Morpho-syntactic development in the expression of modality: The subjunctive in French L2 acquisition

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This paper presents a quantitative analysis of the variable use of the subjunctive which constitutes a notable "fragile zone" in the spoken French of advanced L2 learners. A comparative approach is adopted to consider the relative impact of naturalistic and instructed L2 exposure in the case of our learner-participants who were Irish university learners in both a classroom and study abroad context. The findings presented attempt to illuminate the difficulty that use of the subjunctive poses to the learners, whereby their minimal use of this form, irrespective of their context of acquisition, is lexically restricted to the occurrence of *falloir* in the matrix clause, although the learners do produce other subjunctive-conditioning verbs and conjunctions expressing subordination. The findings are discussed in terms of their pedagogical and acquisition implications.

Cet article vise à mettre en lumière une zone de fragilité importante dans les lectes d'apprenants avancés du français L2, à savoir la réalisation variable du subjonctif. Nous présentons une analyse comparative pour considérer de façon quantitative l'effet du contact langagier naturel et guidé sur l'emploi de cette forme par nos intervenants irlandais à l'université en Irlande et en milieu non guidé en France. Les résultats cernent la difficulté que leur pose l'usage du subjonctif qu'ils emploient très peu, qu'ils soient en milieu guidé ou non. Bien qu'ils utilisent toute une série de verbes lexicaux et de conjonctions de subordination, l'emploi du subjonctif se restreint à un seul verbe lexical, à savoir *falloir*. Les résultats sont discutés du point de vue de leurs conséquences éventuelles pour l'acquisition et l'enseignement du français L2.

Introduction

Although the acquisition of tense and aspect has received considerable attention in Second Language Acquisition studies, the acquisition of the related phenomenon of modality has not been subject to the same rigorous level of investigation. While there exist some important studies of other L2s, modality is an area where studies of L2 French are particularly missing. This paper is a preliminary attempt to illuminate such an area specifically in relation to its

morphological marking through use of the subjunctive in L2 French. Before detailing this form in target language French, we will first consider the issue of modality in L2 acquisition studies. By modality, we understand, "[T]he semantic domain pertaining to elements of meaning [. . .] whose common denominator is the addition of a supplement or overlay of meaning to the most neutral semantic value of the proposition of an utterance, namely factual and declarative" (Bybee and Fleischman, 1995, p. 2, quoted by Ayres-Bennett, Carruthers and Temple, 2001, p. 18). The latter authors further add that "[I]t embraces a wide range of semantic nuances (e.g. jussive, desiderative, intentive, hypothetical, potential, obligative, dubitative, hortatory, exclamative)."

It is also useful to bear in mind Giacalone Ramat's (1992, p. 308) conceptual distinction between epistemic and deontic modality, where epistemic modality "describes matters of knowledge, belief, or opinion rather than fact. [. . .] It indicates the degree of commitment by the speaker to what he or she is saying and typically includes hypotheses, deductions, hear-say statements or reports, and more." In contrast, "volition expresses a kind of deontic necessity where the source of modality is the subject itself." (For extensive discussion of modality, see Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca, 1994; Bybee and Fleischman, 1995.)

The acquisition of modality

While the acquisition of modality has received minimal attention in the case of French, similar studies are more available in the case of L2 Italian and L2 German. For example, Giacalone Ramat (1992) presents a study based on the Pavia Project in Italy which involved the collection of spoken data from adult naturalistic learners. Her findings lead her to posit morphological markers of modality, such as the subjunctive and the conditional, at the end of her acquisition order of tense-modality-aspect for L2 Italian. In contrast, Giacalone Ramat's naturalistic learners rely heavily on more implicit markers of modality such as through pragmatic and lexical means whereby modal values emerge through discourse structure, situational context and strategies of inference on the interlocutor's part. Explicit markers are found to be restricted to modal adverbs and some modal verbs before morphological marking of modality emerges. In the case of L2 German, Dittmar and Terborg (1991) offer similar findings.

Beyond such means, use of the inflected form of the subjunctive has also been the focus of a number of studies of L2 Spanish, with particular reference to the impact of pedagogic strategies. For example, in view of the syntactic constraints on its selection in native speaker discourse, Collentine, Collentine, Clark and Friginal (2002) consider how a pedagogic approach which involves both a morphological and syntactic focus might lead to better learning outcomes than approaches which involve more implicit learning of the subjunctive as well as approaches whose focus is solely on morphological form. Implicit

methods in the study are based on an approach where the subjunctive does not receive explicit attention, but rather allows the learner to implicitly infer information about its usage. Their study is therefore based on a comparison of three groups of learners, involving a control group whose instruction was based on a more implicit approach, and two other groups, one who received instruction on both the syntactic and morphological features of subjunctive usage, and another which did not receive instruction in the area of syntax but rather focused on the morphological features of the subjunctive. The study involved 3 groups of 23 learners each.

Collentine *et al*.'s findings are ambiguous, however, with their learners whose instruction aimed to develop their syntactic knowledge of Spanish as well as of the subjunctive, underperforming in relation to the group who received more explicit instruction on the morphological make-up of the subjunctive. However, both groups outperformed the control group whose instructional approach was based on implicit methods. Both findings held true in relation to both production and recognition tests. However, the syntax-subjunctive group did demonstrate an advantage insofar as they tended not to overuse the subjunctive in indicative contexts to the same extent as the other groups. A further comparative study is offered by Collentine (1998) where he compares the effects of Processing Instruction, an input-oriented approach, with more traditional output-oriented approaches. His findings in this regard indicate that both approaches are equally effective. (See also Collentine, 1995.)

