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# Nativelike right-dislocation in near-native French

**Bryan Donaldson**

University of Texas at Austin, USA

Second Language Research

27(3) 361–390

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DOI: 10.1177/0267658310395866

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## Abstract

Recent research on advanced and near-native second-language (L2) speakers has focused on the acquisition of interface phenomena, for example at the syntax–pragmatics interface. Proponents of the Interface Hypothesis (e.g. Sorace, 2005; Sorace and Filiaci, 2006; Tsimpli and Sorace, 2006; Sorace and Serratrice, 2009) argue that (external) interfaces present difficulties for L2 grammars, resulting in permanent deficits even in near-native grammars. Other research, however, has argued that interfaces are acquirable, albeit with delays (Ivanov, 2009; Rothman, 2009). This study examines right-dislocation (RD) in experimental and production data from near-native French. Right-dislocation marks topic in discourse and thus requires the integration of syntactic and discourse–pragmatic knowledge. Participants were 10 near-native speakers of French who learned French after age 10 and whose grammatical competence was comparable to the near-native speakers of French in Birdsong (1992), and 10 French native speakers. The data come from two experimental tasks and an 8.5-hour corpus of spontaneous informal dyadic conversations. The near-natives demonstrated nativelike judgments, preferences, and use of RD in authentic discourse. Only one near-native displayed evidence of first-language (L1) transfer, which resulted in non-nativelike use of RD. On the whole, the results suggest nativelike acquisition of this area of the syntax–pragmatics interface and fail to provide support for the Interface Hypothesis.

## Keywords

second language acquisition, syntax, dislocations, discourse, information structure, near-nativeness, French language

## I Information structure

This study discusses aspects of information structure (Lambrecht, 1994) and how it is signposted syntactically in second-language (L2) near-native French. Information structure, broadly defined, involves the flow of old and new information in discourse and consequent syntactic, phonological, morphological, and lexical choices. The field of inquiry dates to the Prague School (Mathesius, 1939; Firbas, 1964) and has a long functionalist tradition

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### Corresponding author:

Bryan Donaldson, Department of French and Italian, University of Texas at Austin, 1 University Station  
B7600, Austin, TX 78712-0224, USA

Email: [bdonaldson@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:bdonaldson@austin.utexas.edu)

(Kuno, 1972; Chafe, 1976). Recently, aspects of information structure have attracted attention among generativists, especially with respect to the structure of clausal peripheries (Rizzi, 1997; Belletti, 2004; Benincà, 2006). The construction examined here – right-dislocation (RD) in French – lies at the interface of syntax and discourse pragmatics, in that RD is a variant word order used to signal how information is organized in an utterance or across utterances. In this section, I discuss the notions of topic, focus, and the types of information that discourse referents can represent.

Assertions typically contain a topic and a focus. Reinhart (1981) operationalized topic as expressing ‘the relation of being about’ (p. 54). The topic of an utterance is what is being talked about; the interlocutors are typically familiar with the topic, and the topic therefore constitutes old information. What is predicated about the topic is the focus. Focus information is novel, unanticipated, and moves the discourse forward (Firbas, 1964; Kuno, 1972; Rochemont, 1986). Crosslinguistically, topic is most commonly realized as the subject of the clause, and focus as the predicate (Reinhart, 1981). As an illustration of the relation between topic and focus, let us imagine two interlocutors who have, for several turns of their conversation, been discussing a mutual friend, Marcel. Marcel, by virtue of having been mentioned in the discourse, is a known referent to both participants. One of the interlocutors now utters the following:

- (1) Eh oui, il est bien gentil, Marcel.  
 ‘Well yes, he’s really nice, Marcel.’

In (1), *Marcel* represents the topic of the utterance: what the utterance is about. In this case, the topic has not changed from the previous discourse. The focus is what is predicated, viz. the assessment of Marcel’s character.

To the discourse participants, *Marcel* represents old information, and the information about his character is new. The distinction between new and old information is central to the study of information structure. Some referents, however, represent neither truly old nor truly new information. For example, the knowledgeable reader of a linguistics article will be unsurprised by a mention of Chomsky but may be surprised by the subsequent mention of Jonas Salk. Neither referent – Chomsky nor Salk – has been mentioned in previous discourse. Consequently, both constitute new information. Yet, given his stature in the field of linguistics, the mention of Chomsky is inferable and unsurprising. Examples such as this led Prince (1981) to refine the binary new–old distinction, providing instead seven nuanced categories (Table 1).

Brand new referents are new to the discourse: They have not been previously mentioned, and a speaker assumes that they represent new information for the hearer. The unanchored/anchored distinction is essentially structural: An anchored referent is linked structurally to a known referent, for instance via a possessive. Unused referents, although unmentioned in previous discourse, are familiar to the hearer because they belong to the hearer’s frame of reference. For instance, the place name *Paris* belongs to the frame of reference of residents of France. Continuing the discussion of Paris, a mention of the *Musée d’Orsay* is new to the discourse but inferable. A containing inferable differs from an inferable only on structural grounds, in that it contains (e.g. in a complex noun phrase) an inferable referent, for instance *the mayor of Paris*. Evoked referents have been

**Table 1** Prince's (1981) information status taxonomy

Category	Properties
brand new unanchored	new to discourse; assumed to be new to hearer
brand new anchored	new to discourse; associated with previous discourse referent
unused	new to discourse; assumed to be familiar to hearer
inferable	new to discourse; logically inferable from previous discourse
containing inferable	new to discourse; contains an inferable referent (e.g., in complex NP)
evoked	overtly evoked in previous discourse
situationally evoked	not evoked in previous discourse but present in discourse environment

**Table 2** Information status: hearer and discourse status

	[+Discourse new]	[-Discourse new]
[+Hearer new]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand-new unanchored</li> <li>• Brand-new anchored</li> </ul>	–
[-Hearer new]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unused</li> <li>• Regular inferable</li> <li>• Containing inferable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textually evoked</li> <li>• Situationally evoked</li> </ul>

mentioned explicitly in previous discourse. Situationally evoked referents are a visible part of the discourse environment, including the setting, building, food, drinks, noises, and the discourse participants themselves.

A refinement from Prince (1992) allows a clean characterization of the behavior of French dislocation, as demonstrated in the next section. Prince (1992) classified the categories from her taxonomy (Prince, 1981) according to whether information was new or old both to the hearer and to the discourse. A slightly adapted version of Prince's (1992) classification is presented in Table 2, in which 'new' is expressed in feature terms as [+new] and 'old' is expressed as [-new].<sup>1</sup>

As an illustration, a brand new (anchored or unanchored) referent is [+Hearer new] because it represents information that is new and not recoverable to the hearer. It is also [+Discourse new] because it has not been previously mentioned. Unused information is likewise [+Discourse new] because it has not been previously mentioned, but it is [-Hearer new], because it is assumed to be part of the hearer's frame of reference, and therefore recoverable. Note that a referent cannot be [-Discourse new] and simultaneously [+Hearer new]. If a referent has been mentioned in the discourse, it is recoverable and therefore [-Hearer new], hence the empty cell in Table 2.

## II Right-dislocation in French

In spoken French, topic and focus can be marked syntactically by deviations from what is considered to be the canonical subject–verb–object order of French (Lambrecht, 1987). For

example, a canonical preverbal subject cannot receive *in situ* focus, unlike a postverbal object (De Cat, 2007). To be focused felicitously, the subject must be clefted (Lambrecht, 1986, 1994, 2001). The variant word order of interest in this study is dislocation, which is the placement of a constituent to the left or right of an independently grammatical clause. Typically – although not exclusively – the clause contains a pronoun that is co-referential with the dislocation. An example of left-dislocation (LD) is given in (2), and RD in (3).

- (2) Le facteur<sub>i</sub>, personne ne l<sub>i</sub>’attendait à cette heure. (Fradin, 1990)  
 ‘The mailman<sub>i</sub>, nobody was expecting him<sub>i</sub> at that hour.’
- (3) *Interviewer:* Votre mari, est-il de la région? (Ashby, 1988)  
 ‘Your husband, is he from the region?’  
*Speaker 78:* Oui, il<sub>i</sub> est de Loches, mon mari<sub>i</sub>.  
 ‘Yes, he is from Loches, my husband.’

The dislocation may be a tonic pronoun, proper noun, full noun phrase, adverbial phrase, prepositional phrase, tensed clause, or infinitival clause (Delais-Roussarie et al., 2004). The dislocation can represent the subject, direct object, or indirect object of the clause, or it may be an adjunct. For referential expressions, the referent must be construable as a discourse topic. Consequently, as De Cat (2007) noted, indefinites are excluded, as in (4), unless they are generic, as in (5).

