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Henry Tyne

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HENRY TYNE

Style in L2: The Icing on the Cake?

0. Introduction

We do not all speak in the same way to each other all of the time. Rather, we vary our speech as we interact; we adopt different stances across the different social situations we encounter and we behave differently. This variation is known as style[1], and, as Gadet (2005: 1359) points out, it can be observed in all languages, where it plays a fundamental role in insofar as it '*renders the negotiation of social meaning possible*'. And this leads us to ask the important question: what of style in L2?

In research on L2, style is generally dealt with under the wider label 'sociolinguistic competence'. The focus is typically on learners' ability (or non-ability) to produce target language-like (henceforth TL-like) variation, whether it be a matter of style *per se* or 'sociolect' (diastratic variation) or both (see various articles by Mougeon and his colleagues in Canada – e.g. Mougeon & Rehner 1999). It is widely accepted in the literature that mastery of this variation is a late feature in the acquisition process (Howard *et al*. 2006), the final hurdle, even (Dewaele & Mougeon 2002). This does indeed appear to be the case for those linguistic variables which have typically been studied, in

[1] The term 'style' has been used to describe many different phenomena, from general aesthetics in speech to specific phonological variables. It is often used interchangeably with the similarly vague term 'register' (see Hervey 1992). No attempt is made here to give full discussion of this term in relation to other possible contenders. Style is used here to mean variable expression (not specific to any one area of variation) in relation to the situation of speech (taken in general terms).

phonology, lexis and grammatical features such as *ne* omission and expression of future tense.

And yet, the sole use of a number of pre-defined variable features as a measure of sociolinguistic competence does not seem very satisfactory. Not only do they imply a reduction of what is a very wide-reaching and complex phenomenon (cf. the problem of trying to complete the picture for the extent of possible variation), but they are also typically centred on the target community[2], i.e. they acquire social meaning in the target community (cf. questions of legitimacy of use by non-members – Valdman 2000: 657) and cannot generally be accessed 'naturally' (can be ignored if no contact assured; questions of restricted teachability – Dewaele 2007). Sociolinguistic variation in the wider pattern of speech (i.e. beyond features sets) in L2 has not received much attention[3], understandably perhaps given its complex and unwieldy nature. However, we suggest here that by looking at the wider picture (i.e. beyond 'traditional' features and specific points of grammar), we can come closer to reconciling the idea of style being an 'unavoidable' phenomenon and the study thereof in L2.

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[2] In terms of language pedagogy, this is perhaps an understandable course of action: what can we observe in the TL and how can we get learners to do the same? Indeed, much of the work carried out on L2 sociolinguistic competence in the variationist strain has had this rationale. The present study, however, follows a more descriptive route.

[3] Beyond those studies of the acquisition of selected points of grammar (e.g. Dewaele 1999), there have been studies on the notion of 'complexity' in L2, in particular in relation to planning and task types (e.g. Crookes 1989; Skehan 1996). However, it is difficult to equate this with sociolinguistic style. Moreover, the objectives of this type of research are generally different from our own, being geared towards more specific acquisitional preoccupations (e.g. length of error-free units). Other studies, such as Noyau *et al*. (2005), have looked at L2 variation over time, according to patterns of conceptualisation (granularity and condensation) in event retelling. Again, it is difficult to reconcile these studies, despite the potential interest for the sociolinguist, with the present work.

1. The study of style

1.1 Locating style

Any communicative being, however competent or fluent, will have recourse to style in some form or rather since it is that part of communication which relates to human involvement. Consequently, there is no reason why non-native speakers, who are social beings and competent speakers of their own L1, should not have stylistic devices of some kind, be they at a general communication level (cf. the notion of '*elokutionnel*', a kind of universal competence or know-how – see Coseriu 1980; see also Shaw 1992) or be they at a more language-specific, acquirable level. The present study is situated somewhere between the two extremes: whilst we agree that the study of language-specific acquirable features teaches us a lot (e.g. for language pedagogy), we would argue that these are *not* the be-all and end-all of style and that a wider approach can be also be used.

Here, we adopt a macro approach following a proposal by Bilger & Campione (2002). With this approach, it is claimed that the type of production itself (what one does, communicates, with whom, when, and how) plays a key role in the 'selection' of certain features: speech is dynamic and, according to what is being said, the points of view being put across, the interlocutors present, etc., certain patterns will not always be the same. In an exploratory study of French L1, these authors found that the relative frequency of functional constituents differed across three types of production (a corpus of written French, a corpus of fabricated utterances and a corpus of informal conversation), i.e. the make-up of syntactic units was not the same (e.g. the percentage of lexical subjects is found to vary considerably). Description of this nature would appear to be suited to the study of L2 productions, not least because it goes beyond the study of selected points of grammar, looking instead holistically at patterns of language use, at general language 'architecture', which means that micro-grammatical features (which may be 'erroneous' or lacking) do not

become the focus of attention. Also, it would appear to be appropriate for investigating a fairly broad spectrum of learner levels in that it does not work on the assumption that L2 style simply involves acquiring sets of features or rules which are somehow applied to language: could we suggest, for example, that students who do not display features such as variable *ne* deletion do not yet have style?