A further study of L2 Spanish is that of Terrell, Baycroft and Perrone (1987) who compare knowledge of subjunctive usage on a grammar test with its use in spoken interaction. Their findings point to a considerable gap between such knowledge and use — whereas their classroom learners demonstrated high levels of understanding of subjunctive usage on the grammar test, such knowledge was not matched in its use in the learners' spoken discourse. Indeed, in the latter case, use of the subjunctive was found to be minimal, at 10% compared to 92% on the grammar test.

In contrast to such studies of L2 Spanish, studies of subjunctive usage in L2 French are less forthcoming in level of detail, at best simply suggesting that the subjunctive is late-acquired. In a Canadian immersion context, for example, Harley (1992; Harley and Swain 1978) notes its general lack of use. However, in a study of Swedish university learners of French, Bartning (2003) finds traces of its use even among beginner learners in the case of the impersonal expression *il faut que* 'it is necessary to'. Even in her more advanced learners, she also finds levels of use averaging 64% across a wider range of contexts, while her future teacher informants demonstrate an average rate of use of 83% which the author considers to reflect a level of productive usage. It is important to note, however, that Bartning's slightly more positive findings compared to the Canadian immersion context may reflect important

differences in the learner-participants in each study, as well as in the pedagogical approaches which the learners experienced across contexts. For example, in the Canadian immersion context, the studies were typically conducted with primary and high school students whose acquisition experience was based on more implicit approaches, in contrast to the potentially more explicit instruction characterising the young adult speakers in Bartning's study.

While clearly there are various means for expressing modality — modal verbs and adverbs, inflectional morphology or moods, lexical verbs of knowledge, belief, opinion and volition, as described by Giacalone Ramat (1992) — the focus of this paper is specifically on the morphological form of the subjunctive whose (non-)use is prescriptively subject to a complex set of rules dependent on the features of syntactic, lexical and semantic context.

The subjunctive in target language French

In spoken French, the subjunctive form consists of both a present and a past form, in contrast with the written language where a literary imperfective form also exists.[1] While homophonous with the indicative form of regular *-er* verbs except on the 1st and 2nd person plural, the present subjunctive form is phonetically salient on irregular verbs, as well as *-ir* and *-re* verbs, as exemplified in (1)–(3):

(1) *Regular* -er *verbs*:

Present subjunctive:

Le professeur veut que je *regarde* ce film pour en faire un exposé.

'The teacher wants me to watch the film so as to make a presentation on it.'

(2) -ir *verbs*:

a. Present indicative:

J'espère que la plante *embellit* la salle.

'I hope that the plant enhances the room.'

b. Present subjunctive:

Il est peu probable qu'elle *finisse* les rénovations aujourd'hui.

'It is unlikely that she will finish the renovations today.'

(3) *Irregular verbs*:

a. Present indicative:

Je pense qu'il *prend* des vacances la semaine prochaine.

'I think that he is taking holidays next week.'

b. Present subjunctive:

Les parents veulent que leur fils *prenne* un peu de temps pour aller leur rendre visite.

'The parents want their son to take some time to go and visit them.'

Whereas the present subjunctive is prescriptively used in embedded clauses to mark verbs, the temporal relation of whose actions is either simultaneous or posterior to the event of the main clause, the past subjunctive marks events whose actions are anterior. The past subjunctive is a composed form, much like the *passé composé* involving an auxiliary verb, *avoir* or *être*, in its subjunctive form, and a past participle, as exemplified in (4)–(5):

(4) Le prof ne croit pas que les élèves *aient lu* le livre qu'ils devaient lire pour la leçon.

'The teacher doesn't believe that the pupils read the book that they should have read for the lesson.'

(5) Les enfants niaient qu'ils *soient sortis* de l'école sans la permission du prof.

'The children deny going out of school without the teacher's permission.'

In terms of the specificity of its usage, the subjunctive has been the focus of a range of L1 studies which attempt to capture the common invariant, if any, underlying its semantic meaning. Ayres-Bennett *et al.* (2001, pp. 195–197) present an overview of such work, which attempts to capture the semantic values of the subjunctive in terms such as "unreality" versus "reality" (Imbs, 1953; Grevisse, 1963), "opinion" and "judgment" (Damourette and Pichon, 1911–1936), "possibility" versus "probability" (Guillaume, 1929; Martin, 1983), "doubt" versus "certitude" (Winters, 1993). However, as Ayres-Bennett *et al.* (2001) note, each approach is not wholly perfect given the inevitable exceptions which they fail to account for.

Drawing on such semantic approaches, prescriptive grammars have also detailed the contexts in which use of the subjunctive is prescribed. In particular, those contexts tend to relate to three phenomena, namely the matrix verb, the syntactic subordinator, and the adjectival expression in the matrix clause. In the case of the matrix verb, prescriptive grammars have collated long lists of lexical verbs which are deemed to require use of the subjunctive in order to convey its supposed semantic meanings such as those of doubt and improbability, wish and desire, feeling and emotion, as exemplified in (6). Impersonal expressions are also deemed to require the subjunctive when expressing necessity, possibility and judgment, as exemplified in (7):

(6) Je *souhaite* qu'ils *s'en aillent* tout de suite.