- (4) # Quelqu’un<sub>i</sub>, il<sub>i</sub> est venu. (De Cat, 2007)  
 ‘Somebody<sub>i</sub>, he<sub>i</sub> came.’
- (5) On leur<sub>i</sub> couperait le cou, à des aristocrates<sub>i</sub>. (De Cat, 2007: 83)  
 ‘We would cut off their<sub>i</sub> heads, of some aristocrats<sub>i</sub>.’

As De Cat (2007) pointed out, the generic indefinite RD in (5) is felicitous in the conditional mood, which allows a generic reading, but not in a temporally specific context (e.g. the present, the future). In (6), the generic indefinite requires the resumptive pronoun *ça* ‘that’ rather than the subject pronoun *elle* ‘she/it’, witness the infelicity of (7).

- (6) Ça<sub>i</sub> coûte cher, une voiture<sub>i</sub>.  
 ‘That<sub>i</sub> costs a lot, a car<sub>i</sub>.’
- (7) # Elle<sub>i</sub> coûte cher, une voiture<sub>i</sub>.  
 ‘It<sub>i</sub> costs a lot, a car<sub>i</sub>.’

It has been claimed (see discussions in Lambrecht, 1981; Barnes, 1985) that RD differs structurally from LD in that, unlike LD, RD must be case-marked, although case-marking can only appear with indirect objects, obliques, and possessives that require a preposition (Ashby, 1988). The data from Ashby (1988; see also Delais-Roussarie et al., 2004) challenge this observation, however, as both case-marked and non-case-marked RDs appear, as in (8) and (9).

- (8) Il va arriver un jour où on en<sub>i</sub> trouvera plus, de ces vieux instruments<sub>i</sub>.  
(Ashby, 1988)  
'There will come a day when you won't find any more of these<sub>i</sub>, of these old tools<sub>i</sub>.'
- (9) On peut pas s'en<sub>i</sub> servir, le reste<sub>i</sub>.  
(Ashby, 1988)  
'We can't use it<sub>i</sub>, the rest<sub>i</sub>.'

In (8), the partitive *en* 'of these' requires the preposition *de* 'of', and the RD is appropriately case-marked with the preposition *de*. However, in (9), in which the RD is linked to the same partitive *en*, the RD lacks the preposition *de* and is therefore not case-marked.

In declaratives, RDs cannot be prosodically stressed. They are characterized by a low flat pitch that decreases in intensity (Ashby, 1994; De Cat, 2007), yielding a lack of prosodic prominence (Lambrecht, 2001). The sequence of the clause plus the RD forms a continuous intonation contour, unlike afterthoughts, which are preceded by a pause (Ziv, 1994). As Ashby (1994) and Delais-Roussarie et al. (2004) showed, differences in the discourse functions of RDs do not change their intonation contour. On the other hand, RDs in interrogatives end with the rising intonation characteristic of interrogatives in general (Delais-Roussarie et al., 2004).

In most cases, only one constituent is right-dislocated, but multiple RDs are possible with a single clause (Lambrecht, 1981; Delais-Roussarie et al., 2004), as in (10). When multiple RDs occur, their order is not structurally constrained (Villalba, 1998; Delais-Roussarie et al., 2004).

- (10) Je<sub>i</sub> le<sub>j</sub> lui<sub>k</sub> donne, moi<sub>i</sub>, le livre<sub>j</sub>, à ton frère<sub>k</sub>. (Delais-Roussarie et al., 2004: 517)  
'I<sub>i</sub> give it<sub>j</sub> to him<sub>k</sub>, me<sub>i</sub>, the book<sub>j</sub>, to your brother<sub>k</sub>.'

The syntactic representation of RD is the subject of ongoing debate.<sup>2</sup> Proponents of a transformational movement include Villalba (1998) and Belletti (2001, 2004). In their analyses, the clausal material moves upward past the RD, which then surfaces in the right-periphery. An alternate view argues that RD is base-generated (Carroll, 1982a; De Cat, 2007). In De Cat's view, both LD and RD are generated *in situ* on the periphery of a discourse projection, whose properties resemble those of a root clause. In this view, RD is essentially a rightward clausal adjunct, and the relationship between the RD and the clause-internal pronoun is referential rather than syntactic (De Cat, 2007).

The present study investigates how RD structures the flow of information in discourse. Regardless of how the grammar generates RD, RD appears in specific discourse conditions to accomplish specific discourse functions. Although RD has been equated with an afterthought added post hoc for clarity (Givón, 1983), Ziv (1994) stressed that RDs are not performance errors. Instead, they are an intentional and planned part of the phrase structure of spoken French (Ziv, 1994; Lambrecht, 2001; Delais-Roussarie et al., 2004).

Both LD and RD are associated with topic: The dislocated referent represents the topic of the utterance. Unlike LD, however, RD cannot encode contrast. Whereas LD signals changes of topic, promotes a non-topical referent to topichood, or marks contrastive topic, RD indicates continuity with a current or immediately previous topic

(Lambrecht, 1981, 2001; Ashby, 1988; de Fornel, 1988; Ziv, 1994). Speakers also use RD to return to a previous topic (Cadiot, 1992; Ziv, 1994) and to encode situationally evoked referents (Ashby, 1988; Ziv, 1994). Lambrecht (1981), Calvé (1983), and Cadiot (1992) all concur that referents in RD demonstrate a higher degree of recoverability than those in LD. It follows that RD cannot introduce new referents into the discourse.

French RD is restricted to certain types of discourse referents. As the data from the native speakers in the present corpus will confirm, French RD accepts unused, inferable and containing inferable, and evoked and situationally evoked referents. On the other hand, brand new (anchored or unanchored) referents are infelicitous in RD. Reference to Prince's (1992) classification of discourse referents (see Table 2 and previous discussion) shows that unused, inferable and containing inferable, and evoked and situationally evoked referents are uniquely defined as a class by the feature [-Hearer new]. In contrast, the referents that are disallowed – brand new anchored and brand new unanchored – both represent [+Hearer new] information in Prince's (1992) schema. The behavior of French RD respects the following constraint:

- (11) RDs may not encode [+Hearer new] information.

Right-dislocation is a topic construction, as is LD. However, whereas topic is foregrounded in LD, it is backgrounded in RD, such that the focus of the utterance is rendered salient (Carroll, 1982b; Calvé, 1983; Ziv, 1994; Villalba, 1998; Delais-Roussarie et al., 2004). In this sense, RD is a focus construction with an incidental mention of topic (Delais-Roussarie et al., 2004). With RD, a speaker both emphasizes the interesting and novel contribution of the utterance (focus) and simultaneously signals topic. In some cases, RD encodes referents that appear unpredictable in light of the discourse context, but the referent, which necessarily represents [-Hearer new] information, is in fact recoverable from the hearer's perspective (see Delais-Roussarie et al., 2004). Finally, Ashby (1988) and Calvé (1983) both reported that RD often co-occurs with interrogatives.

Descriptions of French RD necessarily make reference to LD, on account of structural similarities and the shared connection with topic. Although LD and RD both occur commonly in spoken discourse, corpus-based research reveals LD to be substantially more frequent than RD: Ashby (1988) found 862 tokens of LD to only 226 tokens of RD. The present corpus yields similar results, with 883 LDs and 202 RDs.

The use of dislocations depends on language register: Dislocations are characteristic of informal spoken French rather than written French or formal, planned discourse (Lambrecht, 1981; Carroll, 1982a, 1982b; Barnes, 1985; Ashby, 1988). This sensitivity to register has implications for research method and data collection. In the present study, informal spoken French is taken to be the register in which one may find some, if not all, of the following features:

- deletion of the negative particle *ne* (Ashby, 2001; Coveney, 2002);
- non-standard interrogative structures (Coveney, 2002);
- lexical innovations such as truncation (George, 1993);
- phonologically reduced clitic pronouns (George, 1993);
- /l/ deletion in third-person singular and plural subject pronouns (George, 1993);

- null objects (Fónagy, 1985);
- particles like *enfin* ‘well’ (Beeching, 2001);
- first-person plural *nous* ‘we’ replaced by *on* ‘one’ (Lebel, 1991), and informal lexical items and slang expressions.<sup>3</sup>

### III Second language acquisition

#### I Dislocation in L2 French

Despite their role in constructing coherent spoken discourse, little work has focused on the L2 acquisition of French dislocations, perhaps because they represent a departure from normative grammar (Coppieters, 1987). Nevertheless, Barnes (1990) rightly highlighted the importance of dislocation for successful L2 communication in French (see also Katz and Blyth, 2007), although they are rarely taught (Barnes, 1985, 1990; Kerr, 2002). Several studies have examined the acquisition of dislocations by early and intermediate L2 learners of European French.<sup>4</sup> Trévisé (1986) and Perdue et al. (1992) both used interactive spoken data. Trévisé (1986) analysed interviews between instructed Spanish and English learners and native French speakers. The learners (age and proficiency not given) produced numerous examples of LD but only two tokens of RD (group total). The study is nevertheless a valuable examination of authentic interactive data, and although the learners used little RD, they had acquired some types of syntactic topic marking. Perdue et al. (1992) examined interviews with four naturalistic adult learners of French (L1s = Moroccan Arabic, Spanish). Each participant produced at least some tokens of RD or structures closely resembling RD; despite formal inaccuracies, the learners’ appeared sensitive to topic structures in the input.