1.2 Data

Data from twenty students of French (ten first years and ten fourth years) at a UK university (Surrey) were collected and analysed. All students were 'advanced'[4] in that they had studied French at GSCE (or equivalent) and A-level (or equivalent). Whereas most first years had only experienced brief visits (typically family holidays) to France, all fourth years had spent at least six months in a francophone country. All students had received the majority (if not all) of their university instruction, including 'content' courses, in the TL.

During several periods of fieldwork, naturally occurring (i.e. non-elicited) speech samples for each of the students were collected in three different situations: formal presentation (prepared presentation in an oral examination – henceforth FP), formal conversation/question and answer session (oral viva – henceforth FC), informal conversation (henceforth IC) with the author. In both formal situations, examiners (i.e. a member of staff and an external examiner) were present. It should be pointed out that it was impossible to replicate the three production types in Bilger & Campione's (2002) study. L1-L2 comparisons will be made generally on the basis of assumptions about shared communicational features (see Koch & Œsterreicher 2001).

The complete data set (constituted in 2003) of around 13 hours of continuous speech, including all speakers, represents 149 000 words.

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4 The term 'advanced learner' is used in an unsophisticated way here, relating to the minimum level of study of the learners, i.e. the fact that they are all students of French at university, having previously studied French for GCSE and A-level. No particular linguistic criteria (cf. Bartning & Schlyter 2004) are used to justify this commonsense label.

1.3 Hypotheses

Our hypotheses are that, given the different sociolinguistic and acquisitional considerations: (1) different types of production will produce different distributions and, therefore, different 'types' of units, regardless of the particular year of study. And, consistent with findings from existing studies of L2 sociolinguistic competence, it is further hypothesised that: (2) there will be differences between more or less advanced speakers, i.e. we can expect that the extent of variation will be greater in the more advanced learners' productions, where linguistic ability and fluency is greater.

2. Syntactic description and data coding

2.1 Syntactic units and functional constituents

The Pronominal Approach[5] to syntax is used here as a means of identifying units for analysis. Pronominal Approach, which brings together ideas from linguistics and constructive mathematics (proportionality), was originally conceived for the description of African languages. The basic locus for analysis is the valency kernel (verb plus complements). This approach does not purport to study all possible realisations of valency-bound elements, but rather limits itself to the representative subset of these which can be realised as 'pro-forms' (pronouns, hence Pronominal Approach) and which behave syntactically in the same manner as longer lexical entries, i.e. all valency-bound elements determined by the verb can be reduced to pro-forms in order to produce minimal statements about basic syntactic patterns. The verb occupies the central position in

[5] A detailed presentation can be found in Blanche-Benveniste *et al*. (1987). An application to the study of French L2 can be found in Tyne (2005).

identifying the syntactic unit since it determines the presence of other elements.

Beyond the valency kernel, other 'non-essential' elements may also be found. The various functional constituents of the unit are termed 'sequences'. For instance, in the following extract[6], we identify three sequences (Subject Sequence, Verb Sequence, Object Sequence: respectively SS, VS and OS), all of which form the valency of *inaugurer*. In this instance, the verb is divalent:

(1a) Jacques Chirac a inauguré la nouvelle ligne TGV Méditerranée
(1b) SS: Jacques Chirac
VS: a inauguré
OS: la nouvelle ligne TGV Méditerranée

Further non-valency sequences (NVS or adjuncts and 'inserts') can come into the unit as in the following, where a Governed Sequence (GS) has been added:

(2) GS: le 7 juin 2001
SS: Jacques Chirac
VS: a inauguré
OS: la nouvelle ligne TGV Méditerranée

All sequences, regardless of their content, are identified according to the same functional criteria. Thus, extracts 1 and 3 contain the same constituents at a shallow level:

(3) *SS: Le Président de la République Jacques Chirac qui était en déplacement…*
VS: a inauguré
OS: la nouvelle ligne TGV Méditerranée

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6 This example and subsequent reworkings (examples 2 and 3, and 9 to 11) are taken from the SNCF Website. Other examples (L2) are taken from the Surrey corpus. Transcription conventions are from DELIC (http://www.up.univ-mrs.fr/delic/).

In all, we identify some nine sequences[7]. Sequences other than valency sequences are: Governed Sequence (GS), Associated Sequence (AS), Modality Insert Sequence (MI), Weak Governing Verb Insert Sequence (WI), Phatic Insert Sequence (PI), Comment Insert Sequence (CI). Examples of these can be seen in extracts 4 to 8 below:

(4) SS: le bilan de cette explosion
VS: s'élève à +++
OS: plus de deux milliards de dollars et trente morts
AS: malheureusement

(5) MI: est-ce que
VS: vous pouvez répéter
OS: la question

(6) VS: ils[8] chantent +
CI: {des chansons}[9] euh + {ben c'est} {c'est} ++ ben j'aime pas du tout ça
OS: /euh, et/ des chansons {et} + qui a {des} des mots euh ++

(7) GS: pour euh les profs
VS: c'est
OS: une grand problème euh
WI: je crois + euh ++

(8) GS: {dans les} ++ {dans les domaines} euh +++ {dans les} {dans les} euh dans les soucis des Maghrébins +++
PI: oui
VS: il y avait

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7 These are mostly adapted from the original terminology offered by Bilger & Campione (2002). These authors identify several other sequence types (in particular for dealing with utterances without verbs). Non-verbal utterances and other elements not contained in units, such as connectors, are not dealt with here.