'I wish that they would leave immediately.'

(7) *Il est possible que* le train *soit* en retard.

'It's possible that the train may be late.'

Syntactic subordinators have also been subject to such prescriptive listing under categories concerning conjunctions of intention and result, restriction, time, concession and condition, as exemplified in (8):

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(8) Vous réussirez à l'examen *pourvu que* vous *fassiez* une bonne préparation.

'You will pass the exam provided that you prepare well.'

Finally, the subjunctive is also prescribed following adjectival clauses in their superlative form where there is a restrictive meaning to the utterance. In contrast, the indicative is prescribed in such structures when the restrictive element is not intended, as contrasted in (9):[2]

(9) C'est le livre *le plus intéressant* que j'*ai(e)* jamais *lu*.

'It's the most interesting book that I've ever read.'

At first sight, such prescriptive rules, especially in terms of the long lists of lexical exemplars that prescriptive grammars provide, may seem to facilitate their acquisition by the L2 learner. However, studies of real language usage among L1 speakers suggest that such rules are not applied with the same level of categoricity that such grammars would imply. In particular, Poplack's (1992, 2001) work on use of the subjunctive among speakers in her Ottawa-Hull corpus of spoken French suggests that the indicative is overwhelmingly used in the majority of such prescriptive contexts, pointing to a considerable discrepancy between prescriptive norms and real language usage. For example, Poplack finds that the form is not applied at all following many matrix verbs, such that its usage dominates following just three, namely *falloir* 'to be necessary', *vouloir* 'to want' and *aimer* 'to like', accounting for 75% of all matrix verbs co-occurring with the subjunctive. Even when the subjunctive is selected, Poplack further identifies a lexical effect, insofar as only four lexical verbs, namely *aller* 'to go', *faire* 'to do/make', *avoir* 'to have' and *être* 'to be' are inflected for the subjunctive with any regularity. Such findings are further reflected in a similar study carried out by Laurier (1989) on Canadian minority francophone speakers in Ontario where he finds that not only does the subjunctive tend not to occur in contexts where its use would be described as variable by prescriptive grammars, but even in obligatory contexts, its use is highly variable. In those contexts, Laurier reports lexically restricted use, such that the subjunctive tends to occur with a limited set of frequent verbs, principally *falloir* 'to be necessary', as similarly reported in Poplack's study, and also only among French-dominant and bilingual speakers. It is not clear whether such findings reflect a genuine effect for the impact of English on such franco-phone speakers in a minority language context, or simply their more restricted opportunities to engage in French language usage, or indeed a combination of both.

Taken together, these findings along with those of Poplack suggest not only that there is a considerable discrepancy between prescriptive and descriptive norms underlying use of the subjunctive, but, the strong lexical effect on its usage also calls into question the degree to which the subjunctive is productively used for semantic effect. As Ayres-Bennett *et al.* (2001, p. 197) write,

its semantic usages are increasingly seen "not to involve a meaningful choice or positive selection of this mood as opposed to the indicative, but rather are simply required by a codified rule of grammar." Poplack's study provides very clear evidence in support of this claim.

While it is regrettable that similar descriptive studies do not exist for metropolitan French, casual observation would suggest that some variation arises in terms of the native speaker's choice between the subjunctive and the indicative such as following the matrix verb *penser* 'to think' in its interrogative and negative contexts, where the indicative can be heard depending on the speaker's degree of certitude, as in (10):

(10) Je ne pense pas qu'il *vienne* / qu'il *viendra*.

    'I don't think that he's coming.'

Such variable use of the subjunctive is borne out in Sand's (2003) work, based on an analysis of the Orléans corpus of French — his findings nonetheless indicate that subjunctive usage is surviving well, especially following expressions of willingness and emotion, attributive adjectives and the complementizer *pour que* 'so that'. Such work reflects that of the GARS group[3] in Aix-en-Provence, as presented in Blanche-Benveniste (1990): "d'après les corpus que nous avons rassemblés au GARS, le mode subjonctif n'est pas du tout moribond ni même en passe de l'être" [based on the corpora that we collected within the GARS, the subjunctive mood is far from being lost or even on its way to being lost] (p. 197). Furthermore, they find that the subjunctive is not socially constrained. Impersonal and personal verbs account for a large number of the occurrences of the subjunctive (35% and 28% respectively). A smaller number of subjunctive tokens is found to co-occur with syntactic complementizers and relative pronouns. Taken together, the differences in findings between Canadian and metropolitan French varieties might suggest that the subjunctive is used more variably in a Canadian context, calling into question to a certain extent its potential survival. However, it is important to underline that this is not the case — while its usage is often at odds with prescriptive norms, the frequent occurrence of the subjunctive with *falloir* in particular would suggest that this nonetheless constitutes a fairly robust form.

