

The role of rote learning in early L2 development

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Research context

- Understanding the nature of learner language
- Interaction between learnt knowledge and acquired knowledge in SLA (or lack thereof)
- Emphasis on learnt knowledge in the classroom context



Research questions

- What is the role of learnt classroom routines in the construction of learners' productive competence?
 - Do the learnt system and the productive system develop independently of one another?
 - Do these two systems interact?

Chunks: what are they?

- Various terms: formulaic language; rote learnt formulas, chunks etc...

Longer and more complex than other learner output; usually well-formed

(1) *quel âge as-tu?* what age have you? (“how old are you?”)

(2) **Il âge frère?* he age brother?


In both cases, intended meaning: “how old is your brother?”

- Often overextended:

**mon petit garçon euh où habites-tu?*

my little boy umm where do you live?

“where does your little boy live?”



“a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar.”

Wray, 2002

“a multimorphemic unit memorised and recalled as a whole, rather than generated from individual items based on linguistic rules”

Myles et al. 1998



This study

■ Datasets

□ Beginners

- Longitudinal; 60 learners; years 7, 8, 9 (11-14 years old); oral tasks

□ Post-beginners

- Cross-sectional; 20 in each of years 9, 10, 11 (14-16 years old); oral tasks

Interrogative chunk: *comment t'appelles-tu?*

Comment	+ t'	+ appelle	+ tu
Wh-fronting+	2:sg:refl	+ verb	+ 2:sg:subj
<i>What</i>	+ <i>yourself</i>	+ <i>call</i>	+ <i>you</i>

'what's your name?'

Very often overextended to inappropriate contexts, e.g:

comment t'appelles-tu le garçon?

'What's your name the boy?'

Development of interrogatives

1. Verbless stage

Je grand maison? (I big house)

2. Infinitive verb stage

La mère regarder le magasin? (the mother look – inf
– the shop)

3. Finite verb stage

La mère regarde livre? (the mother looks book)

Asking 'what's his/her name?'

- Chunk: *comment t'appelles-tu?* 2nd person reference (what's your name)
- How do learners ask 'what's his/her name?'


5 developmental stages

1. Chunk over-extended: * *comment t'appelles-tu?*
2. Chunk over-extended, but lexical NP tagged on: * *comment t'appelles-tu le garçon?*
3. Chunk starting to break down: * *comment t'appelle (la fille)?*
4. Further breaking down: *comment s'appelle (un garçon)?*
5. 3rd person pronoun used (very rare): *comment s'appelle-t-il?*



Conclusion

- Chunks break down over time and feed into the construction of the productive grammar
- The breakdown of chunks drives the construction of the L2 grammar forward (as their grammar is more advanced)

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