8 According to the Pronominal Approach, clitic pronouns are not analysed as distinct functional entries, hence the absence of SS. They are analysed as verb-controlled minimal (i.e. unexpandable) forms and thus appear in the VS. Lexis, on the other hand, can be expanded, for example through the use of a relative clause (*l'homme que je connais…* but not **il que je connais…*), and can undergo negation (*l'homme mais pas la femme…* but not **il mais pas elle…*) and extraction (*c'est l'homme qui…* but not **c'est il qui…*). SS and OS generally indicate, therefore, the presence of lexical content.

9 Bracing shows those elements which are not considered 'final' entries (see discussion below).

OS: des changements

It is to be noted that GS, whilst not part of the valency kernel (i.e. they are adjuncts), can undergo the same manipulations (extraction, expansion and negation) as SS and OS. The example of clefting is given below:

(9) (SS) c'est Jacques Chirac qui a inauguré la nouvelle ligne TGV Méditerranée le 7 juin 2001
(10) (OS) c'est la nouvelle ligne TGV Méditerranée que Jacques Chirac a inauguré le 7 juin 2001
(11)(GS) c'est le 7 juin 2001 que Jacques Chirac a inauguré la nouvelle ligne TGV Méditerranée

This is not the case for AS (see example 12) which, as Bilger & Campione (2002: 126) point out, refers to those elements '*gravitant autour du verbe* [qui] *ont l'apparence de compléments régis par cette forme* [mais qui] *ne partagent cependant aucune des propriétés*'. In the literature, these are sometimes referred to as 'sentential modifiers' or 'IP-adjuncts' (Aurnague *et al*. 2001). For the most part, AS resemble GS in that they can occupy the same positions, to the left or the right of the verb, and can carry key information. The difference between AS and GS, then, lies in certain modality constraints.

(12) (see example 4)
**c'est malheureusement que* le bilan de cette explosion s'élève à plus de deux milliards de dollars et trente morts

The rather loose appellation 'Insert Sequence' covers those remaining sequences which are not determined by the verb. They typically include pragmatic elements.

Following the identification of syntactic units (see following section), analysis can be carried out at both macro and micro levels: at the level of the unit, e.g. identifying the sorts of sequences that make up a unit; or at the level of the sequence, e.g. identifying what each sequence or type of sequence contains. The results presented here are from a macro-level study.

2.2 Identification of units for analysis

It is the 'final' version of what is said that is used for analysis, i.e. what the speaker ends up producing (as opposed to simply taking the last occurrence out of several 'attempts') in as many goes as it takes (see modes of construction and grid representation in Blanche-Benveniste 2000). No attempt is made to look at those supposed intentions or processes underlying production. Also, no arbitrary, non-syntactic measures (e.g. pauses) are taken to decide unit length, and no paratactic linking devices or connectors are taken as features for the identification of units (i.e. there is no 'higher' level of unit for analysis). As we saw in Bilger & Tyne (2008), it may be that different learners (different people, even) produce their 'final' version in different ways (Mozartian *vs*. Beethovenian speakers). Thus, it appears necessary to work with the formal relations that are arrived at, in as many goes as it takes. This is particularly necessary when working with different levels of learner (cf. 'problems' of pausing in first year data – Bilger & Tyne 2008). For example, in extract 13b, we analyse the syntactic togetherness of Mark's production in 13a, even though we can see that the expansion of the unit by a GS comes about through the intervention of the other speaker: the important factor here is the syntactic togetherness of these elements.

(13a) Mark: il faut postuler euh novembre décembre de l'an précédent +
Harry: pour euh <être em> <Mark: pour>bauché
Mark: oui pour être <embauché> <Harry: merde alors> en septembre

(13b) VS: il faut postuler euh
GS: novembre décembre de l'an précédent +
PI: {pour} oui
GS: pour être embauché en septembre +

It is considered irrelevant whether Mark actually had in mind to produce this particular utterance when he set out to talk. As Berrendonner (1990: 25–6) points out, speech is typically a collaborative act in which the speaker is not the sole contributor to his/her 'finished' productions. This type of practice is by no means restricted to L2 productions. On the contrary, co-construction is an important part of L1 speech (Jeanneret 1999). The way in which the 'end

product' comes into place is, in itself, an instructive way of looking at learners as users of language (Bilger & Tyne 2008).

