

Sanne van Vuuren

Traces of transfer?

Pragmatic development in the use of initial adverbials in the interlanguage of advanced Dutch learners of English

This thesis investigates the nature of language development at advanced stages of acquisition by presenting a contrastive and developmental corpus-analysis of advanced Dutch EFL learners' use of clause-initial adverbials. It also looks into the possible underlying causes of Dutch learners' frequent use of initial adverbials by considering whether it might be a) a transfer-induced feature of Dutch English, b) an interlanguage feature shared by learners of English with other L1 backgrounds, or c) a characteristic of novice writing in general. The results suggests that it is not so much the overall frequency of initial adverbials that sets apart advanced Dutch learners' EFL writing from the writing of novice and expert native speakers, but the way initial adverbials are used for discourse linking purposes. There appear to be two (possibly interrelated) causes of this heavy reliance on initial adverbials to achieve textual cohesion: transfer and teaching. On the one hand, subtle traces of transfer at the syntax-pragmatics interface are likely to lie at the root of advanced Dutch learners' use of initial adverbials to 'anchor' the sentence in which they occur to an antecedent in the directly preceding discourse. Dutch learners' heavy reliance on initial linking adverbials, on the other hand, appears to be a more widely shared interlanguage feature. This may be at least partly explained by a largely reductionist approach to teaching textual cohesion in L2 English coursebooks, in which a focus on linking words comes at the expense of representative discussion of other cohesive strategies.

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