last few years, a number of academic journals have devoted a special issue to the theme of L2 French (e.g. *Canadian Modern Language Review* (1999 and 2004), *International Review of Applied Linguistics* (2004), *Journal of French Language Studies* (2004), *Langages* (2004), and *Marges Linguistiques* (2005). Papers on L2 French learning or teaching are given at major annual conferences run by organisations such as AFLS (Association of French Language Studies), DILTEC (Didactique des Langues, des Textes et des Cultures), and EUROSLA (European Second Language Association). Corpora of L2 French interlanguage, such as the Learner Language Oral Corpora freely available to researchers at www.flloc.soton.ac.uk (Rule et al. 2003; Rule 2004; Myles 2005a), also provide valuable empirical data for the study of L2 French acquisition.

A noteworthy feature of the studies that are now appearing is the range of L1 perspectives from which L2 French learning is studied. Among the texts cited in this review, L1 backgrounds other than English include Chinese (Sun 2003), German (Behrent 2002; Granget 2004), Dutch (Dewaele 2002b; Dewaele & Regan 2002), Japanese (Ishikawa 2001; Klingler & Véronique 2002; Trévisiol 2006), Korean (Kim 2002; Mitchell & Lee 2003), Lebanese Arabic (Diab 2006), Moroccan Arabic (Stoffel & Véronique 2003), Polish (Lambert 2003; Demagny & Paprocka-Piotrowska 2004), Serbo-Croatian (Pichette, Segalowitz & Connors 2003), Spanish (Costa-Galligani 2001; Rodríguez & Abreu 2003), Swedish (Schlyter 2003; Granfeldt 2005), and Vietnamese (Leung 2005). While most of these studies are set within the context of residence in France, there are a few, though many more will be needed in the future, that are carried out in the foreign language context (e.g. Dewaele 2001, 2002a; Granget 2004; Diab 2006; Trévisiol 2006) and therefore more likely to provide valuable comparison with the L1 English research findings about the learning of French as a foreign language.

A further dimension of the development of this body of research surrounds the distinctions between immersion, second and foreign language contexts. There has been for several decades a strong tradition of research in Canada on the pedagogy and learning of French within the bilingual setting. More recently an emerging body of empirical research within France in the field of Français Langue Etrangère (FLE) is adding its voice to the broader debate. Are these two domains, and that of research into French as a foreign language in non-francophone countries, branches of the same as yet ill-defined tree or is what links them simply the French language? It is possible to read the literature on two levels: as a contribution to the broad issues of L2 research and as part of the growing knowledge base about the context of L2 French.

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1.1 Criteria for the selection of studies included in this review

All studies referred to in this review were completed or published within the 2000–2006 timeframe. The studies selected report on empirical research rather than descriptive accounts of pedagogical innovation and most deal exclusively with L2 French language teaching and learning (in the broader sense of the term) as the main object of enquiry though occasionally studies are included where L2 French learning or teaching is examined alongside other languages. The range of studies included covers articles in major national and international journals, authored books, papers at national and international conferences and doctoral dissertations. The trawl of studies has been global but the majority of studies emanate from Europe and North America.

2. Focus on acquisition

As Mitchell & Myles (2004) have outlined, theoretical approaches to researching L2 acquisition have broadly followed two separate though interlinking paths. The Chomskyan Universal Grammar theoretical account of language focuses on the principles and parameters underlying phrase structures in language. Word order within phrases is the means by which the values of functional categories within an utterance can be interpreted. As the authors point out (Mitchell & Myles 2004: 79), French and English are both 'head-first languages' (meaning that the central element of a phrase, such as main noun or verb, precedes the other elements or complements), apart from the case of unstressed object pronouns which precede head verbs as in *le chat la mange* 'the cat eats it'. The parameter re-setting (which is more extensive between French and non-Romance languages such as Japanese or Mandarin) that is required to adjust to target-like performance results in different stages of development of the interlanguage and has provided the focus of the work of researchers of L2 French following this approach.

The functionalist, or 'functional/pragmatic', tradition in L2 acquisition theory is concerned with 'the ways in which L2 learners set about making meaning, and achieving their personal communicative goals' rather than 'making the formal system their starting-point' (Mitchell & Myles 2004:131). Recent L2 French studies that have followed this tradition have looked at the narratives produced by learners in order to investigate stages of interlanguage development, in which form and function are analysed often in the light of different L1 backgrounds.

The corpus of recent L2 French research has given rise to several texts that have sought to provide overviews or critical summaries of the research (e.g. Dewaele 2004; Towell 2004; Herschensohn 2006; Ayoun 2007). In her review of the current state of French in applied linguistics, Ayoun (2007: 5f.) sees 'core second language acquisition' as consisting of 'the acquisition of syntax, morphology, semantics, and phonology' and the interfaces between these components. The categories she uses to group the range of studies that have been published within this field are: phonological knowledge, syntactic-semantic knowledge, morpho-syntactic knowledge, and pragmatic-sociolinguistic knowledge. I have used these categories in my review of the literature in this section, with the exception of the socio-pragmatic literature which I have not summarised separately but incorporated in the other sections as representing a sociolinguistic perspective on L2 French research. Most of the key recent studies within applied linguistics on the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation in a L2 have arguably emanated from research on L2 French. For the range of studies in this area one should consult the following overviews: Mougeon, Nadasdi & Rehner (2002) and Dewaele (2004).

2.1 Phonological knowledge

Studies on the acquisition of phonological knowledge (morphological, lexical, and syntactic) have, for instance, explored the difficulty that the French phonological system presents for English-speaking instructed learners. L2 learners benefit from the rich input available in immersion settings, so it is unsurprising that studies which have investigated this area have analysed the acquisition of phonological rules from a sociolinguistic perspective. As Dewaele (2004) has pointed out, one phonological item that has recently interested different L2 French researchers working within this paradigm has been the deletion of /l/, which has been noted to occur in the speech of L1 French speakers particularly in the case of the impersonal subject pronoun *il*. In several studies time spent abroad was a key predictor of target-like omission of /l/. Thomas (2002, 2004) examined two groups of English speaking Canadian university students (N = 87) one of which consisted of students who had spent their third year in France. Oral data were collected through a semi-directed test of oral expression and a reading of two texts. Sax (2003) carried out a cross-sectional study of American university students of French, including a group (N = 35) that had completed a period of study abroad (ranging from several weeks to a year). Her data were collected through two role plays. Similarly, Howard, Lemée & Regan (2006) analysed the speech of final year Irish university students (N = 19) who had completed three years of study of French, one of which was spent at a university in France. The data (elicited through 'individual sociolinguistic interviews' ibid. 11) revealed that instructed L2 speakers 'almost never delete /l/ prior to a prolonged stay in the native speech community' (ibid. 17) but that there is considerable increase (from 6% in the interview-elicited output of students who never went

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to France to 33% in that of the 19 informants who had completed their year in France). Though the study is small scale and apparently lacking pre-test data with which to compare the informants' post-test performance, the results do seem to corroborate earlier research evidence of the acquisition of phonological variables through exposure to the naturalistic target language environment. Other socio- and morpho-phonetic variables that have been recently studied include a comparison of the deletion of central vowel schwa by Canadian French native speakers and students of French immersion students (Uritescu et al. 2004) and liaison, subject-verb agreement and the negative particle *ne* (Mougeon et al. 2002; Thomas 2004; Howard 2006). Similar results were produced indicating the positive impact of extracurricular, naturalistic contact with the NS environment on phonological acquisition.