3. Findings

3.1 Basic unit length

Looking beyond the basic distribution of sequences, as carried out in the exploratory study by Bilger & Campione (2002), we can observe the types of units typically used. In the entire L2 data set, we found 352 different unit configurations, of which 222 occurred only once. Of the remaining 130 entries, some were more frequent than others (e.g. VS-OS was very frequent, whereas SS-VS was quite rare). We focus here on content as a practical means of comparing types of units, i.e. what functional constituents are typically present in each unit, and when, regardless of their particular position within the unit and also of their internal make-up or length (e.g. number of words – see note 11). Thus, extracts 14 (from the fourth year FC corpus) 15 and 16 (our altered versions of 14) would count for one entry on the grounds of identical functional content.

(14) SS: {les} les technologies euh
GS: en matière euh {de dépistage} euh + de dépistage euh {d'infections euh intoxica-} euh d'intoxications /et, euh/ + et euh de maladies euh +++
VS: {ont} ont réduit euh {énormément} euh énormément
OS: les risques

(15) GS: en matière euh {de dépistage} euh + de dépistage euh {d'infections euh intoxica-} euh d'intoxications /et, euh/ + et euh de maladies euh +++
SS: {les} les technologies euh
VS: {ont} ont réduit euh {énormément} euh énormément
OS: les risques

(16) SS: {les} les technologies euh
VS: {ont} ont réduit euh {énormément} euh énormément
OS: les risques
GS: en matière euh {de dépistage} euh + de dépistage euh {d'infections euh intoxica-} euh d'intoxications /et, euh/ + et euh de maladies euh +++

A classification of unit types was drawn up using the 'core' sequences and adjuncts only (VS, SS, OS, GS, AS). Insert Sequences were not considered for determining basic unit types. Thus, for the basic unit type SS+VS+OSn[10]+1NVS, the following unit configurations might have been found: GS-SS-VS-OS, AS-SS-VS-OS, SS-GS-VS-OS, SS-AS-VS-OS, etc. In all, 28 different basic unit types were identified (see appendix 1), of which 20 were found in the L2 corpus. These are presented in decreasing order of use in the complete data set in table 1 below.

Unit types and % use			
	%		%
1. VS+OSn	36.37	11. VS+2NVS	1.01
2. VS+OSn+1NVS	24.68	12. SS+VS+1NVS	0.95
3. SS+VS+OSn	10.12	13. SS+VS+OSn+3NVS	0.33
4. VS+OSn+2NVS	7.05	14. SS+VS+3NVS	0.21
5. SS+VS+OSn+1NVS	5.79	15. VS+OSn+4NVS	0.20
6. VS	4.68	16. SS+VS+2NVS	0.17
7. VS+1NVS	3.85	17. VS+3NVS	0.10
8. SS+VS+OSn+2NVS	1.84	18. VS+OSn+5NVS	0.07
9. VS+OSn+3NVS	1.46	19. VS+4NVS	0.02
10. SS+VS	1.08	20. VS+OSn+6NVS	0.01

Table 1. Basic unit types found in the L2 corpus

The most commonly-used unit type, 1 (VS+OSn as in *il vend des huîtres*) shows increasing usage (χ^2 significant, $p < .05$) from the FP to the IC in both groups (see data given in appendix 2). This is a short

[10] No special case is made for those trivalent verbs (i.e. with complex complements) as in *donner quelque chose à quelqu'un*. The use of an 'additional' valency sequence relates to the requirements of the verb: we say it is 'selected' by the verb (this is not the case for GS, for example). Thus, OSn merely indicates the presence of object valency, regardless of the number of slots filled. Some verbs may use one or two object slots depending on the particular context (e.g. *il vend des huitres* and *il vend des huitres aux clients*).

unit type[11]. When we look at 6 (VS as in il a compris), the shortest unit type, we also find a significant ($p < .05$) increase in usage from FP to IC (see tables in appendix 2). This would appear to support the generally accepted idea that in spontaneous, unprepared speech, syntactic units can be expected to be shorter than in prepared speech. If we group together all those 'short' units, i.e. those that contain just the valency kernel (0NVS, i.e. with no non-valency sequences or adjuncts), we do see a significant increase from FP to IC in the fourth year data (see first block of columns in figure 2[12]). However, there is no significant change in 0NVS in the first year data (see first block of columns in figure 1). With the addition of non-valency sequences, and thereby the creation of longer units, so the fourth year data show a decrease in percentage use (χ^2 significant, $p < .05$) from FP to IC (see third, fifth and seventh blocks of columns in figure 2). Again, the pattern found in the fourth year data is not replicated in the first year data, where only the basic unit type (SS+)VS+(OSn)+2NVS (fifth block of columns in figure 1) saw a significant decrease in use.

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11 It should be noted that this is not necessarily a short unit in terms of the number of words. Also, in terms of event conceptualisation, a 'short' unit could relate to highly condensed accounts or highly granular accounts.

12 The *x* axis in figures 1 and 2 presents both basic unit types (under discussion in this section) and information concerning SS use for these (discussed in section 3.2). In each case, the columns referred to as '% SS' give the percentage of the preceding basic units (0NVS, 1NVS, etc.) which contain SS. For example, for 0NVS, we read from figure 2 that 34% of these units contained SS in the FP, 16% in the FC and 3% in the IC.