Aims of the study to be presented

Taken together, the studies outlined in the case of both the native speaker and the L2 learner point to a number of interesting issues in relation to the acquisition of the subjunctive in L2 French. Those issues relate firstly to the relationship between the learner's acquisition and use of subjunctive-selecting matrix verbs and subordinating complementizers and their impact on the acquisition and use of the subjunctive. Secondly, given the difficulty that previous

studies have illuminated in relation to use of the subjunctive *per se*, the question also arises as to what extent lexical issues as opposed to semantic issues condition the potential variable use of the subjunctive by the L2 learner just as they do in the case of the native speaker in a language contact situation, as depicted in Laurier's and Poplack's work. All in all, this paper therefore aims to find out much more about how the subjunctive is acquired, through exploring, on the one hand, issues to do with the relationship between morphological knowledge and syntactic knowledge in the L2 acquisition of the subjunctive. On the other hand, the paper pursues its aim through also exploring lexical issues which have been observed to be at play in the native speaker's variable use of the subjunctive but which contrast sharply with the categoricity underlying the prescriptive norms to which the classroom learner has been exposed through extensive grammar instruction.

Study

The study is based on a quantitative analysis of the spoken French of 18 Irish Anglophone learners in a university environment. At the time of the study, they were aged between 20–22 years, and had been learning French for eight to nine years through classroom instruction. As part of their university studies, the learners had chosen to specialise in French and one other subject, which in some cases was another foreign language. The learners had also learnt Irish from the outset of their schooling, as required in the Irish education context. Since foreign languages therefore effectively constitute an L3 for learners in Ireland, they are characterised by a linguistic awareness (Singleton, 1996) which distinguishes them from their monolingual counterparts. In considering the results of our study, it will be interesting to see whether such linguistic awareness facilitates in some way their acquisition of the subjunctive, thanks to its use in the other languages which the learners were learning.

Following Bartning (1997, 2009), the learners can be situated within the advanced learner variety, insofar as they had surpassed the stage of creative grammaticalisation (for discussion, see Giacalone Ramat, 1992; Noyau, 1997; Housen, 1998) to enter the stage of adaptive grammaticalisation. That is to say, whereas creative grammaticalisation is concerned with the development that underlies a linguistic form acquiring grammatical status from its original lexical status in learner language, adaptive grammaticalisation involves the change in functional value that such a grammatical form is used to express as a result of a discovery by the learner of another functional value that such a form can express in the target language. Given the slow, but nonetheless on-going change that is at work in L2 grammaticalisation, it is clear that there are various intermediary stages within that process before the target language grammar can be seen to have generally emerged in the advanced learner. As such, the grammaticalisation process in this learner variety concerns the refinement and

delimitation of the contexts in which a form is used in the target language, as the learner discovers the full range of values expressed by a specific individual form. Such on-going discovery is reflected in the constituent sub-stages of the advanced learner variety where a number of morpho-syntactic features constitute notable fragile zones such as in the use of verbal and nominal morphology, as the learner gradually gains increased control in their usage in real-time. While such morphology is generally seen to have emerged in the advanced learner variety — that is to say, the learners clearly make productive use of such morphology, unlike their less advanced counterparts — there is considerable variation underlying its usage, such as in the L2 French learner's over- and under-use of the *passé composé* and the *imparfait* in the marking of past time, the poly-functional use of the present, and alternation on use of gender markers with determiners and adjectives. In spite of such variation, however, the advanced learner is clearly aware of the need to apply such morphology in their speech production. (For a description of such fragile zones, see Bartning, 2009.)

In terms of their exposure to the language, our learner-informants had received extensive classroom instruction over many years. That instruction was generally based on a communicative approach, as prescribed in the National Curriculum for Modern Languages in Ireland. In particular, as part of their university studies, the learners had weekly oral classes with native metropolitan speakers, which complemented their further exposure to the target language through extensive study of French literature. Other authentic documents were used in their written language classes where they received formal grammar instruction, which included formal grammar testing and translation tasks.

While primarily instructed learners, some of our learners also had extensive naturalistic exposure through a year abroad program with a number of universities in France — in this case, they followed an agreed programme of study with their home university, which involved taking the same courses as their native speaker counterparts, and did not receive any special language instruction. Such naturalistic exposure was further enhanced through their residence in the university halls of residence, where they further had extensive contact with native speakers.

Data collection and analysis

The study is part of a larger project on the acquisition of French by Irish learners, which involved the elicitation of spoken data from classroom learners at various stages of proficiency as well as in a naturalistic environment.[4] For the purposes of this study, we will compare use of the subjunctive among two groups of learners who had respectively completed two and three years of their university studies (Group 1 and Group 2, respectively), while a third group had

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spent a year abroad following two years of university studies (Group 3). The groups were made up of six learners each.

The data elicitation was based on the sociolinguistic interview, following the procedures proposed by Labov (1984) for the elicitation of natural, spontaneous speech. Conversational modules were chosen to reflect the interests of our learners, and included both formal and informal topics such as pastimes, family, education, studies, career, as well as Labov's famous "Danger of Death" and "Premonitions" modules. The interviews were conducted by the researcher on an individual basis with each of the learners, and lasted approximately one hour. Following their elicitation, they were transcribed into standard orthography following the transcription conventions proposed for French by Blanche-Benveniste and Jeanjean (1987).