Other studies have examined the acquisition of LD (as well as clefts) by L2 learners of French but do not report on RD. One limitation common to the following studies is that the data came from narrative retells rather than interactive discourse. Hendriks (2000) examined adult Chinese learners of French, whose proficiency was not noted. Neither the learners nor the native controls produced large numbers of topic structures, although the learners produced enough tokens to lead Hendriks to conclude that the learners grasped the discourse properties of LD. Kerr (2002) examined the production of LD and the presentational *avoir*-cleft in early and advanced learners who were further divided according to amount of study abroad experience. Kerr found a marked increase in the use of *avoir*-clefts and LD after time abroad, a finding that attests to the role of authentic L2 exposure. Ferdinand (2002) studied Dutch secondary school learners of French. Although the learners used LD to mark topic in the narrative retells, their production – like that of the native controls – was not robust, probably due to the choice of elicitation task. Sleeman (2004) replicated Ferdinand’s (2002) test with advanced university-level Dutch learners of French. Like Kerr (2002), Sleeman found that increased exposure to authentic French led to higher use of LD.

Taken together, these studies suggest that learners show sensitivity to dislocations in the French input from the earliest stages of acquisition, and that they produce LD with some frequency, as well as sporadic tokens of RD. By contrast, little is known about the acquisition and mastery of RD – and discourse organization more generally – by very advanced L2ers and near-natives.

## 2 Near-nativeness

Research on adult L2 learners with apparently near-native abilities yields conflicting claims. Coppiters' (1987) seminal study of French near-natives examined subtle grammatical properties by means of a grammaticality judgment task (GJT) and concluded that the underlying grammatical representations of the near-natives differed fundamentally from those of the natives. However, Birdsong (1992), who replicated Coppiters (1987), reached the opposite conclusion, arguing that the near-natives' grammars fundamentally resembled the natives. White and Genesee (1996) reported that response times from near-native speakers of English did not differ significantly from the native controls on a timed GJT that examined effects related to subadjacency and the Empty Category Principle. Furthermore, White and Genesee found no effects for the age of first exposure to the L2. Birdsong and Molis (2001), however, found that earlier exposure to the L2 resulted in more nativelike performance. In at least some cases, L2 speakers appear capable of nativelike mastery, although Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam (2008) consider such cases to be exceptional, due to unusually high language aptitude.

Sorace (e.g. 1993, 2000, 2003, 2005) and colleagues have drawn attention to the syntax–pragmatics interface. Sorace (1993) studied French and English near-native speakers of Italian. To probe the near-natives' understanding of unaccusativity in Italian, she elicited judgments of phrases that involved auxiliary-verb selection. Sorace reported two forms of deficits in the near-native grammars:

- divergence from the native grammar, in which the near-native judgments differed significantly from the natives; and
- incompleteness of the near-native grammar, in which the near-natives could produce only indeterminate judgments.

The L1 modulated the type of deficit: the French learners showed divergence, whereas the English learners showed incompleteness. In subsequent work, Sorace (e.g. 1999, 2000, 2003, 2005) reported residual optionality in near-natives. The targetlike form may be licensed in the L2 grammar, but not categorically as in the native grammar, and the targetlike form alternates with an infelicitous form. This optionality is claimed to be permanent in the near-native grammar, which may appear nativelike in other aspects. Importantly, however, optionality does not surface randomly in the grammar but rather at interfaces between different modules of linguistic competence, such as syntax and pragmatics. This observation underlies the Interface Hypothesis (Sorace, 2005; Sorace and Filiaci, 2006; Sorace and Serratrice, 2009). With respect to near-nativeness, the broad claim advanced in the Interface Hypothesis is that, whereas the syntactic competence and pragmatic competence themselves may be unimpaired, vulnerability exists when the two are combined. The coordination of syntactic and discourse–pragmatic knowledge is an external interface (Tsimplici and Sorace, 2006; Sorace and Serratrice, 2009): Information from a module internal to the grammar (syntax) interfaces with an external domain (discourse). According to the Interface Hypothesis, although internal interfaces (e.g. syntax–semantics) may be acquired completely (Tsimplici and Sorace,

2006; Sorace and Serratrice, 2009), external interfaces may not be acquirable to native-like levels and are predicted to remain the locus of non-targetlike performance and L1 influence, even in near-natives.

Sorace and Filiaci (2006) reported that English near-native speakers of Italian differed from natives in interpreting Italian subject pronouns. The differences occurred with the interpretation of overt – but not null – subject pronouns, for which the near-natives were hypothesized to have a divergent assignment of the feature [ $\pm$ Topic Shift]. Whereas for native speakers, overt subject pronouns strictly and uniquely carry the feature [+Topic Shift], the near-natives infelicitously allowed both [+Topic Shift] and [–Topic Shift]. In Sorace and Filiaci’s view, the near-natives lacked adequate processing resources to coordinate the information necessary to arrive at a nativelike interpretation and instead relied on a default interpretation guided by L1 principles.

Similar results were reported by Belletti et al. (2007), who also examined English near-native speakers of Italian. Belletti et al. examined null and overt (pronominal) subjects and also postverbal subjects in Italian. As in Sorace and Filiaci (2006), the near-natives overused overt pronominal subjects compared to the native controls. The near-natives also differed from the natives in their use of postverbal subjects. Whereas the natives used postverbal subjects to indicate focus, the near-natives preferred the preverbal subject position in all contexts. This is not to say that the near-natives avoided postverbal subjects altogether. In fact, they were able to produce postverbal subjects and even displayed a nativelike preference for postverbal subjects when the subject was indefinite. However, the near-natives’ production of postverbal subjects was far below the native norm. Furthermore, the near-natives’ preference for indefinite subjects, although in the nativelike direction, was quite weak. As the authors pointed out, the near-natives’ performance indicated the continued presence of a L1-based system of discourse organization.

Not all studies on external interfaces in advanced L2 have found support for the Interface Hypothesis. Ivanov (2009) examined the L2 acquisition of clitic doubling in Bulgarian, in which topics – but not focused constituents – can be fronted and clitic doubled. The participants were intermediate and advanced English-speaking learners of Bulgarian. On a GJT, the advanced group converged on the native performance. The intermediate group, however, demonstrated incomplete acquisition of the relevant constraints. Ivanov’s data show that the syntactic and pragmatic knowledge relevant to this feature of Bulgarian can be successfully integrated, at least by advanced learners. Logically, near-native performance should match or exceed the advanced learners. Rothman (2009), in a study of the distribution of overt and null subject pronouns in L2 Spanish, argued that the acquisition of interface phenomena is delayed until late stages of acquisition but can ultimately be accomplished without permanent optionality, a finding corroborated by Hopp (2010).

Further investigations of near-native competence are warranted to explore the characteristics and abilities of the most successful L2 learners. There is relatively little work on the L2 acquisition of French LD and virtually no work on RDs in L2 French. The present study aims both to contribute to our knowledge of how RD is acquired in L2 French and to add to the debate surrounding the Interface Hypothesis by examining an aspect of near-native performance at the syntax–pragmatics interface.

## IV Study

This study examines intuitions about RD and aspects of how RD is used in spontaneous conversation by near-native speakers of French. The following properties of RD will serve as diagnostics for evaluations of nativelikeness.

- (12) Formal accuracy: RDs must be co-referential with a resumptive pronoun inside the clause with which the RD is associated. Because Ashby (1988) showed that case-marking is variable in native French RD, the presence of case-marking with indirect objects, obliques, and possessives is not taken into consideration.
- (13) Contrast: RD, unlike LD, cannot be used to signal contrast or emphasis.
- (14) Prosodic emphasis (in assertions): RD cannot be prosodically stressed in assertions.
- (15) Information structure: RD cannot encode [+Hearer new] information, viz. brand new anchored or brand new unanchored referents.

Because RD implicates the interface between syntax and discourse and because RD is subject to interpretive restrictions based on discourse organization, its acquisition and use constitute an appropriate testing ground for the Interface Hypothesis. Furthermore, RD is associated with topic, like the more frequently encountered LD. However, RD differs crucially from LD in that it cannot encode contrast. According to the predictions of the Interface Hypothesis, intuitions about RD and the use of RD by near-native speakers will be marked by optionality.