2.2 Morpho-syntactic knowledge

Prévost & Paradis (2004) edited a frequently-cited collection of essays that focus on acquisition of functional categories in the developing grammars of learners of French. The studies gathered in this volume report research, conducted in Europe and North America, that straddles different contexts of acquisition of French (L1, L2, bilingual and language impaired acquisition). The underlying goal of this perspective is to investigate the impact of the similarities and differences in acquisitional contexts on a 'unified theory of syntactic acquisition'. In this way, taken as a whole, the volume is concerned 'with yielding theoretical information regarding the universal and learner-specific aspects of functional category acquisition' (ibid. 2), with French serving simply as a constant linguistic variable. Nevertheless, as the editors indicate in their introduction, the French-specific context of the studies analysed in the different chapters does allow them to throw collective light on the specific process of acquiring French. The findings discussed fall under three main areas of functional category acquisition. With regard to DP (Determiner Phrase) development, the authors report that older children with specific language impairment (SLI) and child and adult L2 learners of French do not omit determiners very often. On the other hand, younger children with SLI and bilingual children go through a stage of determiner omission (e.g. 'tiens couteau' ('hold knife')). Gender accuracy with determiners poses some problems for children with SLI and for child and adult L2 but is generally accurate. With adult L2, gender accuracy may vary according to the learners' L1. Liaison emerges earlier in bilingual L1 than in adult L2 learners (Granfeldt & Schlyter 2004; Hamann 2004; Hawkins & Franceschina 2004; Paradis & Crago 2004). Other recent studies on L2 French gender acquisition also show that agreement between the article and the noun seems easier for learners to acquire than adjectival agreement (Bartning 2000; Dewaele & Véronique 2001; Granfeldt 2005). The second area of acquisition reported on, subject and object clitics, revealed that the former pose less difficulty than the latter for all learners. Errors of omission and distribution (e.g. 'elle demande la' for 'elle la demande' ('she asks for it')) with object clitics are a salient feature of French SLI and adult L2 French, unlike that of bilingual L1 and early child L2 learners (Belletti & Hamman 2004; Hamman 2004; Granfeldt & Schlyter 2004; Herschensohn 2004). The third phenomenon investigated by the studies is that of root infinitives (RI) (i.e. the default use of the infinitive instead of inflected form of the verb). The studies reveal that this was widespread across all learner populations (e.g.'moi jouer avec le train' ('me to play with the train')) (Belletti & Hamann 2004; Hamann 2004; Hulk 2004; Prévost 2004a).

2.3 Acquisition of verb forms

Research on morpho-syntactic acquisition of L2 French has generated several key studies of acquisition of verb forms (Ayoun 2001, 2004, 2005a, b; Bartning & Schlyter 2004; De Lorenzo Rossello 2002; Duperron 2004; Granfeldt & Schlyter 2005; Granget 2004, 2005; Herschensohn 2001 and 2003; Howard 2002a, b and 2005b; Labeau 2002, 2005; Macrory & Stone 2000; Marsden 2004, 2005, 2006; Moses 2002, Myles 2005b; Nadasdi, Mougeon & Rehner 2003; Rule 2001; Salaberry & Ayoun 2005; Schlyter 2003; Starren 2003; Sun 2003).

Myles (2005b: 89) provides an informative discussion of the emergence of the Verb Phrase in early classroom learners of L2 French as a vehicle for investigating the broader relevance of Universal Grammar-related theories in the context of L2 acquisition. Four dominant hypotheses of this link are presented: Full Transfer/ Full Access (in which L2 learners are said to 'have full access to UG'); Minimal Trees ('only lexical categories are projected initially from the L1. Functional categories develop later but not projected from the L1'); Valueless Features Hypothesis ('both lexical and functional categories are transferred early on, but functional categories lack values such as tense, agreement'; Modulated structure building (learners start with lexical projections from the L1. 'Functional projections develop gradually'). Myles's analysis focuses on a longitudinal study of English learners of French (N = 14), 'tracing the emergence of verb phrase over time' (ibid. 93) through completion of a picture-retelling task administered twice with a gap of one year. Her findings include an outline of three developmental stages in the emergence of morpho-syntax: a verbless stage; a bare VP (Verb Phrase) stage, characterised by a lack

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of verb-raising, auxiliaries and modals, agreement paradigm, complementisers and *wh*-movement; and an IP (Inflection Phrase) stage characterised by an agreement paradigm, verb-raising, auxiliaries and modals, and clitic subject pronouns.

In an influential book that has served as a seminal introduction to research on verb acquisition, spanning a range of target languages including French, Bardovi-Harlig (2000) describes two strands of enquiry in L2 temporal systems. On the one hand, meaning-oriented studies have investigated the expression of semantic concepts through various linguistic devices. Research following this paradigm suggests that acquisition of temporal expression follows three stages of development: pragmatic, lexical and morphological stages. Bardovi-Harlig emphasises that these stages are not mutually exclusive but that the features identified are seen as dominant characteristics of a particular stage. On the other hand, form-oriented research has investigated the distribution of verbal morphology as an indicator of the underlying semantic system of interlanguage. This approach focuses on a narrower set of evidence: namely, acquisitional sequences (the emergence of tense-aspect morphology, the meaning associated with each form, and the contrasts between form-meaning associations), the influence of lexical aspect, and the influence of discourse structure. Interestingly, the author reports on a frequently-asserted claim that North American studies have tended to follow the form-oriented approach while European researchers have on the whole favoured the meaning-oriented perspective in research on the emergence of verb morphology.

The Aspect Hypothesis, discussed by Bardovi-Harlig in the context of L2 acquisition research, including empirical work carried out by the author herself, has, in its different revised versions, made claims about the timing of the association of verbal morphology and lexical aspect. The earlier stronger version, also referred to as 'the defective tense hypothesis', claimed that in the beginning stages of acquisition only lexical aspectual distinctions are encoded by verbal morphology, not tense or grammatical aspect. The hypothesis is based on Vendler's four-way classification of lexical aspect, distinguishing between states, activities, accomplishments and achievement. State terms describe a situation that persists over time without change (e.g. *aimer* 'to love', *savoir* 'to know', *vouloir* 'to want'). Activity terms are 'atelic' in that they describe a situation that involves a span of time which can be ended at any point (e.g. *courir* 'to run', *dormir* 'to sleep', *pleuvoir* 'to rain'). Achievement terms capture the beginning or end of an action (e.g. *le train est arrivé* 'the train arrived'). Finally, accomplishment terms are 'telic' in that they have an endpoint and they also have inherent duration (e.g. *faire un dessin* 'to do a drawing'). The aspect hypothesis makes four claims which researchers have explored in the context of L2 acquisition:

1. Learners first use (perfective) past marking on achievements and accomplishments, eventually extending use to activities and statives.
2. In languages that encode the perfective/imperfective distinction, imperfective past appears later than perfective past, and imperfect past marking begins with statives, extending next to activities, then to accomplishments, and finally to achievements.
3. In languages that have progressive aspect, progressive marking begins with activities, then extends to accomplishments and achievements.
4. Progressive markings are not incorrectly overextended to statives.

(Bardovi-Harlig 2000: 227)

Reporting on the results of prior studies relevant to this issue, Bardovi-Harlig found that the first of these claims is attested in the literature in that the perfective past first emerges through use with achievements and accomplishments and later spreads, to a limited extent, to statives like 'be' and 'have'. The second claim of the hypothesis is also supported in the empirical literature. The imperfective past (French IMPARFAIT) emerges later than the perfective past (French PASSÉ COMPOSÉ), and when the imperfect does appear it is first in reference to states (*c'était* 'it was', *il y avait* 'there was').

Since the publication of Bardovi-Harlig's work a number of studies have investigated the aspect hypothesis in the context of L2 French acquisition (e.g. De Lorenzo Rossello 2002; Labeau 2002, 2005; Starren 2003; Duperron 2004; Granget 2004, 2005; Ayoun 2005a; Salaberry & Ayoun 2005). In her doctoral study, Labeau (2002) examined the Primacy of Aspect Hypothesis in the context of the past tense use by anglophone university students of French (N = 61). She employed a cross-sectional research design with a 'pseudo-longitudinal dimension' (ibid. 141). The subjects consisted of groups of first, second and fourth year students, and the data were collected at a 'single point in time, but with different levels of proficiency represented' (ibid. 141). Labeau found interesting features in her data which provide a glimpse of the development of L2 verb acquisition. She found plenty of evidence of use of plural subjects with ER verbs in the 1st or 3rd person singular. There was frequent non-respect of subject – verb agreement if they are not contiguous. There was use of the present tense, especially in subordinate clauses, as an unmarked form to express the past. At all levels, including the NS control group, most use of the imparfait was with *avoir* 'to have' and *être* 'to be'. The claim often made, that irregular morphology precedes regular morphology in the past, is given a more nuanced interpretation by Labeau who found that frequent irregular verbs (*avoir* and *être*) used in the past are used as unanalysed chunks and therefore cannot be taken as evidence of verb morphology acquisition. More generally,

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Labeau refutes the progressive linear development of tense/aspect morphology which is implied by the Aspect Hypothesis. Her data suggest that the movement is pendular: 'Form-function mappings are tested, which results in overgeneralisation and the development of interlanguage rules which are more and more finely tuned until they approach native usage' (Labeau 2002: 378). Starren (2003: 63) combines function and form-oriented analyses in her longitudinal study of data from the ESF project in France (see section 2.4 below) to investigate the acquisition of tense and aspect by Moroccan learners of French. Three adult learners were recorded 'from the onset of their acquisition of French' through a series of activities such as narratives, film retellings, role plays and conversations collected in three cycles of nine months. Starren persuasively concludes that 'the need to express aspectual viewpoint for the establishment of temporal coherence in discourse is the main decisive factor' that accounts for these Moroccan learners' acquisition of the French tense and aspectual system (ibid. 75).