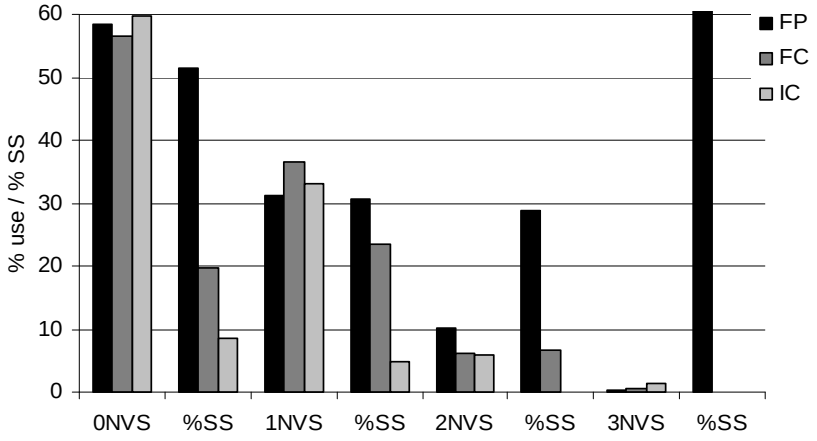

Figure 1. Distribution of basic units across production types in L2 French: 1st year

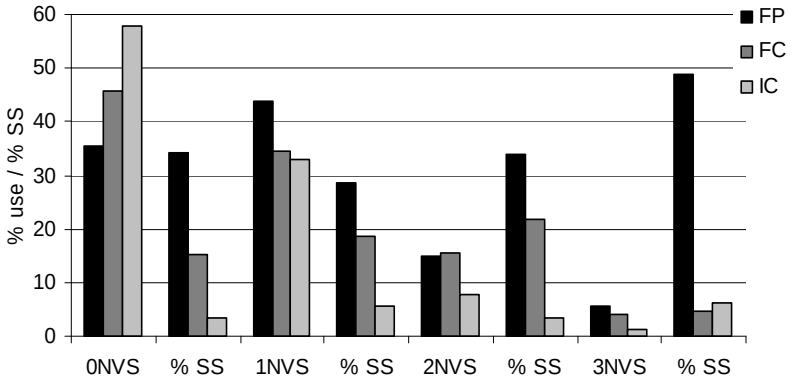

Figure 2. Distribution of basic units across production types in L2 French: 4th year

So, it would appear, then, that whilst length was a factor of differentiation between production types in the fourth year group, it was not really a factor in the first year set where, although longer units are used, the pattern of use did not vary significantly across production types. What the two groups do have in common, though, is the general spread of unit types, i.e. 0NVS is common in both sets (all types of production included) whereas 3NVS and beyond is not at all common, with only a very low percentage use.

3.2 Subject Sequences

Bilger & Campione (2002) note a significant difference in use of SS in the two extreme types of production they studied, from nearly 20% of all sequences used in the written corpus through to just over 1% in the oral corpus. In L1 French, subject types can vary (see Blanche-Benveniste 1994), and lexicalised subjects are more or less frequent in certain types of production, with a tendency towards greater use in formal, prepared productions (we can reflect upon the importance of communicative distance following Koch & Œsterreicher's 2001 model[13]). In the L2 data, when we look at the percentage of those basic unit types used which contain SS (see second, fourth, sixth and last blocks of columns in figures 1 and 2) we see that this observation can also be applied to both groups of learners, where there is a marked decrease in the use of SS from FP to CI (see descending steps), regardless of the length of the particular unit. Here, the first year group shows greater amplitude of variation (FP to IC) than the fourth year group, in particular for the unit type 0NVS, i.e. SS+VS(+OSn) (compare figures 1 and 2).

So, whilst it appears that the variable length of units (defined in terms of number of non-valency sequences) is not such a marked feature of production type in the first year learner group, variation

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[13] These authors look at style from an anthropological perspective, using the notion of communicative distance. For example, if we take the two extremes represented by formal writing and informal oral conversation, the communicative distance (real and perceived) will be reflected in productions: explicitness *vs*. implicitness, detachment *vs*. involvement, etc.

within the valency kernel through presence/absence of SS is more marked than for the fourth year group.

3.3 Sequence position

Basic unit types were defined according to functional content, i.e. they were identified regardless of the particular placement of the sequences within the unit. It is also possible, however, to look at the position of the various sequence types within units. For example, we know that adjuncts, because of their syntactic 'freedom', can be found either to the left or the right of the verb (see extracts 15 and 16 above for ledt/right position of GS). We look here at the basic context (left/right) preference for AS and GS.

The results (see appendix 3) show that the distribution of AS is quite similar in both groups of learners insofar as there is a massive preference (χ^2 significant, $p < .01$) for the left context in both cases (between 92% and 76%), regardless of the type of production (see figure 3). We would also point out that, whereas the right context appears to be increasingly favoured, albeit very slightly, in the first year group, from the FP to the FC (see descending steps for left context in first block of columns in figure 3), this was not the case for the fourth year group, where the right context becomes less favoured (see rise in left context in third block of columns). Many AS are adverbial adjuncts such as *généralement*, *en premier lieu*, *à mon avis*, etc. The 'preferred' position for these in L1 French is often to the left of the verb (in writing, they are typically followed by a comma). Other AS typically include left detached elements (subjects and objects), which are also more common in the left context in L1 French (Ball 2000: 131).

