From a serializing L1 to a non-serializing L2: A preliminary discussion of transfer and Tense-driven restructuring in language contact situations*

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This paper highlights parallels between L1 influence in early second language acquisition (SLA) and substrate influence in creole formation by examining (i) correspondences between serial verb constructions (SVCs) in the L1 and the interlanguage of Vietnamese-speaking learners of English, as well as (ii) correspondences between SVCs in certain creoles and their substrates. On the grounds that the verb raising and serialization parameters work in tandem and that Tense has no temporal specifications in serializing languages (cf. Stewart, 1998), the paper suggests that transferred SVCs are not retained in typical SLA situations involving non-serializing L2s since input conditions favour the building up of Tense as per L2 norms. The paper concludes with a proposal for an L2 acquisition study that investigates the special nature of Tense in serializing languages as well as the tenability of the “no-impairment” transfer hypothesis, which suggests that the initial state L2 grammar is the L1 grammar in its entirety (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996; Prévost & White, 2000).

Introduction

This paper considers language transfer processes that come into play in the early stages of SLA and creole formation. More specifically, the paper highlights parallels between early L1 influence and substrate influence by examining correspondences between serial verb constructions (SVCs) in the L1 and the interlanguage of Vietnamese-speaking learners of English, together with correspondences between SVCs in certain creoles and their substrate languages.

* I would like to thank Juvénal Ndayiragije for sharing his insights into the serialization parameter with me and for providing me with manuscripts of his latest work on Fongbé. I would also like to thank Hoà Pham of the University of Florida for her English-Vietnamese translations and her native-speaker judgements of Vietnamese sentences. Naturally, any errors are solely my responsibility.
According to the Full Transfer/Full Access hypothesis (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996), the initial-state L2 grammar is the learner’s L1 grammar in its entirety; its subsequent restructuring is guided by UG (to which the L2 learner has complete access), as well as L2 input. In other words, L1 lexical and functional projections are available to the L2 learner from the start although some abstract L1 categories might not be consistently realized in an early interlanguage (Herschensohn, 2001; Prévost & White, 2000). On the other hand, “impairment” approaches generally focus on the non-transference of either L1 functional categories or of their associated values. For example, the “minimal trees” hypothesis of Vainikka & Young Sholten (1998) posits an initial state L2 grammar containing L1 lexical categories and projections only. Functional categories (e.g., Tense or Aspect) and their projections appear only upon noticing triggering elements of L2 input and may be underspecified initially for feature strength. Within the “Weak Transfer/Valueless Features” hypothesis (Eubank, 1996), L1 functional categories and projections are transferred, but their associated feature strength is initially underspecified or not specified at all.

In keeping with the Full Transfer/Full Access hypothesis, this paper puts forward the view that L2 learners in any language contact situation are continuously on the lookout for equivalents of L1 items and probably start off with the assumption that there are exact equivalents for L1 lexical and functional categories in the L2. However, in a typical SLA situation, as opposed to a typical creolization one in which access to native speakers of the target language (TL) is severely restricted, there are generally greater opportunities to fine-tune initial hypotheses on the basis of L2 input and to acquire L2 features that may be missing in the L1 or to acquire TL values for a feature that may have different values in the two languages (Siegel, 1997; Winford, 2001).

Second Language Acquisition in Creole Formation: SVCs in Creoles

There are now a substantial number of creolists who propose that creole formation was generally driven by adults engaged in second language acquisition in a language contact situation (e.g., Alleyne, 1980; Arends, Muysken, & Smith, 1995; Lefebvre, 1986 or 1993; Mufwene, 1990; Siegel, 1999, & 2003; Thomason & Kaufman, 1988; Winford, 2001; but see Baker, 2001). It is therefore not surprising that analogous transfer strategies are in evidence in both SLA and creolization (Lumsden, 1999; Siegel, 2003; Winford, 2001 & 2003), irrespective of whether one’s theoretical position highlights substrate retention (e.g., Lefebvre, 1986 & 1993; Migge, 1998) or language shift (e.g., Thomason & Kaufman, 1988).