Research has also focused on the emergence of other temporal expressions, beyond that of the past. For instance, expression of the future in L2 French learners has led to attempts to sketch patterns of progression. In an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation for the University of Indiana, Moses (2002) reported on the factors influencing the development of the emergence of the future in 4 groups of students (N = 24) corresponding to the four years of an undergraduate course in French at the university. By considering 'a learner's use or non-use of adverbials and of future-oriented verbal constructions and by mapping the usage over time [one academic year]' Moses sought to 'construct a picture of the learners as they progressed through the stages' (ibid. 205). He found that the learners 'progressed through the pragmatic and lexical stages to the emergence of the morphological stage in the first year' (ibid. 206). The students only made more systematic use of more complex morphological marking of the future in the third and fourth years. He also found that the students in all years tended to overuse the simple-for-future form (e.g. *je vais demain* 'I'm going tomorrow') and underused the periphrastic future (*aller* + infinitive) and simple future (*j'irai* 'I'll go'). Similarly, Bartning & Schlyter (2004) report that their corpora of oral data from adult Swedish learners of French, gathered at the universities of Stockholm and Lund, reveal developmental stages in the emergence of the future: namely, progression from unmarked future to use of the periphrastic future, to use of the future simple mainly in the form of formulae (e.g. *on verra* 'we'll see'), and finally to correct use of the future simple and of the conditional. However, in contrast to the above studies, Ayoun (2005a) has found contradictory evidence to the 'developmental stages' interpretation of acquisition of the future in L2 French in her study of 42 students of the language. Her findings suggest that there is no overall systematic and uniform development of future expression that progresses from pragmatic and lexical stages to a morphological stage, but instead she found that the learners, at all levels of proficiency, used a range of morphological forms to express futurity. Whilst the matter of definition of developmental stages of acquisition may remain inconclusive, more contextual investigations into patterns of learner use of the verb form can provide equally useful information. Nadasdi et al. (2003) studied the use of the future in spoken French of 41 anglophone school learners (aged 13–18 years) in Toronto from a different angle. They examined the different factors influencing the production of future expression from a sociolinguistic perspective and conclude that residential visits to a francophone environment were the strongest factor correlating with the pupils' use of the periphrastic and simple future forms. They also found a correlation between use of the future and the pupils' level of proficiency in French. Furthermore, they found a significant difference according to the pupils' gender, with girls using the future simple more frequently than boys. Warga (2005) has adopted a socio-pragmatic approach to the study of formulation of requests in French by Austrian learners of French. Data were elicited through the use of discourse completion tasks and closed role plays by French native speakers (N = 45), German native speakers (N = 20) and non-native speakers of French (N = 84). One of Warga's main findings was that whilst the native speakers generally used the conditional tense in their request formulations, this was absent in the lower and intermediate learners, who relied exclusively on more direct formulations, using the present tense.

2.4 Syntactic-semantic knowledge

The functionalist approach to research in L2 learning has been dominant in Europe in recent decades, including in the field of French as L2. This tradition was strengthened by a major, multilingual study on the L2 acquisition of adult migrants funded by the European Science Foundation and which started in the 1980s, involving twenty-one L2 learners of one of the following languages: Dutch, English, French, German or Swedish. The informants' L2 interlanguage was tracked over two and a half years through the completion mainly of oral narrative production tasks. For functionalists such as Clive Perdue and Wolfgang Klein, the directors of the ESF project, 'only a broad discursive-pragmatic approach can capture the changing sequence of means used by the learner to express notions such as temporality, and therefore provide a complete, contextualised account of the origins of more narrowly linguistic means for encoding time reference' (Mitchell & Myles 2004: 146). In other words, in contrast with the UG-based

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morpho-syntactic approach, functionalists see grammatical development of L2 as being fundamentally driven by communicative needs. A similar, more recent multinational study ('projet APN') focusing exclusively on acquisition of French generated a number of discrete studies which were published in a special issue of *Langages* (2004). L1 data were elicited from child and adult L1 speakers of French, Polish, English, German, Italian and Greek. The adult L2 learners of French were native speakers of Polish, German, or English. The sample of L1 children was selected according to three age groupings (4, 7 and 10 years) which correspond to key stages in the development of children's narrative competence (Fayol 2000). Three main objectives motivated the studies that drew on this corpus which, like the ESF project, consisted of three tasks which elicited oral narratives from three sources: a map (spatial description), a silent film (sequential narrative), and a picture (descriptive narrative). Comparisons of child L1 narratives with adult L2 narratives entail taking account of the fact that adult L2 learners will normally be more cognitively advanced than young child L1 speakers. The first aim of the studies was therefore to see how this cognitive difference impacted linguistically on the narratives produced by the two types of learners. Secondly, the researchers looked at how the L1 and L2 languages impacted on the acquisition of procedures needed for narrative construction. Finally, they looked at how the nature of the three tasks might have influenced the narrative output. Lambert & Lenart (2004) looked at how new and given information are marked in L1 and L2 for the film narrative task. They found that while child L1 narratives were influenced by features of the languages they used, adult L2 narratives were not affected by the same L1 constraints but conformed to the target L2 pattern. For instance, the French L1 children used existential expressions to introduce the protagonist (*il y a un chien* 'there is a dog') whereas the Polish children (whose L1 does not have expressions equivalent to *il y a*) introduced the protagonist in preverbal position. The English children (having access to existential expressions, and a more liberal usage of preverbal and postverbal subject introduction) produced both forms of narrative expression. However, the Polish and English adult learners of French all placed the subject in postverbal position when it was first introduced in the narrative. This suggests that adult L2 acquisition does not follow L1 acquisitional patterns. Benazzo (2004) examined differences in the expression of causality between the L1 and L2 narratives. She found that while the L1 children and L2 adults' narratives were similar in that both were predominantly linear and episodic they differed with respect to marking of causality. The children's narratives expressed causal links which respected the order of events in the story (with a preference for marking the notion of consequence). The children relied almost exclusively on temporal interclausal linking through words such as *et* 'and', *après* 'after' and *puis* 'then'. The adult L2 users, on the other hand, showed more sophisticated and diverse expression of causality (including the marking of 'cause' and 'goals'), using words like *parce que* 'because', *comme* 'as' and *alors* 'so'. Demagny & Paprocka-Piotrowska (2004) researched the acquisition of verbs and adverbial lexicon and found that the adult L2 French learners' narratives resembled more those of the adult French L1 control group than those of the French L1 children. Unlike the children's narratives, the adults (both L1 and L2 French) expressed reiteration, duration, frequency and simultaneity. Benazzo et al. (2004) focused on the use of additive scope particles (*aussi* 'also', *encore* and *de nouveau* 'again', *toujours* 'still/always' and describe the different developmental patterns that the L1 and L2 subjects follow in their acquisition of the particles. Hendricks, Watorek & Giuliano (2004) analyse how adult learners and children construct two description and film narrative, focusing on the organisation and expression of spatial information. Their study confirms the hypothesis that while L2 adults are limited by lack of linguistic resources (which they can nevertheless compensate for conceptually), L1 children are constrained by the gradual development of conceptual and communicative capacities. A missing variable in the corpus analysed by the APN studies is that of school-age learners of L2 French, which would allow a comparison between L1 and L2 acquisition of French within a closer age range.