- Hypothesis 1 concerns formal accuracy. Because the formal accuracy of RD – viz., the presence of a right-dislocated constituent and a co-referential clause-internal pronoun – is the domain of narrow syntax, difficulties are not predicted.
- Hypothesis 2 regards the mapping of RD to discourse structure. It is predicted that the near-natives will accept RD in (infelicitous) contrastive contexts in two experimental tasks. It is also predicted that the near-natives will use RD contrastively (like LD) and, finally, that they will prosodically emphasize RD (at least in contrastive contexts).
- Hypothesis 3 also concerns the mapping of RD to discourse structure. It is predicted that near-natives will violate the constraint against [+Hearer new] information. That is, they will use RD with brand new (anchored or unanchored) referents.

In broad terms, it is predicted that the near-natives will evince incomplete or divergent knowledge of how RD functions in French discourse.

### 1 Participants

The near-native participants were 10 adult learners of French retained from an initial pool of about 20 candidates. The near-natives retained for the study were those that met all the following criteria:

- spoke English as the L1;
- self-described ‘very high level’ mastery of French;
- began learning French at age 10 or later;<sup>5</sup> and
- had lived in France for at least three continuous years.

Age was not a criterion, and the near-natives were between 26 and 70 years old (mean = 44.2). Recruitment was through local networking and posted public announcements. These participants were classified as near-native on the basis of their performance on a partial replication of Birdsong’s (1992) GJT (see below).

Ten native speakers of French were also included in the study. The native controls were nominated for participation in the study by the near-natives; each native speaker was a friend, spouse or partner, or other close acquaintance of one of the near-natives, to facilitate an informal register in the conversational recordings. All the natives were from France, and none reported being bilingual from birth, although several had acquired knowledge of an L2 as adults. The natives were aged between 31 and 65 years of age (mean = 49.5). The data were collected in or around major cities in France, and a modest monetary compensation was offered.

## 2 Instruments

The near-natives completed a background questionnaire with demographic questions (based partly on Freed et al., 2004) at the beginning of the study as well as a questionnaire about their use of French in everyday contexts, given at the end of the study. The natives completed a questionnaire over demographic information and L2 knowledge.

*a Replication of Birdsong (1992):* To facilitate future replicability and comparability with previous studies of near-natives, and to avoid an arbitrary classification of proficiency, the near-natives (and natives alike) completed a partial replication of the GJT from Birdsong (1992), which tests seven subtle properties of French grammar (given in its entirety in the appendix of Birdsong, 1992). The present study differed from Birdsong (1992) by not collecting think-aloud data and by using three randomized versions of the instrument to avoid potential ordering effects.

*b Experimental tasks:* Two tasks tested intuitions about the use of RD in discourse. Both tasks were administered after the conversational recordings (see below) to postpone awareness of the intent of the study. Both tasks also contained items designed to test *c’est*-clefts and *avoir*-clefts; these data are not discussed here. The items were based on authentic native usage and were designed in collaboration with French native speaker consultants.

Task 1 was a felicity judgment task: Participants judged the felicity of phrases that contained a RD. Each item contained a context that presented two characters, followed by a prompt in the form of an utterance from one of the characters. Each item was presented both aurally via audio CD and on paper. The audio component was intended to avoid the possibility of varying prosodic interpretations across participants (see Fodor, 2002). A response to the prompt was provided, and the participants were asked to judge the felicity of this response by indicating whether or not the response seemed ‘natural’. Possible responses were ‘yes’, ‘no’, and ‘I don’t know.’<sup>6</sup>

Task 1 contained 60 items, of which 20 were distracters. Of the remaining items, 10 items each tested *c'est*-clefts, *avoir*-clefts, LD, and RD. Of the 10 RD items (see Appendix 1), five items paired contexts designed to favor RD with responses containing a RD; these items were intended to be felicitous. The remaining five items paired contexts designed to favor RD with responses containing a LD; these items were anticipated to be infelicitous. The contexts in LD items all contained contrastive topics or topic shifts (see, for example, Lambrecht, 1981; Barnes, 1985; Ashby, 1988). The contexts in the RD items all contained non-contrastive situationally evoked referents (preferentially encoded in a RD; see, for example, Ashby, 1988; Ziv, 1994) in assertions and interrogatives. Each item was separated by a 10-second pause on the audio track. The task took approximately 27 minutes to complete, and three randomized versions were used. In the item in (16), the response, which contains a RD, was anticipated to be felicitous. Note that *ta cravate* 'your tie' is situationally evoked and therefore [-Hearer new]. The constraint against [+Hearer new] information is respected, and the situationally evoked referent appears in a RD, as native speaker preferences suggest it should (see Ashby, 1988).

- (16) Gérard espère que sa femme Pauline sera prête à partir dans peu de temps. Quelques minutes plus tard, Pauline descend l'escalier pour rejoindre Gérard. Quand il la voit, Gérard lui dit:  
 – *Alors, on peut y aller?*  
 Dès qu'elle voit Gérard, Pauline lui répond:  
 – ***Oui j'arrive. Mais attends, Gérard! Ça ne va pas, ta cravate!***  
 La réponse (**en gras**) vous semble-t-elle naturelle dans ce contexte?  
**OUI**                      **NON**                      **je ne sais pas**

Gérard hopes that his wife Pauline will be ready to leave very soon. Several minutes later, Pauline comes down the stairs to join Gérard. When he sees her, Gerard says:

– *Okay, can we go?*

As soon as she sees Gérard, Pauline responds:

– ***Yes, I'm coming. But wait, Gérard! It doesn't look good, your tie!***

Does the response (**in bold**) seem natural to you in this context?

**YES**                      **NO**                      I don't know

Task 2 tested preferences for the use of RD vs. LD in contexts designed to favor RD. Of the 60 items, 20 were distracters, 20 tested *c'est*-clauses vs. *avoir*-clauses, and 20 tested LD vs. RD (for LD and RD items, see Appendix 1). Like Task 1, Task 2 was presented both on paper and aurally via audio CD. For each item, participants read and heard a context and a prompt. The prompt was followed by two possible responses. The content of the two responses was identical; they differed structurally only by whether they contained a RD or a LD. The participants were instructed to indicate which response they felt was the most natural in the context. A response of 'undecided' was also available. In 10 of the 20 items that tested dislocations, the context was designed to facilitate the RD response. In these items, it was anticipated that the participants would prefer the RD response over the LD response. The other 10 items presented the opposite situation; the context was

designed to facilitate the LD response rather than the RD response. Three randomizations were employed, and each randomization was further divided into two versions to counter-balance a first-response bias: In the first version, the responses were presented in the order LD–RD; this order was reversed in the second version. Task 2 took approximately 31 minutes to complete. An item in which the RD response was anticipated to be felicitous is given in (17), followed here by an English gloss. The RD in response (b), *ce sac* ‘this bag’, is situationally evoked; it is also a continuation of the topic established in the prompt.

- (17) Jeanne et son fils Bertrand font des courses au marché. Jeanne est sur le point de payer des courgettes et elle demande à Bertrand de tenir son sac:

– *Tu tiens le sac s’il te plaît.*

Prenant le sac, Bertrand lui répond:

a. *Oh ce sac il est lourd!*

b. *Oh il est lourd ce sac!*

Laquelle de ces réponses est *la plus naturelle* dans ce contexte?

A        B        INDÉCIS(E)

Jeanne and her son Bertrand are shopping at the market. Jeanne is just about to pay for some zucchini and she asks Bertrand to hold her bag:

– *Hold the bag please.*

Taking the bag, Bertrand responds:

a. *Oh this bag it’s heavy!*

b. *Oh it’s heavy this bag!*

Which of these responses is the *most natural* in this context?

A        B        UNDECIDED

c *Corpus data*: Spontaneous production data were collected from unguided informal dyadic conversations between each near-native and his or her native interlocutor. Each conversation lasted between 45 and 58 minutes and was digitally recorded in a participant’s home or other quiet setting. Once the recording equipment was set up, only the two participants were present, and no topics for discussion were prescribed. The corpus, fully transcribed following the conventions in Jefferson (2004), contains approximately 8.5 hours of conversation and about 77,300 words, excluding non-lexical backchannels (e.g. *eah*, *mm hmm*, *ah*, etc.) and interjections. Each instance of RD was coded for a number of formal and discursive features, and 10% of the data were independently recoded by another researcher (interrater reliability = 93.1%).<sup>7</sup>

As discussed previously, dislocations occur in informal spoken French rather than in formal registers. The corpus was examined to ensure that it contained an informal register. The production of each participant was examined for instances of *ne*-deletion, non-standard interrogatives, lexical truncation, phonologically reduced clitic pronouns, //deletion, null objects, the discourse particles *enfin* and *hein*, *on* for *nous*, and informal lexical items or slang. A single token of each informal trait in question was considered sufficient to attest the speaker’s ability to produce it; a quantitative (sociolinguistic) analysis is left for future research. All the speakers (near-native and native) produced examples of at least eight of the 10 traits. The robust presence of LD (883 in total) offers further evidence that an informal register was obtained.