For the purposes of analysing use of the subjunctive, we extracted from the data all tokens of embedded clauses where the subjunctive would be prescribed,[5] along with the matrix clause, such that it could be observed if, and how the learners use the subjunctive differentially following a matrix verb or other syntactic marker of subordination which prescribe use of the subjunctive. As such, the data were coded for morphological form in terms of whether the subjunctive was used or not, as well as for the co-occurrence of this form with different matrix and embedded verbs and syntactic markers. We were careful to examine the data for examples of subjunctive-like forms in indicative contexts as well as those where the subjunctive would be prescribed. In so doing, we wished to exclude from the analysis subjunctive-like tokens occurring in both context-types which evidently do not constitute genuine tokens of subjunctive usage. Rather, tokens such as *je doive* 'I have to' in both indicative and subjunctive contexts are cases of overuse of a subjunctive-like form which may in fact have the status of an indicative form in the learner's language variety — our attention to detail in this regard is exemplified in note 5. In spite of our efforts to respect such careful principles of data analysis, we did not find any such tokens of over-generalisation of subjunctive-like forms in indicative contexts.

Results

In total, we identified 100 contexts where the subjunctive would be prototypically prescribed in target language French. The number of contexts produced by each learner was in the range of 1–9 in Group 1, 1–8 in Group 2 and 3–6 in Group 3. While limited in number in our database which amounts to over 18 hours of recorded data, subjunctive contexts are similarly rare in native speaker discourse, "not exceeding five or ten per half hour of speech. [...] [I]n these contexts between a third and a half of the surface forms are morphologically ambiguous" (Ayres-Bennett *et al*., 2001, p. 210 based on findings from the

Table 1: Use of the subjunctive

		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Potential contexts of subjunctive usage (morpho-phonetically distinct forms + forms similar to the indicative)	n	24	47	29
Potential contexts (morpho-phonetically distinct forms only)	n	22	32	23
Subjunctive realisation excluding forms resembling the indicative	n	1	5	3
	%	4.5	16	13

GARS Project — see Blanche-Benveniste, 1990).[6] However, while averaging 5.5 contexts per hour in line with findings for native speaker French, realisation of the subjunctive was much more limited by the learners — produced only in its present form — as exemplified in Table 1.

Table 1 reveals the more increased use of the subjunctive form among those learners who have had naturalistic exposure through study abroad (Group 3), as well as among those who have had further classroom instruction (Group 2). However, even within these groups, some learners do not realise the subjunctive form at all — in the case of Group 2, four out of the six learners produce a subjunctive form, while in the case of Group 3, just two learners do so. In the case of Group 1, with just one ambiguous token, non-realisation of the subjunctive is almost categorical among those learners at a lower level of instruction.[7] Examples of the learners' production of the subjunctive are provided in (11)–(13).

(11) Elle ne voulait pas qu'il *sache* la vérité.
     'She didn't want him to know the truth.'

(12) Il faut que vous le *preniez*.
     'You have to take it.'

(13) Il faut que tu *sois* heureux dans la vie.
     'You have to be happy in life.'

In spite of its minimal usage, we considered whether certain expressions in the matrix clause might be conducive to use of the subjunctive, as well as considering how its usage may be favoured with certain lexical verbs in the embedded clause. On this score, it is interesting to note that the learners, irrespective of their group, produced a range of expressions deemed to require subjunctive usage in target language French, including both verbal expressions (four for Group 1, five for Group 2 and seven for Group 3) and subordinating clauses, although their range is much smaller than in the case of verbal expressions (three for both Groups 1 and 3, and one for Group 2) — see Appendix A

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for a full list. That limited range suggests that subjunctive-inducing contexts in the learners' language are primarily verbal, with much scope for development on syntactic devices conditioning subjunctive usage in target language French. Other expressions found to occur included the superlative form and *la seule/première fois que* 'the only/first time that'. In spite of such expressions, use of the subjunctive across the groups is restricted to *falloir* 'to be necessary' in both its present and imperfective forms. Only Group 3 produces one other verbal expression which co-occurs with the subjunctive, namely *vouloir* 'to want'. It seems therefore that even if the subjunctive is present in the learners' interlanguage, albeit to a minimal extent, its usage dominates with a single frequent expression in the matrix clause with which the learners have learnt to apply the subjunctive to varying degrees — out of three tokens of *falloir*, just one is not followed by the subjunctive in Group 3, while eight tokens are found in Group 2, five of which (62%) are marked for the subjunctive. Taken together, however, *falloir* does not assume the status of a highly frequent verb in the matrix clause giving rise, in turn, to frequent subjunctive usage as a whole — rather, the highly infrequent marking of the subjunctive among the learners reflects their frequent use of other matrix verbs and subordinating conjunctions apart from *falloir* with which they fail to use the subjunctive. Indeed, in contrast with such forms, *falloir* only occurs in three out of the 23 subjunctive contexts in Group 3, and eight out of the 32 contexts produced by Group 2 — see Appendix A for the frequency of use of the full range of expressions.