Though not part of a comparative international analysis, a study by Myles (2003) does examine the development of L2 narratives among school learners of French in the UK (age range 12–14 years). The longitudinal study focuses on a narrative re-telling task which the pupils completed twice at a yearly interval in order to investigate 'the role of the verb-phrase prior to the development of productive morphology (i.e. to mark tense-aspect distinctions), as a shaper of discourse, and to relate this role to the development of linguistic complexity and of discourse features' (ibid. 43). Findings revealed that the pupils produced longer narratives and retold more of the story at the second elicitation. They were able to use more verbs to structure their sentences and seem 'to be moving from an initial stage in which they simply project simple phrases without attempting to link them together, to a second stage in which they use verbs in order to make explicit relationships between elements within a sentence' (ibid. 52). Myles draws the important conclusion that 'the fact that learners do not transfer narrative skills from their L1, as they rely on a schema typical of preschoolers, shows that these skills have to develop in the L2, in similar ways as in the L1, and cannot just be transferred over' (ibid. 53). Similarly, in an illuminating study of the emergence of temporal adverbs in German

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pupils of French, Granget (2003: 90) concludes that one should avoid sweeping generalisations about the impact of L1 on L2 acquisition. The influence is neither always stage-related (i.e. strongest impact at early or advanced stages of acquisition) nor uniform (i.e. impacting on all levels: discursive, semantic and syntactic). Granget based her analysis on the oral productions of 13–16-year-old learners of French at a school in Berlin, using the ESF-modelled methodology of eliciting retellings of a Chaplin film extract. She found that the L1 supported the pupils' acquisition of temporal adverbs of succession (e.g. 'après') but inhibited the development of lexical forms of iterativity (i.e. 'aussi').

3. Focus on Pedagogy

3.1 The effect of pedagogy on the acquisition of L2 French

In the light of the widely held belief that French tense acquisition poses difficulties for anglophone learners in particular, several experimental studies have recently been conducted to examine the extent to which different pedagogical strategies can result in improved acquisition of tense. Marsden (2004, 2005, 2006) has conducted experimental research in order to compare the effectiveness of the Processing Instruction (PI) model of language teaching (VanPatten 2004) with that of Enriched Input. Her research sought to investigate the differences in impact of the two approaches on 13–14-year-old pupils in England learning French verb inflections. She found that PI led to improvements in the use of French verb inflections, whereas input that did not force learners' attention onto the meaning of the verb inflections (EI) did not result in any statistically significant learning gains. Another study in this field, targeting the acquisition of direct object pronouns, rather than verb acquisition as in Marsden's work, is that of Erlam (2005) whose small-scale study examined the relationship between language aptitude and three different instructional approaches used with 60 pupils at a high school in New Zealand. The pupils in Erlam's quasi-experimental study were assigned to one of three groups which received three 45-minute lessons following three different pedagogical approaches. The first approach consisted of deductive instruction in which the pupils were given explicit explanations of the rule, followed by form-focused activities in which they were required to produce the direct object pronoun orally and in writing. The pupils received corrective feedback which drew their attention to the grammatical rule. The second approach was that of inductive instruction with no explicit rule explanation followed by activities that required them to produce the pronouns and to identify whether they were used correctly and if not to correct them. The third approach, 'structured input instruction', is loosely based on the VanPatten model used in Marsden's thesis. Here they were given explicit rule-based instruction, followed by a series of input-based activities which did not engage them in production of the target form. Erlam found that the first model, providing students with explicit rule explanation followed by opportunities to engage in language production, benefited all learners. Also learners with greater working memory capacity benefited more from structured input instruction. While the study provides useful preliminary evidence of the effectiveness of the different pedagogical approaches, the limited scale of the research leaves several questions unanswered including those relating to the motivational considerations and influences that might have intervened prior to the delayed post-test. Macaro & Masterman (2006: 297) ask the same question more boldly: 'Does intensive explicit grammar instruction make all the difference?' In search of an answer, the authors conducted a descriptive analysis of the effect of explicit instruction on the grammatical knowledge and writing proficiency of 12 first year students of French at the University of Oxford. They looked at the effects on grammatical knowledge and written production of an intensive course on French grammar during the summer vacation prior to the start of the first year of the undergraduate degree. The authors report that 'the intensive grammar course was not a sufficient factor' (ibid. 318) to cause improvement in the students' grammatical knowledge compared with the comparison group. However, the students showed 'a greater ability to correct errors in sentences once these had been judged ungrammatical' (ibid. 318f.). In all, though, the authors conclude that explicit grammar teaching 'did not make all the difference' (ibid. 319).

The issue of teaching gender in French has been researched by Lyster (2004a, b) in the Canadian immersion setting. He sees the cognitive theoretical framework (as illustrated in Skehan's cognitive approach to researching task-based language learning) as a more suitable framework in this setting than that of the interactionist paradigm. Lyster analysed the effects of a form-focused, inductive instructional approach with 10–11-year-old Grade 5 learners of French (N = 179) in Canada which extended over a five week period. The pupils' attention was drawn to noun endings as predictors of grammatical gender through the use of 'typographical enhancement' in 'simplified versions of texts found in their textbooks' (2004: 331). The pupils were directed to identify the features, to classify them according to endings and gender attribution and to identify the phonological or orthographic rules behind the patterns. Lyster also examined the relative effectiveness of different types of feedback: namely, recasts, prompts (e.g. *Pardon?* which pushes the pupil to self-repair) or no feedback. Results from a series of post-tests suggest that the most effective form of feedback is the use of prompts,

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with recasts only slightly more effective than no feedback at all.

3.2 Research focusing on the four language skills

Research interest in the role of pedagogy in the development of reading, listening, speaking and writing L2 French has commonly involved critical engagement with the concept and development of language learner strategies. As such, L2 French research can be said to have made a significant contribution to language strategy research more widely. In the case of the receptive skills, reading and listening, the underlying hypotheses and assumptions that have guided recent investigations in the L2 French context include the question of transfer of processing skills from the L1, and the degree of interdependence between performance in reading or listening comprehension and level of L2 proficiency.

3.2.1 Listening

In L2 French listening research, Vandergrift (2002, 2003a, b, 2005, 2006a) has conducted a number of empirical studies which have shed light on learner performance. In an investigation of the effect of different predictors of L2 listening comprehension ability, Vandergrift (2006a) has analysed the performance of anglophone learners of French aged 14–15 (N = 75) in two schools in a Canadian urban setting. Analysis of the students' performance in a French listening comprehension and an English listening comprehension test revealed that both L1 listening ability and L2 proficiency were significant predictors of L2 listening comprehension ability. L2 proficiency though was 'a much better predictor than L1 listening comprehension ability' (ibid. 12f.). The author reports that L2 proficiency had greater influence on the pupils' processing of literal comprehension than on their processing of inference questions. He also suggests that strategy instruction could be usefully developed to reduce the gap in transfer of L1 inference skills to L2 inferencing tasks. Farrell & Mallard (2006) have studied the use of 'reception strategies' that learners use to deal with L2 French input in face-to-face speaking contexts. They conducted a qualitative classroom-based investigation of the types of frequency of strategies used by learners of French in Singapore (N = 14) at three different proficiency levels (elementary, intermediate and advanced). The typology of strategies they draw up (which match those listed in previous studies, including Vandergrift 1997) provides a useful suggested linkage between reception strategy and speaker response. Strategies to develop new information are: forward inference (indicating understanding by asking a question or making comment); uptaking (prompting the speaker to continue); faking (sends uptake signal though has not understood previous utterance). To confirm old information, the strategies used are: hypothesis testing (asking a question to confirm what was heard); text-level reprise (repeating parts of the utterance for confirmation). Finally, strategies to clarify old information are: sentence-level reprise and global reprise. The authors argue that development of interactive listening strategies relies heavily on the existence of an appropriate classroom environment. They suggest that the use of two-way information-gap tasks is one way of eliciting such strategies in the classroom. Another source of pedagogical support for listening strategies, though on an individual basis, is that of multimedia annotation, discussed by Jones & Plass (2002) and Jones (2004), who examined the effectiveness of this tool for supporting listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition with 171 students of French during their second semester at a university in the US. The students listened to a historical account in French presented by a computer program, lasting two minutes and twenty seconds. The students were randomly assigned to four groups: one with no annotation, one with written annotation, one with pictorial annotation, and one with both pictorial and written annotation. The findings suggested that the students remembered word translation and recalled the passage better when they had selected both written and pictorial annotations while listening.

