

# L2 ACQUISITION OF CLITICS: OLD FRENCH AS AN INTERLANGUAGE\*

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## 1. Introduction

Some time ago a Dutch newspaper published a cartoon called “language delay”.<sup>1</sup> The cartoon shows an Islamic woman living in The Netherlands who tells the psychologist that her son is language delayed. The psychologist asks how big the delay is. The boy shows his “delay” by saying one of the oldest Dutch texts attested, dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup>

Although the cartoon just wants to stress that the language delay of Islamic children living in the Netherlands is a problem and does so by playing with the ambiguity of the word “language delay”, which makes the cartoon humorous, I show in this paper that interlanguages of L2 learners can show striking similarities with older stages of the L2.

Hulk (1990) shows that the word order used by Dutch L2 learners of French in the initial states reflects the Old French word order in 1300, which supports the idea that interlanguages of L2 learners are possible human languages, suggesting that L2 learners have access to UG. Hulk tries to account for the similarity by arguing that the interlanguages of Dutch L2 learners of French are the result of transfer from Germanic, viz. Dutch (see also Hulk 1991) and that the Old French word order is the result of an influence by the Germanic superstrate, such as V1 in yes-no questions (see, e.g., Posner 1996:249), V2 in declarative main clauses and verb final in subordinate clauses (see, e.g. Posner 1996:248-249 and Machonis 1990:109-110; 200-201).

The phenomenon that is studied in this paper is the acquisition of clitic placement in French by Dutch university students learning French as an L2. It is shown that the interlanguages of many of these L2 learners also come very close to 13<sup>th</sup> century French w.r.t. clitic placement. In this paper I also try to account for this similarity by showing that both contain Germanic aspects.

The paper is organized as follows. In §2, previous studies on L2 acquisition of French object pronouns are presented and some predictions for the acquisition of the French pronoun system by Dutch learners are formulated. In §3, the results of a test on the acquisition of clitic placement in L2 French by Dutch university students are presented. In §4, the development of clitic placement in Old and Middle French is presented and the students’ interlanguages are compared to Old French. In §5, the results of this paper are discussed. The paper ends with some concluding remarks in §6.

## 2. Previous studies and some predictions

Kayne (1975) distinguishes two types of pronouns in Modern French: strong pronouns and clitics. The strong pronouns can only be used after a preposition, in isolation or in a clefted constituent. They can also be coordinated. The clitics occur in proclisis w.r.t. the verb, but are used in enclisis w.r.t. a positive imperative.

The French pronoun system is presented in table 1. When *je*, *me*, *te*, *le*, *la*, and *se* are cliticised to a verb starting with a vowel or a mute *h*, their vowel is dropped.

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	subject clitic	accus. clitic	dative clitic	strong pronoun
1 <sup>st</sup> sg.	je	me	me	moi
2 <sup>nd</sup> sg.	tu	te	te	toi
3 <sup>rd</sup> m. sg.	il	le	lui	lui
3 <sup>rd</sup> f. sg.	elle	la	lui	elle
1 <sup>st</sup> pl.	nous	nous	nous	nous
2 <sup>nd</sup> pl.	vous	vous	vous	vous
3 <sup>rd</sup> m. pl.	ils	les	leur	eux
3 <sup>rd</sup> f. pl.	elles	les	leur	elles
3 <sup>rd</sup> refl.		se	se	soi

table 1 : modern French pronoun system

Cardinaletti & Starke (1999) make a tripartite division: strong pronouns, weak pronouns and clitics. It can be argued that non-strong subject pronouns in French are weak because they can be left out in coordination (1), whereas object pronouns are clitics because they cannot be left out in coordination (2):

- (1) *Il entre et dit bonjour.*  
 He enters and says hello  
 “He enters the room and says hello.”
- (2) *\*Je le dis et (je) répète.*  
 I it say and (I) repeat  
 “I say it and repeat it.”

In this section, I present some studies on L2 acquisition of French (object) clitics and I formulate some predictions for the acquisition by (advanced) Dutch learners of French.

2.1 *Previous studies on L2 acquisition of clitic placement in French*

Towell & Hawkins (1994) distinguish four stages for the acquisition of preverbal unstressed pronouns by English learners of French. In the first stage the learners transfer the position from English:

1. Postverbal position      *\*J'ai reconnu le* I have recognized him
2. Omission of the object      *\*J'ai reconnu* I have recognized
3. Before the participle      *\*J'ai le reconnu* I have him recognized
4. Before the tensed verb      *Je l'ai reconnu* I him have recognized

Granfeldt & Schlyter (2004) confirm this development for Swedish adult learners of French (stages 1, 3 and 4 of Towell & Hawkins'). They report that in postverbal position the pronoun often has a non-clitic form (which can also be a strong form as in (3)), that in the intermediate position (before a participle or an infinitive) it has a strong form, as in (4), or a weak/clitic form, and that in the target position before the tensed verb it has a clitic form:

- (3) *il dit lui*  
 he says him
- (4) *il a lui assis*  
 he has him sat

According to Granfeldt & Schlyter these results mean that the process of cliticisation is subject to development in adult grammars. Granfeldt & Schlyter argue against a transfer account. Since a pronoun position as in Towell & Hawkins' 3<sup>rd</sup> stage does not exist in Swedish, there cannot be transfer. Since it is a position that exists neither in L1 Swedish nor in L2 French, this suggests in Granfeldt & Schlyter's view direct access to Universal Grammar. To account for the errors, Granfeldt & Schlyter adopt Rizzi's (1988:33) Categorical Uniformity Principle for L2 acquisition by adults: adults assume a unique canonical structural realization for a given semantic type. Granfeldt & Schlyter assume that clitics are heads. In their view, Swedish adults start by interpreting French pronouns as XPs.

