

The Department of French & Italian presents a PhD Dissertation Defense

Charlène Gilbert

Referential Computations and *Wh*-Movement in Native and Non-native Processing of French: Evidence from Reading Times

10 am, Friday, August 2, 2024, Indiana Memorial Union Redbud Room, in English. Please notify Prof. Laurent Dekydtspotter (ldekydts@indiana.edu) or Prof. Steven Franks (franks@indiana.edu) if you would like to attend.

Research in first-language (L1) sentence processing has found evidence that language comprehenders use binding condition A as a filter to rule out noun phrases that are binding-inaccessible before proceeding with the task of finding the correct antecedent. Sturt (2013) notes that this strategy does not appear to apply to advanced speakers of second-language (L2) English, even when they demonstrate a strong understanding of English binding constraints in off-line tasks. This is consistent with the Shallow Structure Hypothesis—the view that L2 speakers do not compute all the syntactic details incrementally in real time, and rely more heavily on other sources of information during initial stages of processing (Clahsen & Felser 2006; 2018). My dissertation focuses on L1 vs. L2 sentence processing in French by investigating resolution of anaphora subject to binding condition A (anaphors) and B (pronouns) under reconstruction (a syntactic phenomenon linked to *wh*-movement). To do so, two self-paced reading tasks were designed. The participants included 25 L1 French speakers and 25 advanced/intermediate L2 French speakers. The first task examined the processing of the pronouns *lui* ‘him’ and *elle* ‘her’ in noun complements (introduced by *de* ‘of’) vs. adjuncts (introduced by *par* ‘by’). The second task focused on the processing of the French reciprocal anaphor *l’un l’autre* ‘each other’ in noun complements (introduced by *au sujet de* ‘about’), examining the influence of number features on the search for a possible antecedent. The main findings are the following: a) L1 speakers use anticipatory processing strategies to refresh information before a new phase of syntactic computations begins, b) L2 learners are sensitive to subtle syntactic information in real-time referential computations, with stronger statistical effects when proficiency is taken into account, and c) there is psychological evidence for successive cyclicity in the processing of a second language.



Committee:

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