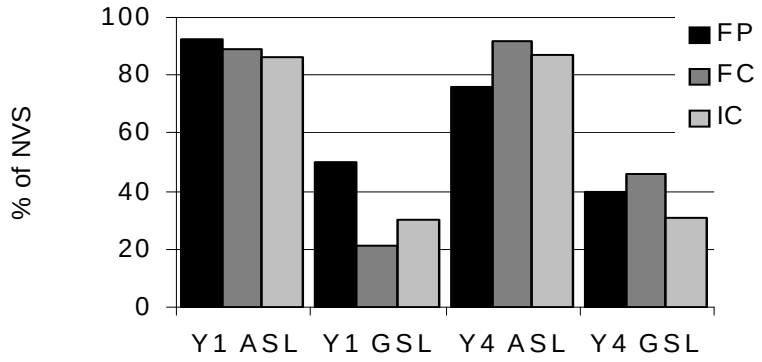

Figure 3. Left position preference for AS and GS in L2 French: 1st & 4th year

For GS position, there appears to be more movement in the first year data, where 50% are used in the left context in the FP as opposed to 20% and 30% in the FC and IC respectively (see figure 3). In the fourth year data, the degree of right-left variation is less marked, with a significant preference ($p < .01$) for the right context in all types of production. However, it should be noted that the overall shift from FP to IC[14] in both groups involves decreasing left context use for GS. This is interesting, and it ties in with the received idea that in spontaneous, unprepared speech, it is the right context that will often be used for unit expansions, i.e. as additional information is given following the valency kernel (although it also may be inserted to the left – see Blanche-Benveniste 2000).

[14] We will not make much here of the fact that FC stands out at times. It is very difficult to consider the three production types as a simple continuum, and whilst FC contains an element of formality, it is also a spontaneous conversation. Elsewhere (see also the first years in figure 4), we find that the CF distinguishes itself significantly from the other types of production in terms of the percentage use of the insertion sequences (CI, MI, WI, PI). Here, the specificity of the type of production (students formally defend or justify points of view) helps us to understand this distribution.

3.4 Dynamism and changes in unit configuration

In terms of variation within unit configuration (i.e. the changing arrangement of the functional sequences), a basic index is used which takes into account the degree of variation both across unit types (e.g. GS-VS followed by VS-OS, etc.) and within reworkings of these (i.e. further permutations as in GS-VS followed by VS-GS, for example). The variation index takes the total number of permutations and divides by the total number of units found (i.e. the maximum possible number of permutations) in the data set. Thus, scores close to zero indicate that there is very little variation whereas scores close to one indicate a high level of variation with a new permutation for almost every syntactic unit.

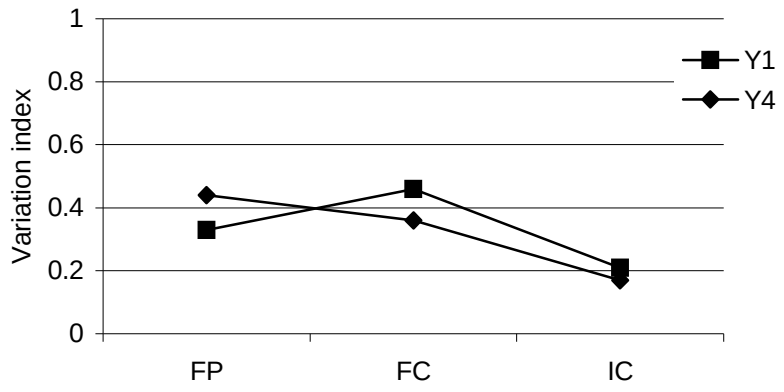

Figure 4. Variation index in L2 French: 1st & 4th year

The results (see figure 4) show that there is, for both groups of learners, a marked difference in the degree of unit variation within between the formal settings (FP and FC) and the informal one (IC), where units were also generally shorter (see above). Whereas for the fourth year group, the highest degree of variation was found in the FP

(the role of preparation?[15]), this was not the case for the first years, where it was the FC that yielded the highest score (higher still than the fourth year score for FP). The score for the IC is also higher in the first year data. These results are interesting: firstly, they imply that preparation (or the act of presenting) is more beneficial to the fourth years in terms of permutations and new unit types; secondly, they imply that the first years, despite having certain 'favourite' configurations (e.g. SS-VS-OS – see Bilger & Tyne 2008), which are used very frequently, globally vary more in this area than the fourth years (i.e. the average score, across the three production types, is higher).