Herschensohn (2004) found the four stages distinguished by Towell & Hawkins in the L2 French interlanguages of two Anglophone subjects, 16-17 years of age. On the basis of these findings, she supports the Full Transfer/Full Access hypothesis. L2 learners transfer their L1 settings, but are also able to acquire functional projections (such as clitic projections) that are not present in their L1.

In the same vein, Hulk (2000) claims that although young bilingual children have access to Universal Grammar, they can also transfer from their other language. Anouk, a Dutch-French bilingual child, produces sentences in French in which the object pronoun is in a position possible in Dutch, following a tensed verb, or preceding (an adverb +) a participle or an infinitive:

- (5) *Je prends la.* (Anouk 3;03,23)  
 I take it
- (6) *T' as le pas donné.* (Anouk 3;06,25)  
 You have it not given
- (7) *Tu peux le très bien faire.* (Anouk 4;06)  
 You can it very well do

Furthermore Anouk uses clitic climbing with modal and aspectual verbs. In Dutch the pronoun would follow the tensed verb. Probably Anouk (incorrectly) applies the French proclisis rule to the pronoun:

- (8) *Je le sais pas faire.* (Anouk 4;06).

Similarly, Duffield et al. (2002) argue in favor of the No Impairment Hypothesis, whereby L2 functional categories, features and feature values are attainable. The English and Spanish subjects in Duffield et al.'s study were at a high intermediate or advanced level of proficiency. The test was a sentence matching procedure, consisting of pairs of grammatical and ungrammatical sentences that had to be judged by the learners. The learners' grammaticality judgments of proclisis of the pronoun w.r.t. the verb(s) in simple and perfect tenses were tested, as well as the grammaticality judgments of absence of clitic climbing with modal verbs (clitic climbing not allowed) and clitic climbing with causatives (required in modern French). A clear overall effect of grammaticality was found, although this was less clear for the causatives for the English learners.

For child L2 French White (1996) reports that object clitics were acquired later than subject pronouns (just as in L1 French), but that there was no stage in which the English L1 was the initial state of L2 French.

After having presented some previous studies on the L2 or bilingual acquisition of the French pronoun system, in the next section I will do some predictions for its acquisition by Dutch adults.

## 2.2 *Pronoun placement in Dutch and predictions for L2 acquisition of French by Dutch learners*

According to Cardinaletti (1999), Dutch has three types of (object) pronouns: strong pronouns, weak pronouns, clitics. Weak pronouns and clitics are labeled deficient pronouns. Since the distinction between clitics and weak pronouns in Dutch is not relevant for this paper, I will group them together as weak pronouns.

The Dutch object pronoun system is presented in table 2 :

	strong	weak
1 <sup>st</sup> sg.	mij	me
2 <sup>nd</sup> sg.	jou	je
3 <sup>rd</sup> m. sg.	hem	hem; 'm
3 <sup>rd</sup> f. sg.	haar	haar; 'r; d'r
3 <sup>rd</sup> n. sg.		het; 't
1 <sup>st</sup> pl.	ons	ons
2 <sup>nd</sup> pl.	jullie	jullie
3 <sup>rd</sup> pl.	hun; hen	hun; hen; ze

table 2: Dutch pronoun system

Dutch has an SVO word order in root sentences and an SOV word order in non-root sentences. Pronouns occupy the same position as full DPs:

- (9) *Ik zie het.*  
“I see it.”
- (10) *Ik denk dat hij het begrijpt.*  
I think that he it understands  
“I think that he understands it.”

It has been shown in the literature (see §2.1) that in the initial interlanguages of English and Swedish learners of French pronouns occur in postverbal position (*\*Il dit lui*). The learners of French in my test have already learned during their study that in French clitics precede the verb in declarative sentences (*Il lui dit*). Since in Dutch subordinate clauses, pronouns also precede the verb, the preverbal position in French is not difficult to acquire for Dutch learners.

Dutch is a V2 language. Referring to Den Besten (1977) and Koster (1978), who distinguish weak pronouns from strong pronouns on the basis of their distribution, Cardinaletti (1999) observes that in Dutch weak object pronouns cannot occur sentence-initially in verb second clauses, which means that topicalization of the weak object pronoun into Spec,CP is not possible:<sup>3</sup>

- (11) *Mij zag hij.*  
me saw he  
“He saw ME.”
- (12) *\*Me zag hij.*  
“He saw me.”

It has to be noticed that a weak pronoun in Dutch can, however, occur after a conjunction:

- (13) *Als Paul me belt en me vertelt dat ...*  
if Paul me calls and me tells that ...  
“If Paul calls me and tells me that ...”

If, in L2 acquisition, learners rely on their L1, this leads to the following prediction for the use of clitic pronouns in French by Dutch learners:

*Prediction 1:*

Dutch learners refrain from using clitics in sentence-initial position in French, but they may use clitics in sentence-initial position after a conjunction.

In Dutch, any non-finite verb accompanying the inflected verb must appear in clause-final position, objects preceding the non-finite verb or the infinitive marker *te* “to”. This is called verb separation, cf. German (Clahsen & Muysken 1986).