SVCs in many Caribbean creoles have been seen as the product of retained (or “transferred”) substrate syntactic and lexico-semantic patterns with lexical forms from the superstrate (Migge, 1998; Winford, 1993). Migge (1998), for example, on the basis of a comparison of SVCs with give in modern Surinamese Creoles and its substrate languages (e.g., Èwè and Fongbé), concludes that the grammar of Surinamese Plantation Creole was the result of substrate retention. As exemplified by 1 and 2 below, the V2s gi/da “give” in Surinamese Creoles closely resemble give-type verbs in Gbe (e.g., ne) in terms of their syntax and the semantic roles of their arguments (Migge, 1998, pp. 235-244):
(1) a. Mi iti a koosi (go) gi en. [Ndnyuka]
   I throw the cloth go give him
   “I threw the cloth to him.”

   b. Kofi da bulu-a (yi) n-ī. [Éwé]
   Kofi throw ball-the go give-her
   “Kofi threw the ball to her.” [Migge, 1998, p. 238]

(2) a. A tapu a liba gi mi. [Ndnyuka]
   He blocked the river give me
   “She blocked the river against me.”

   b. Etu mū-a na-m. [Éwé]
   She block path-the go give-me
   “She blocked the path against me.” [Migge, 1998, p. 240]

In (1a) and (1b), gi/ne “give” take goal NPs, and go/yi “go” highlight the directionality of the action referred to by the V1 (da/iti). In (2a) and (2b), give as V2 takes a recipient NP, whose referent is acted upon malefactively by the action represented by V1.

Similarly, SVCs in Haitian resemble those in Fongbé (which Lefebvre, 1986 & 1993, puts forward as the most influential of the substrate languages in this creolization context, albeit not uncontroversially):

(3) a. É sɔsɔ yi àxi mñ. [Fongbé]
   3rd take crab go market in
   “He brought the crab to the market.”

   b. Koku pote krab ale na masé. [Haitian]
   Koku bring crab go in market
   “Koku brought a crab to the market.” [Lefebvre, 1986, p. 290]

In all of the above-mentioned examples, we see the existence of SVCs in the creole despite the lack of these in the relevant lexifying languages (English, Portuguese, or French). Note that this paper is not claiming that all SVCs in creoles derive from their substrate languages or that SVCs in creoles always correspond closely to SVCs in their structure and range (see, for example, Bickerton, 1989, and Veenstra, 1996).

**SVCs in Interlanguage Data: Findings of a Small-Scale Study**

This section discusses the findings of a small-scale study involving two L1s, Hindi-Urdu (H-U), which, like the TL English, is non-serializing, and Vietnamese, which has a wide variety of SVCs (Kuhn, 1990), including object-sharing resultative ones (RSVCs). (The Vietnamese data below have been compiled largely on the basis of the translations, judgements and explanations of Vietnamese-speaking informants.)
In Vietnamese, a small number of verbs appear in both transitive and intransitive constructions, for example, in the class involving “movement around an axis” (cf., Levin, 1993):

the tree shake in wind.
b. Hang run[ŋ] ca[y].
“Hang shook the tree.”

In classes such as physical change of state, sound emission, and directional motion (Levin, 1993), autonomous events in an intransitive construction are usually represented by a “state” (unaccusative) verb, which cannot be used transitively (therefore, causatively) (Nguyễn Inh Ho, 1995). In the causative, a suppletive form appears as the main verb (as in (5b)), and the unaccusative verb may be used as a resultative in a serial construction (as in (5c)).

(5) a. L·th‹«ang ch·y.CLAS letter PROG burn
“The letter was burning.”
b. Ng‹©i «‡n Ùng «ang «t bŸcth‹.The man PROG ignite CLAS letter
“The man set fire to the letter.”
c. Ng‹©i «‡n Ùng «ang «t bŸc th‹ chay
The man PROG ignite CLAS letter burn
“The man set fire to the letter, resulting in its burning.”