## V Results

### 1 Replication of Birdsong (1992)

The replication of Birdsong's 76-item GJT was used only to serve as a benchmark measure of grammatical competence and to allow a comparison with the participants in a widely cited study on near-native speakers of French. In the present study, the responses of the near-natives were compared to those of the natives (present study); no direct comparisons were made between the participants here and those reported in Birdsong (1992). In Birdsong (1992), the natives and near-natives differed significantly in their responses to 17 of the 76 items, a small enough number to lead Birdsong to conclude that the near-native grammars were underlyingly nativelike. In the present study, significant differences between the near-native and native response means were found on only 5 of the 76 items. The near-natives reported here are therefore argued to possess a level of grammatical competence equal – if not superior – to those reported in Birdsong (1992).

### 2 Task 1

The response patterns of the near-native and native speakers did not differ statistically on any of the 10 items designed to test intuitions about RD, although the results approached significance on one item,  $\chi^2(1, N = 18) = 3.60, p = .058$ .

### 3 Task 2

No significant differences were found between the response patterns of the near-natives and natives on any of the 10 items where the RD responses were anticipated to be preferred or on any of the 10 items where the RD items were anticipated to be dispreferred, nor did any of these items approach significance. Note that on both tasks, the near-natives' responses were compared to those of the natives, whether or not the natives responded as anticipated by the researcher.

### 4 Corpus

*a Production:* Although the data from the tasks suggest that the near-natives possess nativelike intuitions about the role of RD in discourse, they do not speak to the near-natives' ability to deploy RD in spontaneous informal conversation. The fact that tasks such as those just discussed lack a truly interactive component (see Sorace, 1985; Trévisé, 1986) motivated the corpus-based section of the study.

As discussed, the language of the corpus shows evidence of an informal register in all 10 dyads. Because RD occurs in informal registers (Barnes, 1985), it was anticipated that, if the near-natives were capable of using RD, the register in the corpus should favor its appearance. The corpus data confirm this expectation. All the near-natives produced multiple tokens of RD; individual production ranged from a low of 3 to a high of 11 tokens. Similarly, all the natives produced RD, with individual production ranging from a low of 4 to a high of 28 tokens. As a group, the near-natives produced a total of 66 RDs, and the natives produced a total of 136 RDs. The individual production data are given in Table 3.

**Table 3** Production of RD: Near-native speakers and native speakers

<i>Near-native speakers:<sup>a</sup></i>	
A1	3
A2	4
A3	10
A4	11
A5	10
A6	7
A7	4
A8	7
A9	7
A10	3
<i>Native speakers:<sup>b</sup></i>	
F1	28
F2	18
F3	12
F4	20
F5	4
F6	10
F7	11
F8	12
F9	15
F10	6

Notes: <sup>a</sup>  $n = 66$ ,  $M = 6.6$ ,  $SD = 2.9$ ; <sup>b</sup>  $n = 136$ ,  $M = 13.6$ ,  $SD = 6.7$

**Table 4** Production and grammatical distribution of RDs: Near-native speakers

	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10	Total
Subject	3	3	9	9	9	7	3	7	5	3	58
Direct object	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	4
Indirect object	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Multiple RD	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	3	4	10	11	10	7	4	7	7	3	66

*b Formal accuracy:* There were no instances of formal inaccuracy in the near-natives' RD.

*c Constituent types in RD:* In this corpus, all the constituents placed in a RD were subjects, direct objects, or indirect objects. Other types of RD – although possible in native French (see, for example, Delais-Roussarie et al., 2004) – did not occur in this corpus, in either the near-native or native production. In addition, it is possible – although rare in the present corpus – to right-dislocate more than one constituent. Tables 4 and 5 detail the distribution of RDs across different types of grammatical categories for the near-native and native speakers, respectively.

As Tables 4 and 5 show, most of the RDs for both groups of speakers were used to encode a subject. To ascertain whether or not the two groups used RD in similar proportions to encode subjects, direct objects, and indirect objects, the individual data were

**Table 5** Production and grammatical distribution of RDs: Native speakers

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10	Total
Subject	27	16	10	20	3	8	9	10	15	6	124
Direct object	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	2	0	0	9
Indirect object	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
Multiple RD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	28	18	12	20	4	10	11	12	15	6	136

**Table 6** Distribution of RDs across grammatical role in the corpus: Near-native speakers, native speakers and corpus total (percentages in parentheses)

	Speaker group		Corpus total
	Near-natives	Natives	
Subject RD	58 (87.9)	124 (91.2)	182 (90.1)
Direct object RD	4 (6.1)	9 (6.6)	13 (6.4)
Indirect object RD	3 (4.6)	3 (2.2)	6 (3.0)
RDs (all)	66 (100.0)	136 (100.0)	202 (100.0)

aggregated for each group, and the marginal multiple RD category was excluded. The aggregate data are given in Table 6.

The near-natives did not differ significantly from the natives in the types of constituents that they right-dislocated, and the proportions of their total RD production used with these different types of constituents matched those of the natives,  $\chi^2(2, N = 6) = 0.89$ ,  $p = .642$ . That is, the near-natives mirrored the natives with respect to the proportions of RDs allocated to subjects, direct objects, and indirect objects.

*d Discourse functions:* Let us turn to how RD was used with respect to discourse function. Each RD in the corpus was analysed for contrast and also for prosodic emphasis. As anticipated, none of the natives used RD contrastively. Among the near-natives, only one speaker (A9) used RD contrastively (one token only, discussed below). Although RD cannot encode contrast, it can signal topic shift, especially with evoked referents. Both the natives and near-natives use RD in this way: Non-contrastive topic shifts account for 30.7% of the near-natives' felicitous RDs (20 of 65 tokens; 1 contrastive token excluded). This figure closely matches that of the natives, who used 27.9% of their RDs (38 of 136 tokens) in this way. Nonetheless, although RD can signal topic shift, speakers use it far more often to signal topic continuity: RDs that signal topic continuity account for 69.2% of the near-natives' felicitous RDs (45 of 65 tokens) and 72.1% of the natives' RDs (98 of 136 tokens).

As mentioned, one near-native (A9) violated the restriction against contrast in one token. The RD in question, unambiguously contrastive, is given in (18); the capital letters indicate prosodic emphasis (see following discussion).

- (18) Il a dit il va falloir que je l<sub>i</sub>'aide ELLE<sub>i</sub> et j'avais besoin de quelqu'un qui m'aidait moi.

‘He said it’s going to be necessary for me to help HER and I needed somebody who could help me.’

The discourse makes it clear that the RD *elle* ‘her’ is contrastive. At question is who needs assistance; A9 is citing an overworked acquaintance who is saddled with an unhelpful assistant at work. The RD is used infelicitously to signal that it is in fact the assistant who needs help. The utterance in (18) ends with a further RD that participates in the contrast. The felicity of this RD is less clear. Although it appears to signal contrast (*moi* ‘me’ vs. *elle* ‘her’ in the previous RD), it does not carry prosodic stress like the immediately preceding example with *elle*. Furthermore, the *moi* continues the overarching discourse topic, which is the professional situation of the speaker (and not the assistant). The example bears a close resemblance to a *moi*-RD in a corpus of native French, cited by Ashby (1988) and given here as (19). Ashby analyses the RD as contrastive; the context, as described by Ashby, is a story in which the speaker, working as a server at a restaurant, one day dropped a bowl of soup.

- (19) Un jour, oui, j’arrive en salle, puis je suis tombé. Le potage par terre. Tout le monde a rigolé. Je<sub>i</sub> rigolais pas, moi<sub>i</sub>. (Ashby, 1988: 218)  
 ‘One day, yes, I come into the room, then I fell. Soup on the floor. Everybody laughed. I wasn’t laughing, me.’

Although Ashby claimed the RD (*je rigolais pas, moi*) to be contrastive, I believe an alternate analysis is more plausible. In Ashby’s analysis, the speaker contrasts himself with the others (*tout le monde* ‘everybody’). However, the discourse topic of the entire passage is the speaker and the speaker’s experience in the restaurant. The fact that everybody else laughed is still part of the speaker’s experience. When the speaker utters *je rigolais pas, moi*, the new information (focus) is conveyed by the negative adverb *pas*. What is contrasted here is neither the speaker, nor the laughter, but rather the negation of the clause: the fact that the speaker was not laughing. If the speaker had wished to contrast himself from the others, he would have used a LD: *Moi, je rigolais pas* ‘Me, I wasn’t laughing.’ The difference between the LD and RD options is subtle but important: The RD variant actually uttered in (19) is best analysed, following Delais-Roussarie et al. (2004), as a focus construction with an incidental mention of topic. That is, the focus, which receives prosodic stress, is the negative adverb *pas*, and the *moi*-RD is an incidental mention of topic. In contrast, in the putative LD variant, the LD signals contrastive topic, and the negation of the utterance is less salient than in the RD example. The second RD in speaker A9’s utterance in (18) is compatible with such an analysis as well. This leaves one indisputably contrastive example of RD in A9’s speech: the first RD in (18).