- (14) *Jan heeft het gehoord.*  
 John has it heard  
 “John has heard it.”
- (15) a. *Jan wil het horen.*  
 John want it hear  
 “John wants to hear it.”
- b. *Hij probeert het te begrijpen.*  
 he tries it to understand  
 “He tries to understand it.”

Dutch learners have to learn that in French clitics precede the auxiliary (*Je l’ai reconnu*, see §2.1) and not the participle (*\*J’ai le reconnu*), as in Dutch (see (14)). Probably, the advanced learners in my test will have already acquired this rule. In Dutch, pronouns also precede infinitives. The infinitival clause can be a direct object or an indirect object. If it is a direct object the pronoun immediately follows the finite verb (15). If the infinitival clause is an indirect object, the pronoun is separated from the finite verb by the preposition, which forms a compound with the locative pro-form *er* announcing the infinitival complement, as in (16):

- (16) *Hij denkt erover ze te kopen.*  
 he thinks of-it them to buy  
 “He considers buying them.”

Since in Dutch pronouns precede the infinitive, the pre-infinitival position of the clitic in modern French (*Je peux le comprendre* “I can understand it”) will probably not pose a problem to Dutch L2 learners of French. When they have learned that in French deficient pronouns precede tensed verbs and generally cannot follow them, as in Dutch, the learners might also wrongly apply this rule to a pronoun which follows a tensed verb, but which is the complement of the infinitive (*\*Je le peux comprendre*). As we saw in the previous subsection, this is an error that the Dutch-French bilingual child in Hulk’s (2000) study makes, see (8). Dutch learners of French will probably not apply the preposing rule when the pronoun is separated from the tensed verb by a preposition (*\*Il la rêve de rencontrer* instead of *Il rêve de la rencontrer* “He dreams of meeting her”). This is formulated in prediction 2:

*Prediction 2:*

Dutch learners may incorrectly apply the proclisis rule w.r.t. tensed verbs to the pronominal complement of infinitives, but they do not do so when the infinitival clause is introduced by a preposition.

In Dutch, when an infinitive is modified by an adverb, the order is pronoun–adverb–infinitive (*Ik begin hem goed te kennen* “I am getting to know him well”, whereas in French the word order is adverb–pronoun–infinitive (*Je commence à bien le connaître* instead of *\*Je commence à le bien connaître* “I am getting to know him well”). In the previous subsection, we saw that Anouk, the bilingual child from Hulk’s study, transferred the word order from Dutch to French (see 7). This leads to prediction 3:

Prediction 3:

Dutch learners of French may incorrectly use the order pronoun–adverb–infinitive.

After having presented the French and Dutch pronoun systems and the expected errors made by the Dutch learners in French, I will present the test and the results in the next section.

### 3. L2 acquisition of French pronouns by Dutch students

In this section I present a study on the acquisition of clitic placement in French by Dutch L2 learners.

#### 3.1 *The test*

In order to find out how Dutch learners acquire French clitic placement, I tested a group of 50 Dutch students at the University of Amsterdam, all learning French as an L2.<sup>4</sup> Dutch university students generally have learned French during 4-6 years at school, approximately 2 or 3 hours a week. This means that they have had 400-600 hours of formal instruction at school. The students that I tested had just started the second semester three weeks before the test took place. During the first and second semester the students follow grammar courses at an advanced level, but clitic placement is not extensively studied before the second half of the second semester. The students all had read and heard texts, however, in which they must have met the various aspects of clitic placement investigated in this paper.

The test I used was a written production test. It consisted of 20 French sentences. In each sentence one object DP was underlined. The complements were all introduced by a definite article and could only be replaced by the third person object clitic pronouns *le*, *la*, *l'*, or *les*. The students were told to replace the underlined complement by a personal pronoun and to put the pronoun in the correct position in the sentence. The students had to write the whole sentence, with the underlined complement replaced by the pronoun. They were told not to change the word order of the part of the sentence that was not underlined. The test took 15 minutes. The test is presented as an appendix at the end of this paper, with the required answers.

In §2.2, I formulated three predictions for the acquisition of the French pronoun system by advanced Dutch learners. Since the learners are advanced, I predict that they will have reached stage 4 distinguished by Towell & Hawkins (1994), see §2.1, and will put the clitic before the tensed verb in sentences 1 and 2 (see the appendix). Prediction 1 is tested in sentences 3, 7, and 8 and in 4, 11, and 14: it is predicted that the learners will refrain from putting the clitic in sentence-initial position, but that after a conjunction, they will be less reluctant to use the clitic in proclisis. It is also predicted that in sentences 1, 2, 5, 10, 13, and 16 the learners will (correctly) put the clitic before the verb, because it will not be in sentence-initial position. Prediction 2 predicts that there will be more clitic climbing in sentences 9, 15 and 18 (without a preposition) than in sentences 6, 12, and 17 (with a preposition/infinitive marker) or than in 19, where clitic climbing would place the clitic in sentence-initial position. Prediction 3 is tested with sentences 12 and 20. It is predicted that the learners will wrongly put the clitic before (part of) the adverb.

In the next subsection I present the results of the test.

#### 3.2 *The results*

In this section I present the results for all 20 sentences that the 50 students were asked to transform in relation to the results of the studies presented in §2.1 and in relation to the predictions presented in §2.2.

In sentence 1, a declarative sentence with a simple tense, 12% of the students put the pronoun (in a strong form) in postverbal position (*Jean connaît elle*; *Jean connaît lui*). This is a stage 1 error in Towell & Hawkins' classification presented in §2.1. This order can have been transferred from Dutch, see (9). Some students, viz. 6%, put the pronoun in a strong form in the preverbal position (*Jean elle connaît*; *Jean lui connaît*). Most of the students, viz. 82%, used a clitic in preverbal position, which is target-like and which

corresponds to stage 4 in Towell & Hawkins' classification (*Jean la connaît; Jean le connaît*). This order occurs in subordinate clauses in Dutch, see (10).