The reasons for this could be multiple and would need more detailed exploration: is it to do with accommodation, or copying, even, of the interlocutor? Is a lower degree of variation here being made up for by other aspects (e.g. internal arrangement of the sequences)? Is dynamism a positive feature in this case (i.e. evidence that the speakers are not mono-stylistic)? Or are the first years just more 'jumpy', less bound by the situational constraints? Are the first years simply 'better' than the forth years in this aspect? Etc. This is an area which would merit further investigation.

4. Discussion

The findings presented in sections 3.1 to 3.4 would appear to support the first hypothesis, i.e. that there is variation in the L2 data, regardless of the particular level of advancement. The less proficient students (first years), who had not participated in a residence abroad scheme display clear variation, and this variation generally goes in the

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15 It should be pointed out that preparation does not necessarily make for more variable unit types in L1. In defence lawyers' speeches, Bilger (1990), for example, found that preparation brought about a certain degree of repetition of the same schema. Also, whilst the benefits of preparation may or may not show up here, this does not mean that it has not been useful elsewhere, e.g. in terms of grammatical accuracy (cf. results from Skehan 1996).

same direction as that of the more proficient group (see also L1 – Bilger & Campione 2002). However, the second hypothesis cannot be confirmed: the most advanced students are not necessarily the ones who vary the most. Whilst in certain areas (e.g. length), the fourth years show the most variation, in other areas it is the first years: the fourth years did not simply out-vary the first years in all areas as could perhaps have been expected. So, if first year students are using variation across production types, where does this come from? Also, what happens between the first and fourth years to bring on the differences that we do find?

In response to the first question, we would reiterate that, from a sociolinguistic perspective, this variation is a necessary communicational feature: we can expect communicational differences (however slight, in whatever form). What is difficult to try to ascertain here is how much of the visibly TL-like behaviour is actually down to TL influence and pedagogy and how much is a 'natural' response by the speaker to the type of production in hand (cf. the '*elokutionnel*'). Given the rather diverse nature of exposure to the TL in these learners, it would be difficult to conclude all in favour of the first possibility. Having said this, however, learners have no doubt been exposed to authentic documents, texts, etc. in which this type of distribution will have been present.

In response to the second question, much could be said from an acquisitional point of view, looking at this issue within the broader context of the acquisition of L2 in general. What actually goes on is not easily monitored; on the subject of the residence abroad scheme, Coleman (2005) has referred to the 'black box' (i.e. we typically have data from 'before' and 'after' but not 'during' – see Dewaele 2007 on the importance of developing an emic perspective). Generally speaking, though, we should say that style is present in the less advanced student because he/she is a social being. However, the realisation of this would appear to develop (cf. first/fourth year differences) as he/she gains resources[16], improves fluency and participates in different speech situations in L2.

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[16] It has been questioned (Gadet, personal communication) whether this type of development is wholly a L2 phenomenon: one could expect L1 students, as they pass from first to fourth year, gaining in maturity, with changing social

5. Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with style in French L2. It has attempted to show how a sociolinguistic understanding of style, which sees speakers above all as social beings, can be an interesting way of looking at L2 data and thus adding to the increasing number of studies on sociolinguistic competence. We claimed that style was an essential part of communication and that, as long as we define it in general terms (and not just as formal criteria variation), it will be present. We would argue, then, that the locus for style is in the communicative resources (all of them) of the speaker, i.e. it does not just 'grow' on language as a reflection of some independent social ordering and, for the language learner, is not limited to a set of acquirable features or rules which are superimposed upon the linguistic structures already in place. Rather, it should be viewed as a continuum of possibilities for communication, which can be realised in many ways, ranging from the extreme linguistic to the extreme non-linguistic (e.g. dress, posture, etc. – see the notion of a '*competent speaker who can't speak*' in Goodwin 2004). Whilst the approach outlined here is situated towards the linguistic end of the continuum, and supposes a certain level of linguistic mastery, we would argue for a consideration of this within a wider conception of style as social practice.

In conclusion, we would say that it is difficult to consider style seen thus as a 'final' acquirable feature, the icing on the cake (could we ever conclude that style has been definitively acquired in L1, even?). Rather, we would suggest that it be considered as a part of the cake itself, present from the outset. The question, then, is knowing where to look.

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networks and more access to stylistic differences, to enrich their palette of expression.

Appendix

Unit types	
VS	SS+VS+OSn+3NVS
VS+OSn	SS+VS+3NVS
SS+VS+OSn	VS+4NVS
SS+VS	VS+OSn+4NVS
VS+1NVS	SS+VS+OSn+4NVS
VS+OSn+1NVS	SS+VS+4NVS
SS+VS+OSn+1NVS	VS+5NVS
SS+VS+1NVS	VS+OSn+5NVS
VS+2NVS	SS+VS+OSn+5NVS
VS+OSn+2NVS	SS+VS+5NVS
SS+VS+OSn+2NVS	VS+6NVS
SS+VS+2NVS	VS+OSn+6NVS
VS+3NVS	SS+VS+OSn+6NVS
VS+OSn+3NVS	SS+VS+6NVS