For the purposes of this study, RSVCs in Vietnamese were analyzed as cases of complementation (Collins, 1993 & 1997), rather than adjunction.¹ As highlighted by Baker (1989), and later by Collins (1997) and Stewart (1998), the intransitive V2 of an RSVC must be unaccusative (but see Veenstra, 2000, for an analysis of Saramaccan RSVCs with unergative V2s). In this study, RSVCs in Vietnamese were further analyzed as ECM constructions as represented in (6):

(6) [v*Ng‹©i «‡n Ùng [v*[VP1 [t [VP2 b c th chay]]]]
[v*The man [v*[VP1 [ignite [VP2 the letter burn]]]]]

Here the light athematic verb v* of the transitive verb ignore values its uninterpretable phi- and Case-features against some features of the internal argument the letter (NP2) of the unaccusative verb burn (Chomsky, 1995). Thus NP2 is interpreted as the direct object of V1, and VP2, headed by the unaccusative V2, is interpreted as the result ensuing from the action represented by V1.

¹ Similar resultative constructions with unaccusative V2s are found in Kwa languages such as Éwé:
(i) Me nya ìdevi-] dzo. [Éwé]
I chase child-the leave
“I chased the child away.” [Collins, 1997, p. 468]
As discussed in Helms-Park (2003), the causative verb làm “do”/ “make” is also used in a series with (selected) unaccusative verbs as V2s. Here VP2 is interpreted as the result of the action in V1, and NP2 is the theme of V2. This serial construction generally underscores the causee’s lack of volitionality, as well as the accidental nature of the doer’s action, allowing for fall-type verbs as V2s, but not arrive-type ones. Note that with an unergative V2, such as c ổì “laugh”, and kh c “cry,” or with an arrive-type verb, the construction involves subordination rather than serialization (see Helms-Park, 2003).

In the study being summarized here, interlanguage data were elicited through a picture-based test using high-frequency verbs from 92 learners of English, of whom 45 spoke Vietnamese and 47 spoke H-U. Serial-type constructions appeared in the data produced by 15 of the Vietnamese speakers, while none were produced by any of the H-U speakers. A breakdown of the results according to proficiency level (calculated with the help of Nation’s 1990 test of lexical ability) as well as type of serial verb revealed that altogether ten Vietnamese-speaking learners produced argument-sharing serial-type constructions without make; eleven of these constructions were produced by six elementary-level participants, while only four corresponding ones were produced at the intermediate and advanced levels. The majority of these sentences had V2s that could be interpreted as the result of the action represented by V1; in many cases the V2 was in the form of the ED/EN participle, for example Suzie is cooking butter melted and The man dropped the can of paint fell. In addition, another seven Vietnamese-speaking learners produced serial-type constructions with make + unaccusative verb + inanimate NP2, two each at the elementary and intermediate levels, and three at the advanced level. Included here were sentences such as: The man made the cup broken; The man made the shirt burned; and The man made the egg cracked, which are grammatical on the surface but are “odd” in a context where causation is through direct physical contact. In short, most of the V2s in data were possible translation equivalents of likely unaccusative V2s in Vietnamese RSVCs. (See Helms-Park, 2003, for further details about this study.)

Furthermore, while some of the interlanguage constructions with two thematic verbs had no verbal tense or agreement markings (in keeping with the L1), more than half of the serial-type constructions produced by the Vietnamese speakers had inflectional markings on one or both of the verbs, as in: The man take the cup broke or Suzie cooked butter melted or The man dropped the can of paint fell. While these inflections markings may be taken as evidence that the category Tense (T) has emerged

\textsuperscript{2} While an argument could be made that these are TL-driven resultative constructions, the fact that the H-U interlanguage data lacked them altogether bolsters the view that these constructions derive from the L1.

\textsuperscript{3} Two of these seven learners were among the ten learners cited in the previous category.

\textsuperscript{4} Interestingly, the classes in which serials were used corresponded for the most part to those classes in which stem-sharing between intransitive and the transitive causative verbs in Vietnamese is not allowed, for example, “change of state,” “sound emission with an instrument,” and “directional motion”; in these classes, intransitive and transitive verbs are suppletive, with the intransitive verb frequently appearing as a V2, but not obligatorily so. In the manner-of-motion class, in which stem-sharing is allowed in both Vietnamese and English (e.g., I n “roll” and xoay “spin”), there was only one serial-type construction in the interlanguage data (with spin).

\textsuperscript{5} Many of these markings were anomalous by TL standards, for example, markings on both thematic verbs or markings on the V2 in the case of make serials.
in the learners’ transitional grammars (i.e., as a result of TL triggering data), these inflections could also be essentially aspectual. This ambiguity is one that can be resolved only through a careful examination of verb inflections in the interlanguage of Vietnamese-speaking ESL learners, together with any accompanying serial-type constructions.