3.2.2 Reading

Research in L2 French reading has also shed light on the role of learner strategy skills in language processing. Wright & Brown (2006) have studied the impact of strategy instruction on the use of reading strategies in French (N = 42) and Spanish (N = 44) Year 11 (aged 15–16 years) and Year 12 (aged 16–17 years) pupils in England. They conclude that the impact was variable, depending on the type of strategy, the age group, and, to some extent, on the nature of the reading text. In general, there seems to have been an increase in the use of top-down strategies, such as reading the text through twice before answering the questions. Macaro & Erler (2007) have conducted a more controlled, quasi-experimental study with a younger age group. They investigated the effect of strategy instruction on the reading comprehension of beginner readers (N = 62) of French, aged 11–12, spread over six secondary schools (three intervention and three comparison groups) in England. The pupils were asked to complete two reading tasks: a 'narrow reading' task which required 'bottom-up' lexical and syntactic processing, and one broader comprehension task which required greater manipulation of both bottom-up and top-down strategies. A questionnaire was used to elicit learners' strategies and general approaches to reading French text. The pupils' attitudes to reading were also elicited through

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pre- and post-questionnaires. Reporting on their findings, the authors indicate that the intervention group outperformed the comparison group in reading comprehension as a result of the strategy training. There was some qualitative change in the kinds of strategies used by the intervention group (namely 'Wait for the teacher to explain the text; Scan for words that look familiar and try to guess the meaning of the text from them; Look up many words in the dictionary or glossary'). Finally, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the post-intervention experimental group expressed significantly more positive attitudes towards all elicited aspects of language learning than their control group counterparts.

In the US, Hammadou (2000) has examined the impact of analogies and prior knowledge on reading comprehension of expository texts by French L1 and L2 readers. An example of the use of analogy in this context which is given by the authors is as follows: a 'non-analogy' version of a text on the human eye describes the anatomical function of the eye, while a text that incorporates the use of analogy might compare the eye to the function of a camera (ibid. 41). The study involved 163 US university students of French or students of English as a foreign language in France in order to test the assumption that while analogies would be helpful to L1 readers especially where there was no prior knowledge of the topic, for L2 readers they would be detrimental, regardless of prior knowledge. Results indicated that there was no evidence that analogies in expository texts will help form independent readers who would be able to gain meaning from texts without support from teachers. Pichette, Segalowitz & Connors (2003) examined the hypothesis that effective interlingual transfer of reading skills requires the attainment of some particular threshold of L2 knowledge in a year-long study of 52 Bosnians (aged 17–47) living in Quebec. The authors conclude that 'the greater improvement in L2 reading ability by the active L1 readers than by non-active L1 readers suggested that maintaining L1 reading enhances the transfer of reading skills' (ibid. 391). Lefrançois & Armand (2003) have examined the role of phonological and syntactic awareness in the reading performance of 9–11-year-old Spanish-speaking learners of French. They found that word recognition through the visual route is best explained by the corresponding ability in L1; sentence comprehension is best explained by oral competence in L2; and text comprehension is explained by the corresponding ability in L1, though correlations with syntactic awareness and oral competence are strong.

3.2.3 Writing

There has been comparatively little published research with an exclusive focus on L2 French writing pedagogy within the last few years, especially if one excludes online computer mediated writing. Some key studies that have appeared in this time frame have focused on the phenomenon of writing development. Netten, Germain & Séguin (2004) conducted a longitudinal (three-year) research project involving grade 6 pupils, aged 11, (N = 587) following an intensive French course in 22 schools in Newfoundland and examined the following features of L2 French writing development: the level the learners attained in written production; the relationship between the number of hours of instruction and the level achieved; and the development of accuracy and fluency in writing. They found that the intensive course had a significant impact on the pupils' level of competence in written French, reaching the same level as that of 9- and 10-year-old francophone Quebeckers. The impact was particularly visible in the measures of fluency in written composition. While the authors acknowledge that other factors remain important (such as pedagogy), the finding that intensive teaching (in this case ranging between 150 and 250 hours in five months) results in significant improvement in the level of learners' competence at this age provides useful evidence that increasing the amount of time devoted to formal instruction of a foreign language does make dramatic difference on learner proficiency at this level. In England, Macaro has conducted a number of studies on writing development of school learners of French (Macaro 2001a, 2007), often using a quasi-experimental methodology. His focus has been on the cognitive and metacognitive strategies used by learners during writing tasks. The Oxford Writing Strategies Project (2001) included analysis of the effects of strategy training on 14–15-year-old learners of French. The training received by the experimental groups focused on when to use the L1 and L2 in planning and composing, dictionary use strategies, and self-monitoring strategies. The author reports that the experimental group made significant gains over the control group in relation to the reduction of verb phrase errors. There was also, perhaps unsurprisingly (given that they had received training in it), improvement in the experimental group's level of independence in writing and in motivation. In a descriptive study of 16 near-beginner learners of French who took part in tasks that involved copying words and sentences and others that involved free-writing, Macaro (2007) concludes that being able to write is associated with being able to read, since most of the students seemed to use strategies such as looking first for some meaning in the sentences they copied or attempting to read parts or all of the sentence aloud. The author argues that there is a need for a radical rethink of approaches to writing pedagogy in order to heighten awareness of writing strategies as well as to provide greater opportunities for free writing in the secondary language classroom. In addition to writing development, researchers have focused on the impact of different types of tasks on learner

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written performance. Way, Joiner & Seaman (2000) examined the effects of three different types of writing tasks (descriptive, narrative and expository) and three different types of writing prompts (bare, vocabulary and prose model) on 937 writing samples taken from high school learners of French in the US. They found that 'the descriptive task was the easiest and the expository task the most difficult' (ibid. 173) for the learners. The prose model prompt (whereby the learners were given a prompt in the form of a letter from a French penfriend to which they had to respond in French) produced the highest mean scores. The authors relate their findings to the ACTFL guidelines and argue that their findings support the implicit order of tasks in the guidelines, though their evidence also suggests that it is difficult and perhaps unwise to limit exposure of different levels of learners to different types of task.