Appendix 1: A classification of basic unit types

Unit type[17]	*Total, Standard Deviation & Mean for the 3 production types*								
	FP			*FC*			*IC*		
	Tot	SD	Mn	Tot	SD	Mn	Tot	SD	Mn
1	261.1	10.7	26.1	411.4	18.0	41.1	463.2	10.9	46.3
2	190.1	12.9	19.0	246.4	7.4	24.6	265.2	6.8	26.5
3	286.4	19.8	28.6	90.2	9.4	9.0	49.8	4.6	5.0
4	52.7	4.4	5.3	53.4	7.1	5.3	51.3	3.9	5.1
5	79.9	10.8	8.0	85.8	13.3	8.6	15.5	2.4	1.6
6	22.6	3.1	2.3	41.3	5.2	4.1	83.4	9.8	8.3
7	25.4	2.8	2.5	33.4	5.0	3.3	48.8	2.9	4.9
8	29.4	3.5	2.9	4.0	1.3	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
9	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.0	1.4	0.6	12.3	1.6	1.2
10	13.2	2.2	1.3	21.5	3.2	2.2	2.0	0.4	0.2
11	20.5	2.5	2.0	3.2	1.0	0.3	6.7	1.2	0.7

[17] See table 1 for detail of the basic unit types.

12	15.4	2.6	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
13	3.4	1.1	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
14	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
15	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.2	1.0	0.3	1.9	0.6	0.2
16	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
17	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
18	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
19	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
20	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Tot	1000[18]		100	1000		100	1000		100

Appendix 2a: Distribution of basic unit types: 1st year

[18] It should be noted that each learner group did not produce a rounded corpus of 1000 units per production type. Nor was a sample of 1000 units selected for analysis. Rather, given that the amount of data contributed by each learner is variable (it is spontaneous speech), the first step towards analysis was to provide comparable figures, whereby all learners contribute evenly to the data set. To do this, we calculated each individual's production in terms of the number of occurrences per hundred units, hence the total of 1000 (i.e. 100 units for each of the 10 learners in each year group).

Unit type	*Total, Standard Deviation & Mean for the 3 production types*								
	FP			*FC*			*IC*		
	Tot	SD	Mn	Tot	SD	Mn	Tot	SD	Mn
1	225.2	10.3	22.5	336.6	11.6	33.7	484.7	9.5	48.5
2	281.4	12.5	28.1	259.0	9.2	25.9	238.9	5.8	23.9
3	105.0	8.5	10.5	61.2	4.6	6.1	14.4	1.4	1.4
4	97.2	6.0	9.7	113.6	5.6	11.4	54.7	2.2	5.5
5	99.4	9.0	9.9	54.1	3.4	5.4	12.7	1.4	1.3
6	7.6	1.0	0.8	51.0	5.3	5.1	75.1	3.3	7.5
7	31.5	3.3	3.1	20.5	1.9	2.1	71.7	2.4	7.2
8	44.7	3.7	4.5	31.1	3.1	3.1	1.1	0.3	0.1
9	28.1	2.5	2.8	36.0	3.1	3.6	5.5	0.5	0.5
10	15.5	2.8	1.5	8.2	1.4	0.8	4.6	0.7	0.5
11	2.1	0.7	0.2	7.5	1.0	0.8	20.5	1.8	2.0
12	26.0	3.2	2.6	10.4	1.4	1.0	5.2	0.7	0.5
13	15.8	2.0	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.2	0.1
14	10.8	2.9	1.1	1.9	0.6	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
15	3.8	0.8	0.4	1.4	0.5	0.1	1.7	0.3	0.2
16	6.1	1.5	0.6	2.6	0.6	0.3	1.5	0.3	0.2
17	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.4	0.1	4.7	0.7	0.5
18	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.7	1.2	0.4	0.5	0.2	0.1
19	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.3	0.1
20	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.2	0.1
Tot	1000		100	1000		100	1000		100

Appendix 2b: Distribution of basic unit types: 4th year

Appendix 3: Distribution of AS and GS (production per 100 units) (ST & P

ST & P	*LG (year)*	*Total, Standard Deviation & Mean for the 3 production types*								
		FP			*FC*			*IC*		
		Tot	SD	Mn	Tot	SD	Mn	Tot	SD	Mn
AS L	1st	83.2	6.0	8.3	132.7	12.1	13.3	55.7	3.8	5.6
	4th	163.2	5.8	16.3	141.4	5.4	14.1	93.8	3.3	9.4
AS R	1st	7.3	1.5	0.7	16.1	1.8	1.6	8.5	1.4	0.9
	4th	52.0	5.6	5.2	13.2	1.8	1.3	13.6	1.4	1.4
GS L	1st	150.5	11.2	15.0	71.6	8.0	7.2	101.9	6.2	10.2
	4th	163.6	9.7	16.4	175.8	7.1	17.6	96.3	4.6	9.6
GS R	1st	150.4	12.5	15.0	269.3	13.7	26.9	236.6	5.0	23.7
	4th	248.7	5.3	24.9	208.7	7.3	20.9	214.0	4.2	21.4

=Sequence type and position, LG=learner group, AS L= AS Left, AS R= AS Right, GS L= GS Left, GS R=GS Right)

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