The discourse confirmed that this token was contrastive, and prosodic evidence offers further support. The initial analysis of prosody in the corpus was impressionistic; doubtful cases were subsequently discussed with a native speaker consultant with advanced training in phonetics and then analysed acoustically with Praat (Boersma and Weenink, 2010). In the native speaker production, the prosody of RD in assertions uniformly presented the low flat pitch described in the literature (e.g. Ashby, 1994; Delais-Roussarie et al., 2004); the RDs in interrogatives evinced the characteristic final pitch rise. These observations held true for the near-natives’ RDs with the exception of the contrastive RD produced by A9 in (18).

The RD *elle* in (18) contains a considerably lengthened syllable and also an elevated fundamental frequency (F0). To establish a baseline measure, speaker A9's average F0 and average syllable length were measured. Four extracts were taken from the beginning, middle, and end of her conversational recording. The extracts were chosen in areas of the conversation where A9 was speaking alone without interruption from her interlocutor. The four extracts had durations of 84, 72, 80, and 130 seconds, respectively. Fundamental frequency was measured every 30 milliseconds; the 8,907 resulting measures were averaged to determine an average F0 of 253 Hz ( $SD = 87$  Hz). A9's average syllable length was calculated across 100 syllables from the same four extracts. A9's average syllable length was 190 milliseconds ( $SD = 80$  milliseconds). In French, syllable length is relatively consistent throughout the intonation phrase, until the last syllable, which is roughly double in length (Delattre, 1949). In native French, the RD *elle* in (18) would show neither a lengthened syllable nor a raised F0 with respect to the preceding segments. In A9's case, however, the syllable that contains the RD *elle* has a duration of 520 milliseconds, nearly three times A9's average syllable length of 190 milliseconds. The F0 of *elle*, which measures 466 Hz, is nearly double A9's average of 253 Hz. The increased syllable length, combined with the heightened F0, represents an infelicitous prosodic emphasis on the RD.

Recall that native use of RD, in addition to prohibiting contrast, also excludes [+Hearer new] referents. This entails that RD can encode unused, inferable (regular and containing), and evoked (including situationally evoked) referents, but not brand new (anchored and unanchored) referents. It has also been noted by Lambrecht (1981) and Barnes (1985), among others, that RD is most often found with highly recoverable discourse referents. Consequently, in the native speaker data, the prediction is that no RDs will contain brand new referents and that a large proportion of RDs will contain evoked referents, given that they represent the most recoverable category of information status. This expectation is borne out in the native speaker data but also, contrary to expectation, in the near-native data, as reported in Table 7. Note that several of Prince's (1981) information status categories are conflated when the difference is structural rather than discourse-pragmatic. Thus, brand new unanchored and brand new anchored are combined as brand new. Similarly, the categories of inferable and containing inferable are combined as inferable, and evoked and situationally evoked are combined as evoked. The crucial observation is that the near-natives show no violations of the restriction against [+Hearer new] referents. In fact, the near-natives mirrored the natives in their strong

**Table 7** Information status of referents in all RDs: Near-native speakers and native speakers (percentages in parentheses)

	Near-natives	Natives
Brand new	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Unused	2 (2.0)	7 (5.2)
Inferable	14 (21.2)	10 (7.4)
Evoked	50 (75.8)	119 (87.5)
Total	66 (100.0)	136 (100.0)

preference for placing evoked referents in RD. In both groups, inferable referents are the next most frequent use of RD, followed by unused referents.

Beyond the question of contrast, it has been suggested by Ashby (1988) and Calvé (1983) that RD appears frequently in interrogatives, although neither author provides a quantitative analysis. If these claims are correct, they imply that RD should be used more frequently than LD in interrogatives, a hypothesis that can be explored in the data from the present corpus. If RD enjoys no special association with interrogatives, then it should pattern like LD with respect to proportions of use in declaratives vs. interrogatives.

The data from the natives confirm Ashby's (1988) and Calvé's (1983) observations, and the data from the near-natives pattern nearly identically with those of the natives. In both groups, RD occurred in interrogatives significantly more frequently than LD did. The natives produced a total of 473 LDs, of which only 15 (3.2%) were in interrogatives. By contrast, the natives used 33 of their 136 RDs (24.3%) in interrogatives; the difference in the proportion of RDs vs. LDs used with interrogatives is significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 4) = 50.18, p < .05$ . The near-natives present a very similar pattern: out of 410 total LDs (discussed in Donaldson, 2011), only 12 (2.9%) occurred in interrogatives. However, of the near-natives' 66 RDs, 14 (21.2%) occurred in interrogatives. As in the native data, the difference in the proportion of RDs vs. LDs used with interrogatives is significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 4) = 29.42, p < .05$ . The present data confirm that one functional difference between French LD and RD is the association of RD with interrogatives.

The near-natives used 21.2% of their RDs (14 of 66 tokens) in interrogatives, and the natives used 24.3% of their RDs (33 of 136 tokens) in interrogatives. The proportions of RDs used in interrogatives did not differ between the two groups,  $\chi^2(1, N = 4) = .146, p = .70$ . The near-natives demonstrated a nativelike association of RD and interrogatives.

## VI Discussion

The results obtained are not predicted by the Interface Hypothesis. Almost without exception, the near-natives failed to display the types of non-nativeness (indeterminate intuitions, divergent intuitions, optionality, etc.) that have been documented in previous investigations of external interface phenomena (e.g. Sorace, 1993; Sorace and Filiaci, 2006; Tsimpili and Sorace, 2006; Valenzuela, 2006; Belletti et al., 2007; Sorace and Serratrice, 2009).

Hypothesis 1 concerned the formal accuracy of RD. The near-native speakers were not predicted to have difficulties with the formal structure of RD, which implicates narrow syntax alone rather than the syntax–discourse interface. As expected, the near-natives' RDs in the corpus were targetlike with respect to form, thus confirming Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 related to the interface of RD and discourse function. It was predicted that the near-natives would (1) infelicitously accept RD in contrastive or emphatic contexts, (2) produce contrastive RD and (3) prosodically stress RD. Both the experimental and conversational data bear on Hypothesis 2. On Task 1 (felicity judgments), participants judged whether or not phrases that contained a RD or a LD were felicitous in the given discourse context. To demonstrate nativelike intuitions, the near-natives had to both accept the felicitous items and reject the infelicitous items. The near-natives' response patterns were statistically indistinguishable from those of the natives on Task 1.

The results attest to neither divergent nor incomplete knowledge of these aspects of RD use; this result is unanticipated if the near-natives did not possess a nativelike mastery of the discursive role of RD.

Similarly, in Task 2, participants indicated whether they preferred a response with a RD or a LD in a given context. Again, if the near-natives used RD contrastively or were otherwise unable to distinguish between the functions of LD and RD, their responses should have included indeterminate (chance) or divergent preferences with respect to the native-speaker controls. The results of Task 2 suggest otherwise.

The conversational data corroborate the experimental findings. With the exception of speaker A9, the near-natives did not produce contrastive RD or prosodically emphasize RD. That is, the near-natives other than A9 demonstrated nativelike mastery of the restriction against contrast in RD as well as the prosodic restrictions on RD. The fact that A9 produced an isolated case of a contrastive RD, accompanied by strong prosodic stress on the RD, is probably due to transfer from L1 English, in which prosodic stress marks focus (Selkirk, 1984; Ladd, 1996). English differs from French by allowing prosodic stress to fall on any word of an utterance (Vallduví, 1992). Speaker A9's prosodically focused RD is consistent with other instances in which she marks focus with *in situ* prosodic stress, discussed in Donaldson (forthcoming). Speaker A9's L2 grammar in most cases produces RDs that respect the native French constraints but occasionally resorts to a L1-based strategy. This is precisely the type of optionality predicted by the Interface Hypothesis and described in Sorace and Filiaci (2006), Tsimpli and Sorace (2006), Valenzuela (2006), and Belletti et al. (2007). What is striking in the present study, however, is that the evidence of non-nativeness is restricted to just one speaker. If external interfaces are as difficult to acquire in L2 as current formulations of Interface Hypothesis seem to imply, then one would reasonably expect more of the near-natives, if not the entire group, to evince behavior similar to that of A9. Instead, the results suggest that, although L1 interference sometimes affects L2 performance at the syntax–discourse interface, it can be overcome in adult L2 acquisition, as Ivanov (2009), Rothman (2009), and Hopp (2010) corroborate.