**Initial Transfer and Later Restructuring in SLA and Creolization**

It is clear that serial-type constructions in interlanguage data need to be examined in much greater depth than has been done in the small-scale study discussed above. However, the fact that serials did appear at all in these interlanguage data demonstrates that some of the special structural properties of a serializing language are “transferable” in a language contact situation. Moreover, the complete absence of serial-type constructions in the interlanguage data of speakers of a non-serializing language (i.e., H-U) suggests that SVCs are not a natural product of second language acquisition (cf. Bickerton, 1981, on the spontaneous generation of SVCs in an L1 acquisition context).

The findings of this preliminary study, however, support the view that the retention of L1 properties is far more typical of radical creoles such as Sranan and Haitian than of SLA (Winford, 2001). In SLA, while transfer is generally pronounced during the early stages of acquisition, transferred items are usually retained only when there is congruence between L1 and L2 features (as when an Urdu speaker refers to the “floor” as *ground* because the Urdu word *zamin* encompasses both), except in those situations where factors such as social or psychological distance severely impede interaction with native speakers of the TL (Schumann, 1978). In creolization, while congruence may be a factor in transfer and retention (Siegel, 1999 & 2003), items are often transferred and retained despite a lack of congruence between the substrate and the superstrate. One possible reason for such retention is the existence of substrate languages alongside the developing creole. For example, there is historical evidence that the first Saramaccan-as-L1 group in Suriname also spoke Akan and Éwé (McWhorter, 1992). Furthermore, very limited access to the lexifying language – and for brief periods in history to boot (e.g., English in Suriname) – together with the existence of a variety of non-native or non-standard versions of the TL, made the L1 (rather than the TL) a prominent source of linguistic data (Siegel, 1997 & 2003; Winford, 2001). In fact, Migge (1998) concludes that there was no TL for SLA within the linguistically homogeneous plantation population during the early stages of the creolization process. According to her, the SVCs of the type in 1a and 2a (above) were retained when the substrate-based grammar that emerged from early contact became the TL of a new adult population of L2 learners.

SVCs in many creoles serve as good examples of L1-based features that are retained in spite of no corresponding constructions in the lexifying language. Haitian Creole, for instance, has SVCs and, correspondingly, no verb movement (DeGraff, 1994), while French, the lexifying language, has verb movement and no SVCs:

(7) a. Bouki deja pase rad yo.  
   [Haitian]  
   Bouki already iron cloth the  
   “Bouki has already ironed the cloth.”
b. *Bouki deja pase rad yo.
   "Bouki has already ironed the cloth."

In the interlanguage data presented earlier, on the other hand, serial-type constructions without make emerged at the lowest levels of proficiency but were virtually non-existent at the advanced level (i.e., a single learner produced one serial-type construction of this kind). One tentative explanation for this proficiency-based difference is that the value of the verb raising parameter (which motivates checking for T – whether overtly via a a strong F, or covertly via a weak F, in T – or does not motivate checking for T at all) sets the value of the serialization parameter (which governs whether or not a language allows SVCs), as put forward by Stewart (1998). In a situation involving speakers of a serializing language like Vietnamese who are acquiring a non-serializing language like English, the TL value of the verb raising parameter is assigned relatively early through morphological triggers such as tense and agreement markers in positive input (cf. DeGraff, 2001; Haegemann, 1997; Vainikka & Young Sholten, 1998).

Following Chomsky (1995), T in English, as well as H-U (the comparative L1), can be seen as having the verbal features ± finite, ± past, and ± agreement (person and number in English and H-U, and gender in H-U). In short, both the TL and H-U (i) require T to be checked and (ii) lack SVCs (see Butt & Ramchand, 2001, and Davison, 2003, for analyses of Tense/Infl in H-U). Vietnamese does not have overt verb raising and lacks inflectional marking on verbs. Moreover, it can be argued that T in Vietnamese lacks not just agreement features, but also ± past. For example, the markers s and a, which supposedly represent future and past respectively, are not only virtually absent in spoken Vietnamese and many written genres (Nguyễn Òinh Ho, 1995) but are also best interpreted as aspectual markers for "irrealis" and "perfective" respectively (but see Leung, 2001). In short, if Vietnamese T lacks V-features, there is no Agree relationship whatsoever between T and V in Vietnamese, a characteristic that linked with serialization (Stewart, 1998; see also Ndairagije, 2003). (Note that Baker & Stewart, 1999, and Collins, 1997, propose alternative mechanisms for linking the special nature of T in serializing languages with the existence of SVCs in these languages.)