With the perfect tense in sentence 2, 70% of the students produced target-like (*Michel l'a rencontré*) and 18% put the pronoun correctly before the auxiliary, but in its strong form (*Michel lui a rencontré*). Just as in sentence 1, some students, viz. 8%, put the pronoun in postverbal position (*Michel a rencontré lui; Michel a rencontré il*), but they cannot have transferred this from Dutch, in which the order is as in (14). This is stage 1 in Towell & Hawkins' classification, but their English learners might have transferred this order from English. Only 4% transferred the word-order from Dutch (*Michel a lui rencontré*), which is stage 3 in Towell & Hawkins' classification. Since this word order does not exist in Swedish (or English), this word order in the L2 French interlanguages of Swedish (or English) learners suggests, in Granfeldt & Schlyter's (2004) view, direct access to UG.

It seems therefore that most of the students had reached stage 4 of Towell & Hawkins' classification. In §2.2, I predicted, however, that there would be other aspects of clitic placement that would still present a problem.

Prediction 1 predicts that Dutch learners of French refrain from putting a clitic in sentence-initial position. As expected, in the inversion structure in sentence 3, only 22% did so (*le connais-tu?*), and 2% used a strong pronoun in preverbal position (*tu lui connais?*). Most of the students put the pronoun in postverbal position after the subject, as in Dutch: 28% used a weak form (*connais-tu le?; connais-tu il?*) and 34% used a strong form (*connais-tu lui?*). Others, viz. 10%, put the pronoun in postverbal position before the subject (*connais-le tu?*). Although the students were instructed not to alter the word order of the sentences, some of them (4%) did so in order to avoid putting the clitic in sentence-initial position (*tu le connais? ; tu lui connais?*).

Prediction 1 was also tested in the inversion structure in a perfect tense in sentence 8. Again, most of the students did not put the clitic in sentence-initial position. Only 26% did so (*l'as-tu rencontré?*). Most of the students transferred the Dutch word order (*as-tu le rencontré?; as-tu lui rencontré?; as-tu la rencontré*) and some students used another order (*as-le tu rencontré?; as-tu rencontré lui?*).

Since there is enclisis in French positive imperatives, prediction 1 predicts that this construction will not pose a problem for the Dutch learners. This prediction is borne out: the majority, viz. 74%, of the students used enclisis in the imperative sentence 7 (*Donne-le à ton frère!; Donne-l' à ton frère!*), which is target-like, and 6% used the strong form of the pronoun in postverbal position (*Donne-lui à ton frère!*), whereas 18% put the clitic in preverbal position (*Le donne à ton frère !*). One student, i.e. 2%, did not know how to transform the sentence.

Prediction 1 also predicts that after the conjunction *et* the students will be less reluctant to use proclisis. In the declarative sentence 4, the students did not seem to interpret the position after *et* as the first position of the conjoined sentence, because 74% used proclisis (*et le voit souvent*) and 12% used a strong pronoun in preverbal position (*et lui voit souvent*), cf. sentence 1; 8% used enclisis but added a subject pronoun (*et il le voit souvent*), which suggests that they analyze the subject pronoun as a clitic, cf. sentences 1-2.

In the yes-no question 11, 32% put the pronoun in sentence-initial position after *et* (*et le vois-tu souvent?; et lui vois-tu souvent ?*), whereas only 24% did so in absolute sentence-initial position in the yes-no question 3.

With a perfect tense in the yes-no question 16, 36% used proclisis after *et* (*et l'as-tu lu?*), whereas only 26% did so in absolute sentence-position in 8.

In sentence 14, where the positive imperative was preceded by *et*, 60% of the students (incorrectly) put the pronoun in preverbal position (*écris une lettre et l'envoie à ta copine!*), whereas only 18% did so when the imperative, in sentence 7, was not preceded by *et* (*le donne à ton frère!*).

Whereas in a yes-no question the students refrained from using the pronoun in preverbal position, in a *wh*-question, in which the *wh*-phrase is the sentence-initial constituent, they did not refrain from using it in preverbal position. In the *wh*-question 5, 74% put the pronoun in preverbal position (*à qui l'enverrez-vous?; à*

*qui la enverrez-vous?*; *A qui lui enverrez-vous ?*), whereas only 24% did so in absolute sentence-initial position in the yes-no question 3. In the *wh*-question 13, which is in the perfect tense, 44% put the pronoun in preverbal position, whereas only 26% did so in absolute sentence-position.

Similarly, the declarative sentences 1 and 2, discussed above, contain a sentence-initial position that is filled, so that using proclisis in these sentences must not pose a problem. Since in a negative imperative the first position is filled, proclisis in these sentences must not pose a problem either. Indeed, in sentence 10, 98% of the students used proclisis (*ne les jette pas!*; *ne le jette pas!*).

Clitic placement w.r.t. a modal verb followed by an infinitive should not pose a problem for Dutch learners, because both in Dutch and in French the pronoun is placed before the infinitive. As in Duffield et al.'s (2002) test (see §2.1), the majority of the students placed the pronoun correctly before the infinitive in sentences 9 (*Eric veut la donner*; *Eric veut le donner*) and 15 (*Nicolas n'ose pas le regarder*). In example 8 we saw, however, that the Dutch-French bilingual child Anouk applied the proclisis rule to the pronoun and put it before the tensed verb. This was done by 14% of the students in sentence 9, and by 30% of the students in sentence 15.