Hypothesis 3 pertained to the types of discourse referents that are licit in French RD: RD disallows [+Hearer new] information. The natives and near-natives respected this constraint without exception. The near-natives not only avoided placing infelicitous types of referents in RD, they also matched the natives' preference for highly recoverable (evoked) referents (see Table 7). This result contrasts with previous findings in which the discourse of advanced or near-native speakers showed nativelike tendencies but remained clearly distinguishable from native performance. For example, Bohnacker and Rosén's (2008) advanced Swedish learners of German differed gradiently rather than categorically from native speakers. Both groups placed focus information in the German 'Vorfeld' (first position of the clause), but whereas the natives evinced a preference for focus in first position, the learners preferred topic. Similarly, although the L1 English near-native speakers of Italian in Belletti et al. (2007) showed sensitivity to the Italian preference for indefinite – as opposed to definite – postverbal subjects, the near-natives' preference was significantly weaker than that of the natives.

Overall, the results of the present study offer no evidence that the near-natives' behavior with respect to RD differed qualitatively from that of the natives. In addition to the measures just discussed, the near-natives also matched the natives in their preference for

right-dislocating subjects (as opposed to objects, etc.) and in their association of RD with interrogatives. The same group of near-natives displayed similarly nativelike attainment of both LD (Donaldson, 2011) and *c'est*-clefts and *avoir*-clefts (Donaldson, forthcoming), findings that suggest that the level of attainment documented for RD is not an isolated occurrence at the syntax–discourse interface. Although Hypothesis 1 (formal accuracy) was confirmed, neither Hypothesis 2 (ban on contrast in RD) nor Hypothesis 3 (ban on [+Hearer new] referents), both of which predicted difficulties at the interface of narrow syntax and discourse pragmatics, were upheld. Although RD is considered to be more functionally complex than LD (Ashby, 1988), emerges later in interlanguage than LD (Trévisé, 1986; Sleeman, 2004), is demonstrably less frequent in the input than LD (Ashby, 1988), and is not taught formally in instructional settings, the near-natives have nevertheless mastered the principal aspects of its use to nativelike levels.

One aspect in which the near-natives appeared to differ from the natives was in the total production of RDs. However, the individual raw RD counts of most of the near-natives fall within the range of the natives' production. Recall from Table 5 that the lowest individual RD count among the natives was four tokens (speaker F5), and speaker F10 produced a similarly low count of only six RDs. Eight of the 10 near-natives produced four or more RDs (see Table 4); only speakers A1 and A10 produced fewer (three tokens each). The native speaker data show wide variation in raw production, and most of the near-natives produced as many or more RDs than several of their native peers, a situation similar to what Rothman (2007) reported for null and overt pronouns in L2 Spanish. Among the natives, several speakers (e.g. F1 and F4) produced far more RDs than the others, an issue left to future research.

## VII Conclusions

This study examined 10 non-native speakers of French who began their L2 acquisition at age 10 or later and whose grammatical competence was found to be equal or superior to the near-natives reported in Birdsong (1992). The near-natives provided nativelike intuitions regarding French RD and demonstrated, with the exception of one speaker, entirely native-like use of RD in authentic informal spoken discourse. This finding suggests that the near-natives successfully integrated syntactic and discourse–pragmatic knowledge at one area of the syntax–pragmatics interface. These results are not anticipated in light of the Interface Hypothesis, which predicts residual optionality at the syntax–discourse interface. Rather, the results point to the possibility of full acquirability at an external interface. Such a scenario is compatible with models of L2 acquisition such as Schwartz and Sprouse's (1994, 1996) Full Transfer/Full Access model or Herschensohn (2000). Of course, neither model claims that nativelike acquisition is inevitable. Crucially, however, the results of the present study suggest that residual non-nativeness is not inevitable, either.

## Notes

- 1 Prince (1992) excluded inferables from her categorization, as she considered their status unclear (personal communication, April 2007). I consider them to be [+Discourse new] because they lack prior mention, but are recoverable from the hearer's perspective and thus [–Hearer new]. Their patterning with respect to French syntactic topic marking supports this analysis.

- 2 The representation of LDs is similarly disputed (see Cinque, 1997).
- 3 An anonymous *Second Language Research* reviewer comments that the traits selected here are somewhat random. I agree with this assessment, as well as the same reviewer's comment about the difficulty of defining spoken French. At the same time, I contend that the battery of traits chosen reflects some of the most often discussed aspects of spoken French. Following Biber (1995), I conceive of the distinction between formal and informal registers not as binary but rather as a continuum of features; the presence of the traits in question speaks at least partially to where a given register falls on such a continuum.
- 4 For L2 Canadian French, see Nagy et al. (2003).
- 5 The near-natives qualify as late (or adult) learners, following studies such as Johnson and Newport (1989), Marinova-Todd (2003), and Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam (2009).
- 6 An anonymous *Second Language Research* reviewer points out that a gradient scale may have better captured the subtle nature of RDs, a point that should be addressed in future research.
- 7 Examples with a pause or hesitation (obvious break in the intonation contour) between the matrix clause and rightward constituent were considered afterthoughts rather than RDs and excluded.

### Acknowledgments

Thanks to Nicholas Bacuez for assistance with the acoustic analysis, and to Julie Auger, Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig, Laurent Deykyspotter, Albert Valdman, the audience at the Mind&ndash;Context Divide Workshop (University of Iowa, April 2009), and to the anonymous *Second Language Research* reviewers for comments on earlier versions of this article.

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## Appendix I Task items

### Task I (Felicity Judgments)

In the original formatting, each item was followed by:

La réponse (*en gras*) vous semble-t-elle naturelle dans ce contexte?

**OUI NON je ne sais pas**

#### Items anticipated to be felicitous with the RD response provided

1. Karine, une lycéenne, se prépare pour sortir à une soirée avec son petit copain. Quand elle voit celui-ci, elle lui dit:  
– *Voilà je suis fin prête pour la soirée de ce soir.*  
Son petit copain lui répond:  
– *Mais dis-moi, qu'est-ce qu'il est beau ton collier!*
2. Gérard espère que sa femme Pauline sera prête à partir dans peu de temps. Quelques minutes plus tard, Pauline descend l'escalier pour rejoindre Gérard. Quand il la voit, Gérard lui dit:  
– *Alors, on peut y aller?*  
Dès qu'elle voit Gérard, Pauline lui répond:  
– *Oui j'arrive. Mais attends, Gérard! Ça ne va pas, ta cravate!*
3. Luc et sa femme Martine sont en train de faire une randonnée dans les Pyrénées. Ils arrivent en haut d'une crête, et Luc dit:  
– *C'est beau ici, hein?*  
Martine lui répond:  
– *En effet. Comme elle est belle, la montagne!*
4. Un couple, Marc et Adeline, roule en voiture sur l'autoroute; tout à coup, Adeline s'écrie:  
– *Fais gaffe – quitte pas la route!*  
Faisant un geste, Marc lui répond:  
– *Mais regarde! Elle est monstrueuse, cette maison!*

5. Jeanne et son fils Bertrand font des courses au marché. Jeanne est sur le point de payer des courgettes et elle demande à Bertrand de tenir son sac:  
 – *Tu tiens le sac s'il te plaît.*  
 Prenant le sac, Bertrand lui répond:  
 – *Oh il est lourd ce sac!*

### Items anticipated to be infelicitous with the LD response provided

6. Karine, une lycéenne, se prépare pour sortir à une soirée avec son petit copain. Quand elle voit celui-ci, elle lui dit:  
 – *Voilà je suis fin prête pour la soirée de ce soir.*  
 Son petit copain lui répond:  
 – *Mais dis-moi, ton collier, qu'est-ce qu'il est beau!*
7. Gérard espère que sa femme Pauline sera prête à partir dans peu de temps. Quelques minutes plus tard, Pauline descend l'escalier pour rejoindre Gérard. Quand il la voit, Gérard lui dit:  
 – *Alors, on peut y aller?*  
 Dès qu'elle voit Gérard, Pauline lui répond:  
 – *Oui j'arrive. Mais attends, Gérard! Ta cravate, ça ne va pas!*
8. Luc et sa femme Martine sont en train de faire une randonnée dans les Pyrénées. Ils arrivent en haut d'une crête, et Luc dit:  
 – *C'est beau ici, hein?*  
 Martine lui répond:  
 – *En effet. La montagne, comme elle est belle!*
9. Un couple, Marc et Adeline, roule en voiture sur l'autoroute; tout à coup, Adeline s'écrie:  
 – *Fais gaffe – quitte pas la route!*  
 Faisant un geste, Marc lui répond:  
 – *Mais regarde! Cette maison, elle est monstrueuse!*
10. Jeanne et son fils Bertrand font des courses au marché. Jeanne est sur le point de payer des courgettes et elle demande à Bertrand de tenir son sac:  
 – *Tu tiens le sac s'il te plaît.*  
 Prenant le sac, Bertrand lui répond:  
 – *Oh ce sac il est lourd!*

