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ABSTRACT

Learning the deep French orthography as a second language: Challenges and short cuts in two different L2 contexts

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Contrary to other Romance languages, written French is known as a deep orthography with a large gap between phonology and orthography. In particular, written French includes morphological units deprived of a phonological counterpart, which often play an important grammatical role (Fayol & Jaffré, 2008). One of these mainly ‘silent’ grammatical notions is number. This study investigates the acquisition of number morphology in written French in Swedish high school second language (L2) learners (n=20) as compared to Swedish L2 children learning French through immersion in a French-speaking school (n=5) (Ågren, submitted). Both L2 groups have been exposed to French for a period of approximately four years but in very different learning contexts. Contrary to the younger children in the immersion setting, the high school L2 learners are exposed to important amounts of written French and only to small amounts of spoken target language input. In this study, both learner groups performed the same production task, a written narrative, in which singular and plural contexts were elicited. Results indicate that, just as expected, the older L2 learners clearly outperform the younger L2 learners in expressing ‘silent’ number morphology in written French. It is argued that while the child L2 learners are under a heavier influence of the spoken language when learning to write in French, the adolescents have a more direct approach to the written language system. This fact turns out to be an advantage in the case of a deep orthography like written French. The multifactor model of Goldschneider and DeKeyser (2001) will be used in order to discuss the importance of linguistic factors such as perceptual saliency, morphological regularity, semantic complexity and frequency in the two settings respectively.

References

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