If Dutch learners transfer the pronoun position from Dutch, they will put the pronoun before the infinitive, but they will not use clitic climbing with causatives, unless they apply the proclisis rule, just like Anouk in (8). This prediction is indeed borne out. In sentence 18, 66% put the clitic before the infinitive (*le professeur fait les corriger*). This is not conform Duffield et al.'s (2002) results. In their sentence matching test, clitic climbing with causatives was found more grammatical than no clitic climbing.

Prediction 2 predicts that there will be more clitic climbing in sentences 9, 15 and 18 (without a preposition) than in sentences 6, 12, and 17 (with a preposition/infinitive marker) or than in 19, where clitic climbing would place the clitic in sentence-initial position. In sentence 9, 14% of the students (incorrectly) used clitic climbing (*Eric la veut donner*), and in sentence 15, 30% did so (*ne l'ose pas regarder*). In sentence 18, with a causative verb, 34% of the students (correctly) used clitic climbing (*le professeur les fait corriger*). As predicted by prediction 2, there was less clitic climbing when the infinitive was preceded by a preposition: 8% in sentence 6 (*la maîtresse les commence à ranger*), 0% in sentence 12 (*la maman les conseille aux enfants de bien respecter*), and 2% in sentence 17 (*l'enfant les promet de respecter*). In the yes-no question 19, with a modal verb, only 2% of the students used clitic climbing (*la veux-tu donner?*), since clitic climbing would put the clitic in the first position, whereas 14% did so in the declarative sentence 9, with the same modal verb (*Eric la veut donner*).

Prediction 3 was tested with sentences 12 and 20. It predicts that, just like Anouk in (7), the students would wrongly put the pronoun before an adverb preceding an infinitive, just as in Dutch. This prediction is borne out. In sentence 12, 70% of the students incorrectly put the pronoun before the adverb (*de les bien respecter*; *de ils bien respecter*). In sentence 20, 26% of the students put the pronoun before *pas* (*ne la pas connaître*; *ne le pas connaître*), and 6% before *ne* (*la ne pas connaître*).

After having presented the results of the test and the influence from Dutch on the L2 French interlanguages of the Dutch learners, I will show in the next section that although many of the non-target-like uses are not accepted in modern French, they were, however, accepted in Old or Middle French.

#### 4. Old/Middle French

The “Old French” period covers the period from the year 842 (date of the “Serments de Strasbourg”, the earliest known document written in the emerging vernacular) until around the fourteenth century, when the period of “Middle French” started.<sup>5</sup> Old French is not a homogeneous language during the five centuries of its existence, but changed gradually. Therefore, several characteristics of Middle French were present already in Old French. On the other hand, some characteristics of Old French changed only in the Middle French period, or even later, i.e. after 1600, a year often used to demarcate the end of the Middle French period.

The (object) pronoun system of Old French consisted of both clitic/weak pronouns and strong pronouns. The clitic/weak pronouns were not autonomous, and they could have an unstressed form (when they preceded the verb) or a stressed form, when they were in a stressed position after the verb. The former

type can be equated with clitics and the latter with weak pronouns in Cardinaletti & Starke’s (1999) tripartite pronoun system. The strong pronouns were stressed and they were autonomous, just like DPs. They could function as direct objects. The forms of the Old French object pronouns are given in table 3 (cf. De Kok 1985):

	strong	Clitic = unstressed	Weak = stressed
1 <sup>st</sup> sg.	moi	me	moi
2 <sup>nd</sup> sg.	toi	te	toi
3 <sup>rd</sup> refl.	soi	se	soi
3 <sup>rd</sup> m. sg. acc.	lui	le	le
3 <sup>rd</sup> f. sg. acc.	li	la	la
3 <sup>rd</sup> m. sg. dat.	lui	li	li
3 <sup>rd</sup> f. sg. dat.	li	li	li
1 <sup>st</sup> pl.	nos	nos	nos
2 <sup>nd</sup> pl.	vos	vos	vos
3 <sup>rd</sup> m. pl. acc.	eus	les	les
3 <sup>rd</sup> f. pl. acc.	eles	les	les
3 <sup>rd</sup> m. pl. dat.	eus	lor	lor
3 <sup>rd</sup> f. pl. dat.	eles	lor	lor
genitive		en	en
locative		i	i

table 3: Old French pronoun system

In this section, I discuss some characteristics and changes in pronoun placement in Old French. I will not distinguish clitics and weak pronouns, weak pronouns being “clitics” in a stressed position. I will call them both clitics.

#### 4.1 Proclisis and enclisis w.r.t. tensed verbs

In Old French, just as in older stages of other Romance languages, clitics could not be placed in sentence-initial position. This restriction is called the Tobler-Mussafia law. When there was no element preceding the verb in sentence-initial position, the clitic had to occur postverbally.

De Kok (1985) schematizes the occurrence of clitic pronouns in Old French as follows:

- (17) a. (X) # # Y Cl + V [+fin]  
 b. (X) # # V [+fin] + Cl

These structures show that clitic placement in old French depends on the constituent immediately preceding the finite verb: Y in (17a) and X in (17b). Clitic placement depends on the type of relation between the verb and X or Y preceding it. Y belongs to the core sentence: it is a subject, a complement of the verb, negation or another adverbial modifier or a *wh*-word. It counts as the first position of the clause. That is why the clitic can occur in proclisis in (18). In (17b) X is not a complement of the verb, but is an adverbial sentence modifier, a conjunction, a vocative, an interjection, or a parenthetical. (19a), which is an example of enclisis after a coordinating conjunction, shows furthermore that Old French was a null subject language. X can also be an empty position, as in (19b):

- (18) a. *Li rois le voit.*  
 the king him sees  
 “The king sees him.”