In many regards, such findings reflect those of Laurier (1989) and Poplack (1992, 2001) who report that, of all verb forms, *falloir* is the verb form which is most conducive to subjunctive realisation among their Canadian francophone speakers in a minority language contact situation. For her Swedish L2 learners, Bartning (2003) offers similar findings, although her more advanced informants do produce the subjunctive in a wider range of syntactic contexts. In contrast, it remains for our learners to demonstrate its usage with such other verb forms in the matrix clause and subordinating expressions. In contrast, in a study of the expression of necessity through use of *falloir* and *devoir* among Canadian French immersion learners, Lealess (2005) finds that they massively avoid the former in favour of the latter. Such limited usage of *falloir* necessarily avoids the need for subjunctive usage, such that once learners do start using this verb form, they may also feel relatively comfortable with using the subjunctive in contexts where it occurs, as in the case of our learners.

Apart from such a finding, however, the effect of the lexical verb to be marked is less clear. Although the range of lexical verbs marked in the subjunctive is limited to three in both Groups 2 and 3, such verbs are different in both groups, namely *aller* 'to go', *prendre* 'to take' and *savoir* 'to know' in Group 3, and *voyager* 'to travel' in its 1st person plural form, *être* 'to be' and *faire* 'to do/make' in Group 2. While limited in range, such verbs are clearly

different. Moreover, given that the learners primarily restrict use of the subjunctive to the occurrence of *falloir* in the matrix clause, it seems likely that their production reflects an attempt to apply the rule for subjunctive usage after *falloir* irrespective of the verb form in the embedded clause. As we have seen above, its categorical non-usage with other lexical verbs reflects the learners' non-acquisition of its usage following other expressions in the matrix clause. This is all the more true given that the lexical verbs to be marked following the other alternative expressions in the matrix clause could not be deemed "difficult" verbs, since they include highly frequent and salient verbs such as *avoir* 'to have', *être* 'to be', *pouvoir* 'to be able', *sortir* 'to go out', *aller* 'to go', *faire* 'to do/make', *vouloir* 'to want', *prendre* 'to take' and *partir* 'to leave'. Moreover, in some cases, these are the same verbs that are marked for the subjunctive following *falloir*, suggesting once again that the learners have simply learned to apply the subjunctive with this single expression.

Discussion and conclusions

In summary, although the scope of the study presented is restricted due to the limited use of the form concerned by our learners, the results provide some important insights into the difficulty that the morphological marking of modality poses to even the very advanced learner. That is to say, although our learners, and in particular our study abroad learners, have gained considerable fluency, are very communicative, and have developed an interlanguage that is highly grammaticalised on other morpho-syntactic forms, the subjunctive still alludes them, and this in spite of many years of learning French and its common usage in the variety of French to which they were exposed, namely metropolitan French. Although they produce a range of syntactic contexts where the subjunctive could be expected, the form still remains to be acquired, such that, in relation to subjunctive-inducing contexts at least, the learners' syntactic development is more advanced than their morphological development. Furthermore, in no way does the acquisition of form precede function in the case of the subjunctive, such that we find no exemplars of its usage in contexts where it is not required, and only minimal usage in contexts where it is required.

Such minimal usage of the subjunctive is in contrast with a range of other morpho-syntactic forms which had clearly "emerged" in their interlanguage, such as the present and the past time forms of the *passé composé* and the *imparfait*, gender marking on determiners and adjectives, and person and number marking. As we previously noted, while use of such forms is subject to considerable variation, their earlier emergence clearly contrasts with the much later emergence of the subjunctive form. Indeed, as we have discussed elsewhere in relation to the late emergence of another form, namely the *plus-que-parfait* (see Howard, 2005a), the emergence and development of use of other markers

of tense and aspect, in particular those of the present and the past time forms of the *passé composé* and the *imparfait*, may be a pre-requisite to the emergence of such other late forms as the subjunctive and the *plus-que-parfait.* For example, our learners here demonstrate highly productive levels of accuracy of use of such past time forms, in the range of 75%–84% in the case of our classroom learners in Groups 1 and 2, and in the range of 91%–92% for our study abroad learners in Group 3 — see Howard (2005c, 2005d) for an outline. Similarly, our learners demonstrate productive use on another verb form which is deemed to pose considerable difficulty within the advanced learner variety, namely 3rd person plural marking on irregular verbs, as exemplified in the contrast between *veut* and *veulent*. Bartning (2003) notes that such contrast in use of "short" and "long" forms is not unlike the difficulty posed in the contrast between indicative forms and their subjunctive equivalents, such as *doit* and *doive*. In the case of our learners here, a previous study presented in Howard (2006a) points to the productive use of such 3rd person irregular plural forms by our learners, such that they may similarly be indicative of the gradual emergence of morpho-phonetically similar subjunctive forms among our learners.

In contrast to such robust levels of use of irregular plural verb forms and past time markers, our findings concerning the minimal use of the subjunctive in advanced French interlanguage very much reflect other Romance languages, notably L2 Italian and L2 Spanish where the difficult status of the subjunctive has previously been identified. Indeed, since some of our learners were also learning such languages, and all our learners had learnt Irish, we had expected such linguistic awareness to facilitate in some way their acquisition of the subjunctive in French. However, this seems not to be the case, such that the differential characteristics of subjunctive usage in the other languages may be a factor. For example, the subjunctive in Irish is often considered a somewhat dated form which is infrequent in daily speech, albeit frequent in some proverbs.