3.2.4 Speaking

Classroom-based studies of L2 French speaking, as opposed to the more clinically-oriented research on acquisition of discourse summarised earlier, have been mainly concerned with the analysis of the phenomenon of teacher–learner target language interaction and in particular focusing on the practice of codeswitching. Macaro (2001b) has reported on a case study of six pre-service student teachers of French at secondary school level in the UK in which he examined the conscious and subconscious decision-making behind their codeswitching between English as L1 and French as target language. He found little evidence of the effect of the quantity of student teacher L1 use on the quantity of L1 or L2 use by the learners. He argues that the absence of evidence of a causal link between teacher L1 use and the amount of L2 use by the pupils brings into question the official requirement (which has since been slightly moderated) in the National Curriculum in England for foreign languages teachers to use the target language as the exclusive medium of instruction. Taylor (2002) has also reported on a small-scale case study of teacher codeswitching by French native speaker teachers of French as a foreign language, this time in the context of CALL-based teaching of French in the US. The researcher adopts a sociolinguistic perspective in his analysis of the language produced, mainly, for procedural purposes during the CALL task. His findings show that the teachers used English, the students' L1, as the main language of communication during private, one-to-one exchanges with a student, while when addressing the class as a whole French, as L2, was the main medium used. Taylor also interprets instances of codeswitching according to Myer-Scotton's socio-linguistic hypothesis that the phenomenon occurs as part of a negotiation of change in the social distance between interlocutors. Similarly, Rolin-Ianzit & Brownlie (2002) have produced a quantitative analysis of L1 (English) use by four teachers with students of French during a first semester beginners' course at the University of Queensland, Australia. They found that teachers switched to the L1 to translate, to comment about form, and to manage the class. Codeswitching decisions were not always under the teachers' control: translations in L1 often followed a student's request. A similar study was carried out in Australia by Gearon (2006), this time in the secondary school context. From her analysis of the codeswitching strategies used by three teachers (two Australian nationals and one French bilingual) in teaching the 'passé composé', Gearon concludes that intersentential switching is preferable to intrasentential switching since the latter is more likely to provoke syntactical errors in the learners' target language production (ibid. 464). Finally, researchers in France provide an interesting contrasting approach to the issue of classroom oral interaction to the studies conducted within an anglophone setting (Ishikawa 2001; Bigot 2002; Faraco 2002, 2003; Cicurel 2003; Bigot & Cicurel 2005), focussing more broadly on the discourse structure. Faraco (2002), for instance, has examined the use of repetition in advanced and beginner French as a foreign language classes in France. Her analysis of classroom discourse leads to a useful outline categorisation of the different functions of teacher and student use of target language repetition and its relationship with cognitive concepts such as 'noticing'. Bigot & Cicurel (2005: 9) use the notion of 'flexibilité communicative' ('communicative flexibility') to describe the personal and affective factors that influence the 'style' of a teacher's use of language: 'Selon les cas, les occasions et les situations, un professeur peut favoriser le plan de la langue ou celui de l'adresse à ses interlocuteurs, il peut préférer leur laisser une amplitude ou se tenir plus strictement à son programme et à la progression prévue, il peut laisser filtrer des anecdotes ou des façons de parler qui révèlent sa personnalité ou sa vie. Selon la flexibilité communicative.' ('Depending on the individual, the circumstances and situations, a teacher may either focus on the language or on interaction with his interlocutors, he may either choose to give them leeway or to keep more closely to the syllabus and to the planned progression of the lesson, he may use anecdotes or turns of phrase which reflect his personality or his life. On the basis of communicative flexibility.')

3.3 ICT-related research

L2 French researchers working in this field have mainly engaged in one of the following three areas: ICT as a pedagogical resource for formal language teaching and learning; ICT as a platform and stimulus for more naturalistic L2 discourse; and introspective research eliciting teacher and student perceptions of

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the usefulness of the resource for learning French. Most of the studies have been carried out in the tertiary sector and given the rapid pace of technological change it is perhaps not surprising that the field remains relatively uncertain in terms of findings on the exact extent and nature of the impact of the technology on teaching and learning.

The constructivist paradigm has served as a recurrent framework for researchers looking at L2 French teaching and learning through use of ICT. Nikolova (2002), for instance, investigated the effects in vocabulary acquisition of student participation in authoring a multimedia instructional module. First-year anglophone students of French (N = 62) at a Midwest university in the US were divided into experimental and control groups over a period of three days. Students in the control group were presented with a French text downloaded from the internet with twenty 'low frequency words' annotated with text. The experimental group had the same text without the annotations which they were asked to create themselves. Results were measured through immediate and delayed (one month) vocabulary post-tests. The findings indicated that when time on task was accounted for there was no significant difference in vocabulary acquisition between the two groups. However, when time on task was disregarded (the authoring students predictably spent considerably longer on the activity than the control group students), then the results revealed that the students who participated in the authoring of the multimedia module had significantly higher rates of French vocabulary acquisition than those students who completed one prepared by a teacher. Thus, the study provides some evidence of the importance of the role of active learning. There also was evidence that the visual element in the annotation of target words led to longer retention in memory. Caws (2005) draws jointly on cognitive and constructivist theories in her qualitative study of student perceptions of online learning on a French essay and translation course at University of Victoria in Canada. The views of 32 third-year students on the value of online learning as a tool for studying French were elicited through a series of three intermittent questionnaires spread over the semester. The WebCT platform was used for completion of tasks, sharing of resources and discussion forum between students in small groups, monitored by the teacher. While generally positive, this preliminary survey also revealed the frustrations students felt in adjusting to this new form of learning: 45% of the respondents found collaborative writing the least preferred area of the experience, while 66% found 'preparatory reading' the preferred area.

The use of computer mediated communication (CMC) has generated a number of important studies in L2 French research and has led to insights into different aspects of more naturalistic use of the target language through this medium. The Cultura project is a major groundbreaking cross-cultural project involving online collaborative learning between students of French in the US and students of English in France, which has been running since 1997. The directors of the project, Furstenberg et al. (2001: 56), again situate the project within a 'fully constructivist pedagogical approach to learning' whereby students gradually 'construct an understanding of the subject matter, at the interaction of language, communication and culture'. The aim of the project has been to develop the students' 'cultural literacy' by stimulating their 'curiosity toward the culture of otherness' (ibid.). Furstenberg et al. report on the use of the programme by two groups of students (at Massachussets Institute of Technology and at Institut National des Télécommunications) who completed a range of activities around a variety of social and cultural topics. Forum discussions were conducted in the L1. Amongst other findings from the analysis of the data, including students' perspectives elicited through questionnaires, the authors identify 'a significant structural difference between French and American semantic networks pertaining to the cultural items' (ibid. 75). Another study drawing on the Vygotskyan sociocultural framework but looking at collaborative use of ICT in learning French is analysed by Jeon-Ellis, Debski & Wigglesworth (2005) in the context of anglophone students of French at the University of Melbourne. The focus of this study is on the impact of project-oriented CALL (PrOCALL) on collaborative relationships between the participant students (N = 8) and on their oral interactions (including individual students' use of the L2 in the oral interactions). Data sources for the analysis included video and audio recordings of the class talk, computer screens, interviews and questionnaires. The authors report that the relationships had a profound effect on the students' learning and provide illuminating examples of peer-mediated learning. The slight disappointment in the paper is an absence of analysis of the students' oral French. The interactions seem mostly to have been in the L1. Fisher, Evans & Esch (2004) describe a project set in the secondary school sector, involving asynchronous CMC interactions between pupils (14–17-year-olds) in England learning French and pupils in francophone countries (France, Belgium, Senegal, Canada) learning English. Small mixed nationality groups were asked, over a period of several months, to interact with one another, with a degree of freedom in the choice of using the L1 or L2 depending on the nature of the task, over a range of different topical issues. The authors' analysis focuses on the role of autonomy of choice and action, revealing the different ways in which the CMC medium and the online collaborative setting impact on the discourse produced. Belz & Kinginger (2002) have analysed the microgenetic development of the *tu/vous* distinction in the email exchanges between anglophone

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university students of French in the US and francophone students of English in France. The authors report that the learners received unprompted guidance on the choice of pronoun from native speaker partners and that this led to changes in the learners' use. Their findings suggest that inter-language restructuring can be profoundly affected by socio-pragmatic context. Finally, teachers' beliefs about the usefulness of the internet for learning French as a foreign language have been researched by Murphy (2002). She reports on the findings from an online discussion list and a questionnaire completed by 130 teachers of French as a foreign language in Canada. The discussion list consisted of teachers working in a range of contexts (from kindergarten to university level) and national settings (mainly US and Canada, but also Australia, Europe, South America and Africa). Discussion of the findings provides an honest and perceptive summary of the ongoing issues that face languages teachers at present as they adapt to the resource and the accompanying pedagogy. The author rightly argues that tensions surrounding the issue of control and authority over the learning process between teachers and students will need to be addressed through training and through rethinking of L2 pedagogy before the medium can be fully exploited by the majority of teachers.