- (19) b. *Ne t' en caust, Rainelet.*  
not you of-it worry, Rainelet  
"Don't worry, Rainelet."
- a. *... é mist la al lit David.*  
... and put it at bed David  
"... and put it at David's bed."
- b. *Faudra me ja mes ceste dolor?*  
Need me always this pain  
"Will I always have this pain?"

According to De Kok, this holds for all sentences types alike (declaratives, interrogatives, hortatives and imperatives).

Hirschbühler & Labelle (2000) distinguish five stages in the development of the position of clitic pronouns in French (see also De Kok 1985).

In stage 1, clitics are excluded from the initial position of the minimal clause in all types of clauses. This is the strict Tobler-Mussafia stage and corresponds to (17), described by De Kok (1985). This first stage extends from the first texts to the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Hirschbühler & Labelle (2000) adopt Vance's (1997) view that Old French is an asymmetric V2 language, with V occupying C in main clauses, except perhaps in SV(O) main clauses, which might be IPs. Since Vance shows that in Old French the pronominal subject, as in (20), is never lower than Spec,IP, Hirschbühler & Labelle claim that in this first stage object clitics are in C:

- (20) *... é savereíez le me vus mustrer?*  
... and would it me you show ?  
"... and would you show it to me?"
- (21) a. [CP savereíez+le+me [IP vus ...  
b. [CP ne+t'+en+caust [IP ...

In stage 2, clitics are in all types of sentences allowed in preverbal position when the clause is introduced by a conjunction of coordination like *et* "and". Hirschbühler & Labelle propose that in this stage the conjunction is in the initial position of the core sentence (the minimal clause in their terms). They notice that this is a short transitional stage, which starts towards the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century:

- (22) a. *... et en as tu talant?*  
... and of-it have you will  
"... and is it your will?"
- b. *Levés sus et me prestéz trois pains!*  
get up and me lend three breads  
"Get up and give me three loaves of bread!"

In stage 3, clitics are allowed in absolute initial position in all clauses except volitives (hortatives and imperatives), and are also in proclisis when the sentence is introduced by a sentence modifier (17b). This stage starts during the 13<sup>th</sup> century and lasts until the 16<sup>th</sup> century:

- (23) *S' est il donques corrouciez a nos?*  
himself is he thus get-angry at us  
"Did he thus get angry at us?"

In volitives, stages 1 and 2 are still preserved. Clitics are in preverbal position when they are in the configuration in (17a), where Y can be the coordinating conjunction *et*, but they are in postverbal position otherwise, i.e. in the configuration (17b):

- (24) a. ... *et vous en souviengne*  
 ... and your of-it remember  
 “and remember it!”  
 b. *Interrogué la.*  
 question her  
 “Question her!”

In stage 4, clitics are allowed in absolute position in all clauses except imperatives. This stage starts during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The following examples illustrate the use of proclisis with a hortative:

- (25) *Vous souvieveigne que ...*  
 you remember that ...  
 “Remember that ...”

Hirschbühler & Labelle suggest that in this stage I-to-C was limited to imperatives. In all other clause types, the verb stayed in I. In imperatives the clitic was in C, and could not occur in sentence-initial position. Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the coordinating conjunction still prevented the clitic from being in clause-initial position with imperatives:

- (26) ... *et me donnez mon bonnet de nuit.*  
 ... and me give my nightcap  
 “and give me my nightcap!”

In stage 5, clitics are always postverbal in positive imperative clauses, even after *et*. Contrary to *et*, the negative element *ne* still counts as the initial element, so that clitics still occur in enclisis with negative imperatives, just as in stage 1:

- (27) *Ne le fais pas!*  
 neg it do not  
 “Don’t do it!”

#### 4.2 *Infinitival constructions*

In infinitival constructions, pronouns could occur in three different positions: as a clitic to the right of the infinitive (28), as a strong form of the pronoun before the infinitive (29), or as a clitic before the main verb (30). The latter construction is called clitic climbing, since the clitic, being an argument of the infinitive, climbs to a position before the main verb:

- (28) *car il bee a couper li la teste*  
 because he desired to cut him the head  
 (29) ... *de eulz non aidier*  
 ... to them not help  
 “...to help them not”  
 (30) *nos le vos aiderons a prendre*  
 we it you help to take  
 “We help you to take it.”

De Kok (1987) relates the possibility for a clitic to climb to “high” object raising. If the clitic can climb, a DP (or a strong pronoun, see De Kok 1987, fn.2) that is a complement of the infinitive precedes the preposition, in a preposition + infinitive construction (but it can also stay in its position following the verb):

- (31) *Et commence la rive a aprochier.*  
and starts the bank to approach  
“And he starts to approach the river bank.”

De Kok observes that if the infinitival clause is replaced by a DP, it is a direct object. De Kok analyzes this clitic-climbing construction as a monoclausal construction (cf. Rizzi 1982, Rochette 1988, Pearce 1985, Roberts 1997), with the preposition as an infinitive marker, which has to immediately precede the infinitive (see also Martineau & Motapanyane 2000).