### Task 2 (Forced Preference)

In the original formatting, each item was followed by:  
 Laquelle de ces réponses est *la plus naturelle* dans ce contexte?  
 A      B      *je ne sais pas*

### Items anticipated to favor the LD response (a)

1. Deux collègues, Marie et Louis, sont en train de déjeuner ensemble à midi.  
 Louis dit:  
 – *C'est vrai que tu as perdu ton passeport?*

Marie lui répond:

a. *Oui mais mon mari, il l'a retrouvé hier.*

b. *Oui mais il l'a retrouvé hier mon mari.*

2. Deux collègues de longue date, Christelle et Paul, sont dans la salle où se trouve l'imprimante de leur bureau. Paul dit:

– *Tu as essayé d'utiliser l'imprimante aujourd'hui? Elle marche toujours pas.*

Christelle lui répond:

a. *C'est parce que les gens de ce bureau, ils remplacent jamais le papier.*

b. *C'est parce qu'ils remplacent jamais le papier les gens de ce bureau.*

3. Deux amis, Florent et Amandine, sont en train de se parler, et leur discussion se tourne au sujet d'un livre récent. Florent dit:

– *J'ai trouvé ce roman totalement affreux. Mon père et ma mère ont pensé exactement la même chose. On l'a tous détesté!*

Amandine lui répond:

a. *C'est vrai? Parce que dans ma famille, ma sœur, elle l'a adoré!*

b. *C'est vrai? Parce que dans ma famille, elle l'a adoré ma sœur!*

4. Deux collègues, Sandrine et Fabien, se rencontrent par hasard dans l'ascenseur. Sandrine demande:

– *Salut! T'as été voir le nouveau film de Luc Besson?*

Fabien lui répond:

a. *Non. Mon fils, il l'a vu, mais pas moi.*

b. *Non. Il l'a vu, mon fils, mais pas moi.*

5. Jean-Marc, un étudiant à l'université, voit un groupe de ses amis au restaurant universitaire. Une amie lui dit:

– *Alors tu nous rejoins ce soir pour le film?*

Jean-Marc lui répond:

a. *Euh je crois pas, ma voiture, elle est en panne.*

b. *Euh je crois pas, elle est en panne ma voiture.*

6. Paul fait souvent de la randonnée le week-end. Une de ses collègues, Angélique, lui demande:

– *Tu vas faire de la randonnée ce week-end?*

Paul lui répond:

a. *Je veux bien mais ma femme, elle veut pas.*

b. *Je veux bien mais elle veut pas, ma femme.*

7. Ivan est en train de parler à son amie Sophie, qui travaille aux Etats-Unis. Sophie dit:

– *Tu me disais que ton frère voulait faire un stage à l'étranger?*

Ivan lui répond:

a. *Oui il veut bien mais mes parents, ils sont contre.*

b. *Oui il veut bien mais ils sont contre, mes parents.*

8. Yolande essaie de planifier des vacances avec son fiancé Pierre, qui a déjà beaucoup voyagé. Yolande lui demande:

– *Pierre, tu connais un peu Vérone? je pense déjà aux vacances!*

Pierre lui répond:

a. *Non je ne connais pas. Par contre, Venise, ça vaut le coup.*

b. *Non je ne connais pas. Par contre, ça vaut le coup, Venise.*

9. François, un collégien, et sa mère Sara sont en train de préparer le dîner. François demande:  
 – *Maman, pourquoi on sort jamais pour manger?*  
 Sara lui répond:  
 a. *Parce que je trouve que les restos, ils sont trop chers.*  
 b. *Parce que je trouve qu'ils sont trop chers, les restos.*
10. Mélissa, son mari Eddie, et leurs trois enfants, ont été invités à passer le week-end chez un cousin éloigné de Mélissa qui souhaite rencontrer Eddie et les enfants, mais Mélissa lui dit qu'ils ne peuvent pas tous venir. Son cousin, un peu déçu, lui dit:  
 – *Mais vous êtes pas en vacances en ce moment?*  
 Mélissa lui répond:  
 a. *Si, on est en vacances, mais les enfants, ils vont faire du ski.*  
 b. *Si, on est en vacances, mais ils vont faire du ski, les enfants.*

### Items anticipated to favor the RD response (b)

11. Karine, une lycéenne, se prépare pour sortir à une soirée avec son petit copain. Quand elle voit celui-ci, elle lui dit:  
 – *Voilà je suis fin prête pour la soirée de ce soir.*  
 Son petit copain lui répond:  
 a. *Mais dis-moi, ton collier, qu'est-ce qu'il est beau!*  
 b. *Mais dis-moi, qu'est-ce qu'il est beau ton collier!*
12. Gérard espère que sa femme Pauline sera prête à partir dans peu de temps. Quelques minutes plus tard, Pauline descend l'escalier pour rejoindre Gérard. Quand il la voit, Gérard lui dit:  
 – *Alors, on peut y aller?*  
 Dès qu'elle voit Gérard, Pauline lui répond:  
 a. *Oui j'arrive. Mais attends, Gérard! Ta cravate, ça ne va pas!*  
 b. *Oui j'arrive. Mais attends, Gérard! Ça ne va pas, ta cravate!*
13. Luc et sa femme Martine sont en train de faire une randonnée dans les Pyrénées. Ils arrivent en haut d'une crête, et Luc dit:  
 – *C'est beau ici, hein?*  
 Martine lui répond:  
 a. *En effet. La montagne, comme elle est belle!*  
 b. *En effet. Comme elle est belle, la montagne!*
14. Un couple, Marc et Adeline, roule en voiture sur l'autoroute; tout à coup, Adeline s'écrie:  
 – *Fais gaffe – quitte pas la route!*  
 Faisant un geste, Marc lui répond:  
 a. *Mais regarde! Cette maison, elle est monstrueuse!*  
 b. *Mais regarde! Elle est monstrueuse, cette maison!*
15. Jeanne et son fils Bertrand font des courses au marché. Jeanne est sur le point de payer des courgettes et elle demande à Bertrand de tenir son sac:  
 – *Tu tiens le sac s'il te plaît.*  
 Prenant le sac, Bertrand lui répond:

- a. *Oh ce sac il est lourd!*  
b. *Oh il est lourd ce sac!*
16. Georges et sa fille Audrey sont en train d'acheter des livres pour l'école. Audrey passe un dictionnaire à son père en lui disant:  
– *Voilà ce qu'il me faut pour le cours de traduction.*  
Prenant le livre, Georges lui répond:  
a. *Mais ce dictionnaire, il est cher!*  
b. *Mais il est cher ce dictionnaire!*
17. Lors d'un dîner chez Philippe et Denise, Lucie leur raconte combien de personnes ont remarqué qu'ils ne vont plus souvent aux soirées. Philippe dit:  
– *Et oui, c'est vrai, on a pas mal voyagé cette année.*  
Regardant autour d'elle, Lucie dit:  
a. *Quels beaux costumes! Cette photo, c'est quoi?*  
b. *Quels beaux costumes! C'est quoi, cette photo?*
18. Alice vient de rentrer chez ses parents pour le week-end, et elle voit son frère Roger. Alice dit:  
– *Salut Roger, ça va? Tu peux m'aider à monter mes affaires?*  
Soulevant la valise, Roger lui dit:  
a. *Eh bien! Ta valise, elle est lourde.*  
b. *Eh bien! Elle est lourde, ta valise.*
19. Renée vient de rentrer chez ses parents après une courte absence. Elle entre, et son père la salue en disant:  
– *Salut! Tu vas bien? Regarde ce qu'on a fait pendant que tu n'étais pas là!*  
Jetant un coup d'œil autour d'elle, Renée lui répond:  
a. *En effet! Tiens, la peinture, je l'aime bien!*  
b. *En effet! Tiens, je l'aime bien, la peinture!*
20. Un frère et une sœur, Antoine et Anaïs, sont en train de regarder des compacts-disques dans une boutique. Antoine dit:  
– *Je trouve pas grand chose, franchement.*  
Anaïs lui répond:  
a. *Moi non plus, et ces disques, qu'est-ce qu'ils sont chers!*  
b. *Moi non plus, et qu'est-ce qu'ils sont chers ces disques!*

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