While reflecting findings for other Romance languages, the findings presented here contrast somewhat with those for Bartning's (2003) study of L2 French. While also studying advanced instructed learners, Bartning reports far greater usage of the subjunctive in a wider range of syntactic and lexical contexts. Indeed, while it is late to emerge, her learners seem to have consolidated their use of the subjunctive to reach quite productive levels of use, averaging between 64%–83% as detailed above. It remains unclear why such differences should arise in our findings for our Anglophone advanced learners and those Swedish advanced learners studied by Bartning. The curiosity is all the more enhanced since Swedish does not have a productive subjunctive form, such that no effect for the learners' L1 can be alluded to.

In contrast to the Swedish study, our findings concur much more with those for L2 Spanish and Italian regarding the late acquisition of and difficulty posed by the morphological marking of modality. In particular, Giacalone Ramat's study of L2 Italian suggests that the semantics of modality is expressed through lexical and pragmatic means, whereby the learner's interlocutor can at best retrieve such meaning in the learner's discourse through strategies of inference, relying on the lexical verbs in the matrix clause as well as the subordinator marking the embedded clause as clues to the modal value of the utterance, but which fail to activate subjunctive use in the learner's language. While such lexical and pragmatic means are highly frequent in the early stages of acquisition, their on-going purpose in even very advanced learners demonstrates their continued importance in advanced L2 communication — not only does their presence in the case of the subjunctive in the advanced variety reflect more wide-ranging findings for less advanced varieties, but it also reflects our earlier findings from the same data for other morphological forms still to emerge in the advanced variety, such as the *plus-que-parfait* where the meaning of anteriority can be clearly inferred thanks to such devices when the *plus-que-parfait* is missing from the advanced learner's linguistic repertoire (see Howard, 2005a).

However, aside from greatly facilitating communication when grammatical means have yet to emerge, such pragmatic and lexical devices do not seem to serve to aid the learners in reminding them to use a specific morphological form. That is to say, while previous work such as Terrell *et al.* (1987) has shown that instructed learners can have high metalinguistic awareness of the lexical forms requiring the subjunctive, that awareness does not manifest itself in real-time communication. This is in spite of our learners' advanced status, where it might be expected that their extensive acquisition of French might in some way have allowed them to develop communication strategies to put more difficult forms such as the subjunctive to use. The type of communication strategy we have in mind is that the presence of other subjunctive-conditioning lexical forms would serve to remind the learner of the need to produce the subjunctive, much in the same way as native speaker use of the subjunctive has assumed the status of simply a highly codified rule of grammar as opposed to necessarily expressing a semantic nuance. While generally not in evidence, such a strategy is somewhat exemplified in the case of subjunctive use with *falloir*, where the lexical verb seems to serve as a reminder of its co-occurrence with the subjunctive. It is curious, however, that in spite of many years of learning French, our advanced learners have such minimal recourse to a very useful strategy ensuring increased grammatical accuracy in their spoken discourse.

Notwithstanding such minimal use of the lexical strategy outlined, subjunctive usage by the learners does seem to be based on lexical learning as opposed to semantic learning — in restricting their use of the subjunctive to

falloir, the question arises as to just to what extent they have acquired the se-
mantic meaning of the subjunctive. Since they show no sign of extending the
form to other subjunctive-inducing contexts, it would seem that *falloir* simply
serves to facilitate use of the subjunctive. On this score, the learners behave
very similarly to the native speakers in Laurier's (1989) and Poplack's (1992,
2001) studies within a Canadian minority francophone context. However, it
begs the question as to why *falloir* is favoured over any other lexical verb.
Tentative answers might relate to its frequency and saliency in the input — for
example, drawing on Poplack (1992) and Sand's (1983) finding that "92 of the
111 unambiguous examples of the subjunctive occurred after *falloir*", Ayres-
Bennett *et al*. (2001, p. 211) state that "[T]his suggests that there are relatively
few contexts in the spoken language where the subjunctive is really vigorous".

In conclusion, as we stated at the outset of the discussion, while limited
in usage, use of the subjunctive nonetheless serves to illuminate a number
of important questions concerning its (non-)acquisition within the advanced
learner variety. Beyond the issues outlined, a final question concerns the po-
tential pedagogic implications, whereby in spite of many years of learning, the
subjunctive as a marker of modality is to all intents and purposes missing from
the learner variety demonstrated by our advanced learners of French at least.
Whether its absence reflects a certain level of fossilisation on their part is un-
clear, insofar as the advanced learner has generally attained a highly functional
level of communicative proficiency such that the subjunctive may simply be
a functionally redundant grammatical item within the advanced learner's lin-
guistic repertoire. Another potential explanation which should not be seen as
opposed to those of fossilisation and functional redundancy but rather as a re-
lated factor is that of the saliency and frequency of the subjunctive in the input.
On this score, we have previously noted that the subjunctive is an infrequent
form even in native speaker discourse — its late emergence may simply reflect
its infrequent occurrence, unlike other more frequent tense-modality-aspect
forms such as the past time forms of the *passé composé* and the *imparfait*,
and lexical verbs of modality such as *pouvoir* 'can'/'may' and *devoir* 'have
to'/'should'.