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6 Many of these markings were anomalous by TL standards, for example, markings on both thematic verbs or markings on the V2 in the case of make serials.
7 Consider the following tests based on Pollock (1989):
   (i) a. Ngồi
   b. *Ngồi
   "He did not sit down."
   "He did not sit down."

   (ii) a. Anh
   b. *Anh
   "You did not write a letter."
   "You did not write a letter."

8 On the grounds that T attracts the closest head that is able to check its features (Chomsky, 1995), Baker & Stewart (1999) put forward the view that since VP is double-headed in SVCs (cf. Baker, 1989), there is
In short, if the values of the serialization and verb raising parameters are assigned early in a typical SLA situation, it is because the L1 and L2 grammars are working in tandem, with triggering data provided by fluent speakers of a generally well-defined TL. On the other hand, in the case of creoles, especially in a “pidgin-to-creole” scenario (where a pidgin emerging from first contact serves as the TL for subsequent acquisition) (e.g., Horvath & Wexler, 1997), morphological triggers for the full implementation of functional categories can be inferred to be scarce or non-existent. Thus, in the face of inadequate TL input, the linguistic resources that learners could fall back on would be the L1 and factors peculiar to interlanguage development. This scenario, however, is reversed in Réunionnais, which, according to historical accounts, remained in close contact with the superstrate (French) over a period of time (Baker & Corne, 1982; Chaudenson; 2001). As has often been observed, Réunionnais manifests the influence of French in a profusion of ways; its verb movement patterns and its lack of SVCs, for example, reflect the non-serializing nature of French (Green, 1988).

**Testing Transfer Hypotheses and Charting the Progression from Serialization to Non-Serialization**

Any future study that charts learners’ progression from a serializing language to a non-serializing language needs to get around the following problem: If an L1 lacks a functional category that the L2 possesses, interlanguage data that show no evidence of this category do not unequivocally support either a “no-impairment” or an “impairment” transfer hypothesis. Note that a no-impairment hypothesis (e.g., Herschensohn, 2001; Prévost & White, 2000), which proposes that all L1 lexical and functional projections are transferred to the initial-state L2 grammar, would predict that a functional category that is absent in the L1 would continue to be missing till the necessary L2 triggers are taken note of. Impairment hypotheses, on the other hand, propose that L1 functional categories are either not transferred at all (Vainikka & Young Sholten, 1998) or are initially minimally specified (Eubank, 1996; Hawkins, 2001). In either case, functional categories that are missing in the L1 would be absent in the initial-state L2 grammar; these categories and/or their values would be built up through triggering data that lead to positive L2 evidence (Carroll, 2001).

Thus one research design that would facilitate the investigation of (i) the connection between the special nature of T and the serialization parameter, and (ii) the tenability of an “impairment” or a “no-impairment” transfer hypothesis would need to compare and contrast the development of English verbal inflection in the interlanguage of learners of a serializing language such as Vietnamese and a non-serializing language such as H-U. In other words, apart from eliciting data that could yield evidence of more than one thematic verb in a unicausal construction, data would need to be elicited through tests of tense, agreement, finiteness, and negative and adverb placement (e.g., the fill-in-the-blanks “morpheme” tests used in the 1970s or sentence-completion tasks, as in Herschensohn. 1998, and Leung, 2001). The results could then shed light on the extent

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no single head that can be attracted. Collins (1997), on the other hand, hypothesizes that T in serializing languages can check features with multiple Vs.
to which the appearance or the non-appearance of serial-type verbs corresponded with the non-use or the use (respectively) of tense, number and agreement markings in obligatory contexts at every proficiency level. However, as is common in L2 acquisition, one would also expect to see periods of “transition,” as when serial-type constructions appear in the data produced by Vietnamese speakers, but with anomalous tense markings, as witnessed in constructions such as The man dropped the can of paint fell yielded by the study discussed above.

References

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