3.4 Research on assessment of L2 French

DIALANG, a major, European Commission-funded project on diagnostic testing in the field of a range of L2s, including French, provides valuable and original information on the use of internet-delivered diagnostic tests in key areas of reading, listening, writing, grammar and vocabulary (Alderson 2005). In addition, the programme also records the learners' self-assessment of their language competence thus allowing for correlations to be made between language test performance and self-assessment. To date, analyses have only been carried out with regard to the EFL data but with time the facility should yield valuable assessment-related data on French in the future. Studies that have appeared since 2000 have dealt with assessment of different aspects of language acquisition or the use of resources in support of language assessment. In the case of the former category, studies have appeared on the assessment of vocabulary in L2 French (Malvern & Richards 2002, Milton 2006). Greidanus, Beks & Wakely (2005), for instance, have examined the development of 'word knowledge' of advanced learners of French through a test format that assesses the quality of word knowledge by means of word associations. One of their findings was that there was a link between frequency and quality of knowledge: the more frequent a word, the better the knowledge of the tested aspects. Among the more medium-oriented studies, Meara, Rodgers & Jacobs (2000) have explored the potential of a computer-based neural network in language assessment. Thirty-six anglophone university students of Business French submitted 300-word texts in response to a picture stimulus marked independently by experienced native-speaking French assessors according to their normal practice. The authors conclude that it may be possible to 'teach a neural network to mimic the judgements made by human markers' not as a substitute but 'as a check on assessors' judgements' (ibid. 353). Cohen & Brooks-Carson (2001) have also focused on assessment of L2 French writing, comparing performance of intermediate learners ($N = 39$) on two tasks: writing directly in French and writing in the first language before translating into French. They found that two thirds of the students did better on the direct writing task across all rating scales while one third did better on the translated scale. In contrast to the quantitative studies mentioned above, Poehner (2005) completed an illuminating qualitative doctoral study on the role of dynamic assessment in assessment of oral proficiency among US university students of French. The concept of 'dynamic assessment' derives from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development whereby assessment is conceived as a pedagogical approach which is integral to learning and acquisition. In a joint article with James Lantolf, Poehner draws on Vygotsky's emphasis that mediation contributes to future development: 'that is, what the individual is able to do one day with mediation, he or she is able to do tomorrow alone' (Poehner & Lantolf 2005: 236). Lally (2002) has investigated the extent and direction of teacher-student perception discrepancies regarding the students' competence in French as a foreign language. She compared the responses of 92 anglophone students in two levels of French at the University of Nebraska with their teachers' evaluations and with exam scores. She found that the higher the level of study, the less the discrepancy between the teacher and the student perceptions. Apart from the group representing the lowest level of competence, all other groups of students underestimated their performance in French relative to the teachers' perceptions. There were no significant correlations with exam results. Studies of formative assessment are rare though the effectiveness of different forms of corrective feedback in the instructional setting has been investigated by Lyster (2004b) and Gascoigne (2003). The latter found that while recasts were the most commonly used form of feedback in a study of 18 post-secondary anglophone students of French, they were less effective than other forms of feedback in leading to 'uptake' by the students. Similarly, Lyster found that form-focused instruction was more effective when combined with prompts than with recasts for learning grammatical

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gender in a quasi-experimental study of eight classes of 10–11-year-old pupils learning French.

3.5 Study abroad

Within the last few years researchers of L2 French have produced a number of significant, albeit small-scale, studies examining the topic from different perspectives. In a special issue of *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* entitled 'Learning context and its effects on second language acquisition', Freed, Segalowitz & Dewey (2004) report on a comparative study that analysed the effects of three different learning contexts on the French oral proficiency of anglophone university students in the US. Of the total of 28 participants in the project, eight spent a twelve-week period in Paris in which they completed a course of instruction in French. Twelve students completed an intensive domestic immersion French programme during seven weeks in the summer, when all lessons and after-school activities were conducted in French as the medium of communication. The remaining students followed a conventional course at an 'at home' institution in which 'classroom learning was inherently similar to instruction at other American institutions' (ibid. 281). The research team focused on the students' acquisition of oral French fluency, which they assessed through a range of measures such as speech rate (words per minute), hesitations, repetition, length of turn, duration of turn and so on, which were tested through oral interviews recorded before and after the semester in question. Results indicated that the study-abroad group improved significantly more than the 'at-home' group in oral fluency, but the immersion group's level of improvement was greater than either of the other groups. The authors attribute this finding to the fact that the immersion students used the L2 more outside the classroom than did the 'at-home' or study-abroad students. Linguistic improvement correlated with the quality and frequency of L2 use in informal settings during the study-abroad experience in the study conducted by Evans & Fisher (2005) (see also Fisher & Evans 2000) with 13–14-year-old anglophone pupils of French who participated in a school exchange visit to France. The linguistic gains of 68 pupils studying French at three secondary schools were measured in pre- and post-tests consisting of immediate and delayed standardised tests in the four language skills. Statistically significant gains were found in the participants' performance in the listening comprehension tests. There was significant improvement in writing performance (in relation to communicative content and fluency but not with grammatical accuracy). The authors also sought to identify the profile of the improvers by correlating performance in the tests with information gained from questionnaires about the pattern of target language use and linguistic support during the stay in France. They found a link between improved performance in speaking and writing and amount of communication in French with their exchange partner and host family. Wilkinson (2002) used conversation analysis and ethnographic techniques to analyse interactions between US university students of French and their host family during a month's home stay summer study in France. The participants (N = 4) taped their oral interaction with their hosts in order to capture naturalistic target language discourse which later was transcribed and analysed in terms of discourse behaviour. Wilkinson interpreted the interactions between the students and their host families, as well as the students' perceptions of the nature of this discourse, in terms of interactional roles adopted by the interlocutors. She found evidence, as Evans & Fisher did in their study referred to above, of 'instructional norms in out-of-the-class interactions' (ibid. 156) that appeared in the native speaker's use of strategies such as corrective feedback as well as initiation–response–evaluation sequences of interaction. Wilkinson concludes that some students' heavy reliance on such roles and norms was 'limiting and often inappropriate in out-of-classroom conversations' (ibid. 168). Similarly, Behrent (2002) has analysed the target language conversations between German university students during study residence in Paris and Metz. The naturalistic data demonstrates how such conversations often include instances of metadiscourse which are language learning experiences in themselves. A broader cross-national study was conducted by Taillefer (2005) who analysed the L2 reading comprehension competence and reading strategies of 177 ERASMUS students on a semester or year abroad between 1999 and 2001. The groups consisted of British, Irish, Spanish, German, Flemish Belgian and Dutch students of French as well as French students on study abroad in north-European countries where English was the medium of instruction. Differences in reading performance between the groups was as much a reflection of the different educational backgrounds of the countries involved as it was of the effect of transfer from L1. Regan (2005) has conducted a rare study of the longer term effect of study abroad on acquisition, examining the durability of *ne* deletion in the speech of five Irish university students of French who completed a period of residence in France as part of the ERASMUS scheme. Using a VARBRUL analysis of the transcriptions of three sets of sociolinguistic interviews in French, Regan investigated the extent to which the students' discourse had 'de-colloquialised' after a year's return to classroom instruction following the year abroad. She found that there was 'a dramatic increase in the rates of *ne* deletion after the year abroad and that after a year back in the classroom, without further contact with the native speech community,

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the speakers seem to remain generally stable in the rate of deletion' (ibid. 201).

3.6 Teacher education

In a discussion of the expression of self-identity of foreign national trainee teachers of foreign languages in England, who represent a growing percentage of the language teaching workforce, Block (2001) describes how the teachers' views on the importance of grammar teaching are closely bound up with questions of national identity. In a study of nine foreign national trainees enrolled on a postgraduate training course (PGCE) in London, Block focuses on the comments of four French nationals interviewed over the duration of the course in 1999–2000. He argues that the trainees distanced themselves from explicit identification with their nationality as part of an attempt to seek 'inclusion rather than status as other' (ibid. 301). However, the issue of grammar teaching was something over which they had strong convictions that were influenced by the French educational approach and which clashed with the grammar-free, communicative approach dominant at the time in England: 'Grammar in a sense became a metaphor for good educational practice, the symbol of both a disciplined mind and a mind disciplined' (ibid. 304). Different perspectives on grammar teaching are also the focus of Turner & Turvey's (2002) equally small scale project in which a student teacher of English L1 and a student teacher of L2 French 'work collaboratively to develop their personal knowledge and understanding of grammar and its role in teaching both subjects to 11-year-olds in an English comprehensive school' (ibid. 100). The authors make a plea for greater interdepartmental dialogue. Newman et al. (2004) have also examined the context of boundary crossing in language teacher education. Their study focuses on the exchange placement experiences of primary language student teachers at a university faculty of education in England and at an 'Institut de Formation de Maîtres' in France. The experience was found to be valuable as a way of developing cultural understanding through first-hand encounter with the foreign education setting. Finally, Christiansen & Laplante (2004) have explored the use of L2 portfolios as part of the professional development of pre-service French immersion teachers in Canada. The authors conclude that while the portfolios became a tool mediating language learning activities, the students proved to be less capable of working autonomously than had been expected.