While such issues constitute potential explanations for its late acquisition,
the subjunctive is nonetheless a robust form in native speaker discourse which
is not a mere morpho-syntactic luxury — indeed, children acquire its usage
early on. As previously mentioned, while it does constitute a highly codified
rule of grammar in native speaker discourse, it nonetheless also retains some
semantic value. From a pedagogic point of view, therefore, there is much scope
for more exploratory work to be carried out on the impact of specific peda-
gogic strategies in relation to the subjunctive in L2 French. While such work
is already advanced in the case of L2 Spanish (see Collentine, 1995, 1998;

Collentine *et al.*, 2002), future investigations of the advanced learner can complement such work by examining how pedagogic strategies may differentially impact on the acquisition of an otherwise functionally-redundant item to come to be used within an already highly functional advanced learner variety. A particularly interesting question concerns how the learner's use of a wider range of subjunctive-inducing syntactic complements and lexical verbs may impact on its wider usage. Further work on more advanced learners may illuminate the effect of how morphological development on use of the subjunctive may be differentially constrained by the learner's increased syntactic development in relation to subjunctive-inducing verbal structures, on the one hand, and syntactic complements, on the other. For the moment, since our findings indicate that subjunctive usage is restricted to *falloir*, the impact of such factors as type of subjunctive-inducing context cannot be teased out.

In more general terms, such work will also serve to track how the advanced learner proceeds from lexical learning to engage in the more semantic learning characteristic, to some extent at least, of native speaker subjunctive usage. In tracking such development in French, it will also be necessary to identify how the acquisition of the subjunctive relates to other morphological markers of modality such as the future and the conditional. As a neglected area of L2 French, future research in the area of modality in general, and in the case of the subjunctive in particular, promises to illuminate a number of interesting questions in relation to the advanced learner variety.

Notes

[1] The imperfect subjunctive is not detailed here since we are only concerned with the spoken language — for discussion, see Dreer (2007).

[2] For a quantitative presentation of levels of use of the subjunctive in such contexts, see Nordahl's (1969) study of written French. For other presentations of the subjunctive in French, see Connors (1978), Ludwig (1988) and Soutet (2000).

[3] *Groupe aixois de recherche en syntaxe.*

[4] For other studies emanating from the project, see, for example, Howard (2005b, 2006a, 2006b).

[5] One reviewer questions the prescriptive approach used in the data extraction phase of the study, pointing out that there is often a considerable discrepancy between how such norms supposedly apply in the written language and how they are used in the spoken language. Indeed, in view of such discrepancies between prescriptive and descriptive norms, as best exemplified by Poplack (1992), some studies of native speaker subjunctive usage only count in their analyses tokens of subjunctive usage

which co-occur more than once with a particular verb in the matrix clause or subordinating clause. Such an approach, however, did not prove feasible in this study of learner language in view of the limited number of tokens of contexts where the subjunctive occurred more than once. We would note, however, that a more prescriptive approach to the analysis does shed light on the extent to which the learners had acquired the prescriptive norms to which they had been sensitized during their formal classroom instruction. In so doing, it is possible to illuminate the range of contexts in which the learners use, or fail to use the subjunctive, as indicated in the list of contexts outlined in the following section — the full list is provided in Appendix A.

[6] One reviewer rightly points out that the number of tokens involved in the analysis is quite small, and in so doing, alludes to a very real issue concerning the role of frequency in spoken data analysis. Indeed, even in the case of native speaker studies of infrequent forms, there has been some discussion, but little agreement — see, for example, Carruthers' (1996, 1999) work on the *passé surcomposé*. However, as we noted in the case of subjunctive usage for this study, the individual learner's rate of production of subjunctive contexts approaches that of the native speaker. While a more experimental study involving grammatical judgement tests for example would undoubtedly give rise to a larger number of tokens, we must be cogniscent of the fact that such type of study would provide very different insights than those which we attempt to provide here in our use of production data. Indeed, given that studies using such comprehension data exist, albeit of languages other than L2 French, as we outlined in the literature review to this paper, the results presented here aim to complement such studies by precisely drawing on spoken production data.

[7] That single token of the subjunctive is deemed ambiguous since its realisation as *s'entende* 'get on with' could simply reflect a phonological slip of the tongue on the learner's part — we are not convinced that the learner would not also produce this form in indicative contexts.

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Appendix A:
List of subjunctive-selecting devices produced by the learners

Group 1		Group 2		Group 3	
Lexical verbs n %	Syntactic devices n %	Lexical verbs n %	Syntactic devices n %	Lexical verbs n %	Syntactic devices n %
ne pas penser que 7 47	*avant que* 3 50	*falloir que* 8 44	*pour que* 1 100	*falloir que* 3 17	*jusqu'à ce que* 6 50
falloir que 5 33	*jusqu'à ce que* 2 33	*être impor-tant que* 4 22		*ne pas penser que* 3 17	*avant que* 4 33
être impor-tant que 2 13	*après que*[a] 1 17	*vouloir que* 4 22		*vouloir que* 3 17	*pour que* 2 17
être con-tent que 1 7		*attendre que* 1 6		*sembler que* 3 17	
		ne pas croire que 1 6		*être pos-sible que* 2 11	
				préférer que 2 11	
				attendre que 2 11	

[a] Although some prescriptive grammars suggest that the subjunctive does not occur following *après que*, it is found to do so variably in some varieties of spoken French. Superlative forms are not detailed in this table.