If the clitic is not allowed to climb, a DP (or a strong pronoun, see De Kok 1993) that is a complement of the infinitive follows the preposition, in a preposition + infinitive construction (but a DP can also stay in its position following the verb). De Kok relates the use of the strong pronoun preceding the infinitive to this construction:

- (32) *si s'est la pucele entremise de l'empereour desarmer*  
so REF is the girl occupied to the emperor disarm  
“the girl disarmed the emperor”

De Kok analyzes the non-clitic-climbing construction as a biclausal structure. The infinitival clause has the function of indirect object. De Kok analyzes the preposition as a real preposition.

According to Marchello-Nizia (1979), the clitic began to regularly appear before the infinitival verb at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In Martineau's (1991) view this means that the Tobler-Mussafia law was weakened in subordinate clauses. Martineau states that in Middle French clitic climbing was still permitted with the same classes of verbs as in Italian (Napoli 1981): modal verbs such as *devoir* “must”, *vouloir* “to want”, and *pouvoir* “can”, aspectual verbs such as *commencer à* “to begin”, and movement verbs such as *venir à* “to come”. It was not permitted with verbs such as *permettre de* “to allow” or *conseiller de* “to advise”, just as in Italian. Clitic climbing was attested until the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

When the clitic began to appear before the infinitive, it did not necessarily have to appear immediately before the infinitive. De Kok (1985) observes that the interpolation of adverbs or negation elements between the pronoun and the infinitival verb was allowed until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century:

- (33) *deliberait de les bien servir*  
thought to them well serve  
“He thought about serving them well.”
- (34) *faisoient semblant de le non croire*  
made appearing to him not believe  
“they pretended to not believe him.”

After having presented, in this section, pronoun placement in Old and Middle French, I will show, in the next subsection, that the interlanguages of the Dutch learners of French show striking similarities with one of the stages of Old/Middle French.

#### 4.3 *L2 French interlanguages and Old/Middle French*

In the previous subsections we saw that in Old French the Tobler-Mussafia law was active, and that it gradually lost its power during the Middle French period, in which, initially, conjunctions could count as the first position, and in which later the first position could be empty with proclisis. We also saw that proclisis

could not occur with imperatives, unless the first position was filled (e.g. by negation or, until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, by a conjunction).

It was furthermore noticed that in Old French pronouns could occur as strong pronouns before the infinitive or as enclitics on the infinitive. Clitic climbing occurred with a restricted class of verbs in Old French (the ones that did not occur with the preposition–strong pronoun–infinitive construction), but, when clitics started to appear in proclisis w.r.t. the infinitive, clitic climbing was limited to take place with a relatively small number of verbs in the course of Middle French, with some of which it was still attested until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In modern French the complement of an infinitive can only appear in proclisis before the inflected verb if the verb is a causative or a perception verb.

Finally, it was observed that the interpolation of adverbs or negation elements between the pronoun and the infinitival verb was allowed until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In §3.2 we saw that in accordance with prediction 1, the students avoided putting the clitic in sentence-initial position, which amounts to saying that the students applied the Tobler-Mussafia law. They avoided proclisis in yes-no questions and in positive imperatives, but if the first position is filled by negation in negative imperatives, the students accepted proclisis. It was also shown that proclisis was more accepted in *wh*-questions, in which the first position is filled by the *wh*-phrase, and even in the second part of coordinated sentences after the conjunction *et* “and”, especially in positive imperatives (60%).

The results of the test showed that in the students’ L2 French interlanguages the clitics almost never appeared in enclisis w.r.t. the infinitive. The clitics were used in proclisis w.r.t. the infinitive, but clitic climbing was also applied, especially with infinitives which are not preceded by a preposition/prepositional complementizer (with *oser* “to dare” in 30% of the cases, and with the causative verb *faire* in 34% of the cases).<sup>6</sup> This confirmed prediction 2.

Finally, it was shown that many students accepted interpolation of an adverb or negation between the clitic and the infinitive, in accordance with prediction 3.

With these characteristics, the interlanguage of Dutch L2 learners of French seems thus to be more like 13<sup>th</sup> century French than like modern French. There is, of course, a lot of variation between the interlanguages and not all interlanguages present all characteristics of 13<sup>th</sup> century French presented here, although 13<sup>th</sup> century French was not homogeneous either. There are, however, interlanguages that come very close to 13<sup>th</sup> century Old French, such as the ones presented in table 4:

student 1	student 2
Jean la connaît.	Jean la connaît
Connais-le tu?	Connais-le tu?
A qui l’enverrez-vous ?	... et le voit souvent.
Donne-le à ton frère !	Donne-le à ton frère !
As-le tu rencontré ?	As-tu le rencontré ?
Eric la veut donner.	Eric la veut donner.
Ne les jette pas !	Ne les jette pas !
... de les bien respecter.	... et lui vois tu souvent ?
Ecris une lettre et l’envoie à ta copine !	... de les bien respecter.
Nicolas ne l’ose pas regarder.	A quels collègues l’avez-vous montré ?
Gérard préfère ne la pas connaître.	Gérard préfère ne la pas connaître.

Table 4 : Interlanguages of Dutch L2 learners of French

If the interlanguages of many Dutch L2 learners of French is like Old French, the question is why this should be so. I discuss this question in the next section.

## 5. Discussion of the results

In §3.2, I presented the results of a test on pronouns that was made by 50 university students, all learning French as an L2, and having learned French at school during at least 400 hours. The results show that clitic placement is not easy to acquire. The most difficult items were the interrogative sentences 3, 8, 11, 13, and 16, the coordinated imperative sentence 14, the non-interpolation effect in 12, and clitic climbing with *faire* “to make” in 18.