4. Focus on learner perspectives

4.1 Studies on beliefs, attitudes and motivation

A number of interesting empirical studies have appeared which contribute to our understanding of students' thinking and orientations in foreign language learning. Studies on student belief have been set in both secondary and university contexts. Using Bandura's self-efficacy and Weiner's attribution theories of motivation, Graham (2003, 2004) has investigated secondary students' beliefs about learning French in terms of three dimensions: agency (beliefs about their own abilities and competences); instrumentality (beliefs about the link between learning strategies and outcomes); and purpose (ability to value success and to see a purpose in achievement). The analysis is based on data from 28 interviews and 594 questionnaires completed by 16–18-year-old learners of French in 10 schools in the south of England. Graham also provides a detailed account of one case study. She concludes that school learners of French in England have a 'low sense of self-efficacy, a maladaptive attributional style in which success is attributed to external, chance factors and failure either to external factors such as poor teaching or to internal but unchangeable qualities such as low ability' (Graham 2003: 16). Shaaban & Ghaith (2003) and Diab (2006) have examined students' beliefs about learning within a broader socio-cultural context, namely that of learning French and English in the Lebanon where post-colonial ties with France and commercial need for English as lingua franca are evident, for instance, in the existence of English-medium and French-medium schools. Diab (2006) used a modified version of Horwitz's 'Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory' (BALLI) questionnaire with 284 students at three universities. Interestingly, she found that though a high percentage of the students agreed that it is important to speak English and French 'with excellent pronunciation' (ibid. 88), the students seemed to show greater tolerance towards errors in English than in French. This may be a reflection of the difference in emphasis between communicative and formal pedagogical approaches adopted in the English and French medium schools. Alternatively, attitudes towards accuracy may be a symptom of instrumental or integrative motivations to learn the foreign language. This useful study would have been all the more powerful if the pool of informants had consisted of students majoring in French as well as in English. Goldberg & Noels (2006) applied self-determination theory and the concept of situated ethnic identity in their investigation of Canadian immersion students' motivation for learning French in the light of their choice of post-high school study of French at either an anglophone university (University of Alberta) or at a francophone university (Faculté Saint Jean). A statistical analysis of the questionnaires completed by 91 students yielded the unexpected finding that there was no difference in the motivational orientations between the two groups. However, a qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions showed that the Faculté Saint Jean participants were more likely than the university of Alberta students to claim

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that 'it is personally important for them to learn French' (ibid. 438). The authors also conclude that 'learning French did not interfere with the students' feelings of identity with their culture of origin, suggesting the presence of an additive form of bilingualism' (ibid. 439). Looking at language learning motivation in a different national setting, this time in the context of post-communist national identity, Dörnyei & Csizer (2002) have examined 'how the significant sociocultural changes that took place in Hungary in the 1990s affected school children's [N = 8,593] language-related attitudes and language learning motivation' (ibid. 421) in relation to five target languages, including French, with the surprising finding that during this period there seems to have been a decline in interest in foreign languages.

Robert Gardner (2001) (see also Gardner et al. 2004) has refined his 'socio-educational model' of motivation partly in response to criticisms that his research had hitherto focused on 'stable motivational attributes that were derived from social psychology' (2001: 4) and that he had neglected more variable factors such as teacher influence. His socio-educational model now consists of four dimensions: external influences; individual differences; language acquisition contexts; and outcomes. He applies the model to measure the motivation of university students of French in Canada at the start and end of a year of study, in order to test the hypothesis that apart from integrative motivation (which they expected to remain stable) the other variables 'would be amenable to change under the right circumstances' (ibid. 13). Gardner and his team found that of the 11 items, the most stable measures were 'attitudes towards French Canadians', 'interest in foreign languages', 'instrumental orientation', 'French use anxiety', and 'integrative orientation' which the researchers interpret as a sign that the basic orientations of integrative and instrumental motivation are 'established early in one's development being largely dependent on historical factors' (ibid. 14). Rodríguez & Abreu (2003) have also examined the stability of the construct of 'classroom anxiety' across learners of English and French in their analysis of pre-service teachers from two universities in Venezuela (N = 110) who completed a Spanish version of the 'Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale'. They found that while levels of general foreign language anxiety did not differ significantly between the two groups, there was a higher level of anxiety with regard to French than to English. This may, however, be partly explained by the different levels of L2 ability between the two groups. The gender variable has been investigated in the context of secondary schooling in England. Williams, Burden & Lanvers (2002) found that in their survey of 11–13-year-old pupils in the south-west of England (N = 228) there was a higher level of motivation to study French among girls than boys and that boys in particular were more highly motivated to learn German than French. Similar findings are reported by Davies (2004).

Other topics that have been examined in introspective studies include the process of autonomy in advanced students of French at the University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago (N = 39) (Carter 2006). The author used Horwitz's BALLI questionnaire in addition to qualitative instruments to explore the students' conceptions about autonomy in language learning. A more cognitive approach was adopted by Graham (2004) and Vandergrift (2006b) who studied the relationship between motivation and metacognition in relation to learning French. Vandergrift focused in particular on the role of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in the L2 listening comprehension of anglophone learners of French, aged 13–14, in Canada (N = 57), with the unexpected finding that there seems to be no relationship between listening proficiency and extrinsic or intrinsic motivation. In sum, it would seem that a significant amount of research is continuing to be produced in this area of L2 French research which perhaps calls for the elaboration of a more comprehensive research-based theory of L2 learner cognition, from the specific angle of the study of L2 French.

5. Future directions

As this review has suggested, research in L2 French has in recent years largely treated the study of teaching and learning as a vehicle for exploring fundamental generic issues of language acquisition (such as whether or not L2 acquisition processes are separate from those of first language acquisition) or generic pedagogical questions (such as the relative effectiveness of different language teaching approaches). While such a stance is understandable and necessary, it may be that future researchers will also want to explore more explicitly L2 French learning and teaching *per se*. One consequence of such a shift of perspective might be a greater questioning of the object of learning itself, namely French as target language, which (with the exception of sociolinguist researchers) is generally assumed in current studies to be a monolithic entity in the form of a standard, 'hexagon' variety. Apart from the strong tradition of research in Canada (Turnbull & Lapkin 1999), and to a lesser extent in Belgium (Flamant-Boistrancourt 2001) and Switzerland (Bregy & Revaz 2001; Gajo 2001; Mondada & Pekarek Doehler 2004), there is still scant analysis of teaching and learning of L2 French within other francophone contexts (for a review of research on the teaching and acquisition of French in Africa, see Dreyfus 2006). Nor is there any developed analysis of the nature of the language targeted within foreign language settings. Within the modern global and multilingual environment it may be important to

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research the emergence of 'global French' as well as more localised varieties reflecting a more 'pluricentric French identity' (Esch 2007) and the impact of this on what is learnt in the classroom in different parts of the world. There are signs of growth in the number of studies taking place in settings other than Europe or North America, but there is scope for more cross-national studies not just for comparative purposes but in order to investigate specific French teaching and learning issues, such as that of 'pedagogical norms' (Gass et al. 2002) in terms of variety of French taught.

As well as greater questioning of the identity of what is taught and learnt, there is scope for more in-depth contextualised understanding of the setting of instructed learning of French as a foreign language. Many of the studies cited in this overview are conducted under clinical or experimental conditions (Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005: 23) and conclude with the caveat that the generalisability of the findings is subject to pedagogical or classroom-related variables that have not been tested. More ethnographic, practitioner research studies would be useful here to investigate these hypotheses and findings under 'normal' conditions, as well as to study areas of largely under-researched topics such as formative assessment. Similarly, there is a relative dearth of studies of L2 French-related research in teacher education, and a need to develop, as Véronique (2005) has argued in relation to L2 French acquisition research and pedagogy, a more robust theoretical account of the connection between knowledge generated by research and the practice of teaching and learning French.

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