I argued that many of the errors were the result of transfer from the Dutch L1, just as the errors made by the Dutch-French child Anouk, see §2.1. Hulk (1991) shows that whereas Dutch secondary school pupils (first, second and third level) still accept Dutch word orders such as verb separation, SOV, and V2 in French in a grammaticality judgment test, Dutch university students do not accept these word orders anymore in French (except for topicalization, a Dutch V2-construction, with an adverbial phrase). Hulk concludes that whereas the pupils still transfer the word order, the university students do not transfer this word order properly anymore. If my interpretation of the Old French word order in the Dutch learners’ L2 French interlanguages as (partly) a transfer from Dutch is correct, this means that whereas the Dutch university students have set the correct parameter for word order in French, they have only partly done so for the use of pronouns in French, and still transfer their use from Dutch. In order to know whether this interpretation of the data is correct, it will, however, be necessary to submit the test to other (i.e. non-Dutch) learners of French.

The students in my test also placed the pronoun in a position that exists neither in Dutch nor in French, but which is possible in other languages, such as English (e.g. *Michel a rencontré lui*). This suggests that the (adult) learners still have access to UG.

It was shown that many of the erroneous productions made by the students were possible in Old French, which also shows that their interlanguage is a possible human language. If the learners transfer rules from their Dutch L1 in the case of clitic placement in French, this means that Old French resembled Dutch in various respects. In the introduction to this paper I referred to Hulk (1990), who shows that the word order used by Dutch L2 learners of French in the initial states reflects the Old French word order of 1300. It was stated that Hulk tries to account for the similarity by arguing that the interlanguages of Dutch L2 learners of French are the result of transfer from Germanic, viz. Dutch, and that the Old French word order is the result of an influence by the Germanic superstrate (V1 in yes-no questions, V2 in declarative main clauses and verb final in subordinate clauses). The similarities between Dutch and Old French w.r.t. pronoun placement are, first, due to the fact that the prohibition against putting a clitic or a weak pronoun in sentence-initial position is an Indo-European law (Wackernagel’s law), which still holds in Dutch, and which also applied to old Romance (the Tobler-Mussafia law), and are, second, due to the fact that, because of the influence of the Germanic superstrate (verb final in subordinate clauses) strong pronouns appeared in a position before the (adverb +) infinitive, which might have favored proclisis w.r.t. the infinitive in French. Rochette (1988) relates the loss of clitic climbing in French to the change from enclisis into proclisis w.r.t. the infinitive. The loss of clitic climbing in French might thus also have been an (indirect) influence of the Germanic superstrate.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper I have shown that the interlanguages of advanced Dutch learners of French show striking similarities with 13<sup>th</sup> century Old French w.r.t. clitic placement. The learners apply the Tobler-Mussafia law, use clitic climbing, and allow interpolation of an adverb or negation between an infinitive and a preceding clitic. Just as in 13<sup>th</sup> century French, the conjunction *et* “and” can function as the first position, satisfying the Tobler-Mussafia law.

I have tried to account for the nature of this “language delay” by comparing pronoun placement in French with that in Dutch. I have concluded that although the students probably have learned that French has clitics and have set the clitic parameter on “proclisis”, they still transfer pronoun placement rules from their L1, Dutch, which leads to the “Old French” interlanguage. I have suggested that the test used in this paper should also be submitted to advanced learners with another L1 than Dutch, in order to test the validity of my interpretation.

The focus of this paper has been L2 acquisition. The main goal of this paper has been to show how Dutch learners acquire French clitic placement. It would, however, also be possible to study the students' interlanguages from another perspective. In studies on Old and Middle French, changes in clitic placement have been related to other changes in the language. Rochette (1988) relates the loss of clitic climbing and the change from enclisis into proclisis w.r.t. the infinitive to the loss of pro-drop in Old French. Since the advanced, university students in this test have learned already that modern French is not a pro-drop language (some students even added a subject pronoun in a position where it can be dropped in modern French), their interlanguages might shed a new light on the analysis of clitic placement in Old and Middle French. I leave this analysis for another occasion.

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**Appendix: test sentences**

1. *Jean connaît la cousine de Caroline.*  
Jean knows the cousin of Caroline  
→ Jean la connaît.
2. *Michel a rencontré le père de Philippe à Paris.*  
Michel has met the father of Philippe in Paris  
→ Michel l'a rencontré à Paris.
3. *Connais-tu le frère de Pierre?*  
know you the brother of Pierre  
→ Le connais-tu?
4. *Paul connaît le frère de Marie et voit le frère de Marie souvent.*  
Paul knows the brother of Marie and sees the brother of Marie often  
→ Paul connaît le frère de Marie et le voit souvent
5. *A qui enverrez-vous la lettre?*  
to whom will-send-you the letter  
→ A qui l'enverrez-vous ?
6. *La maîtresse commence à ranger les livres.*  
the teacher starts to put-away the books  
→ La maîtresse commence à les ranger
7. *Donne le ballon à ton frère !*  
give the ball to your brother !  
→ Donne-le à ton frère !
8. *As-tu rencontré le père de Marianne?*  
have-you met the father of Marianne  
→ L'as-tu rencontré?
9. *Eric veut donner la réponse.*  
Eric wants give the answer  
→ Eric veut la donner.
10. *Ne jette pas les journaux !*  
Neg throw not the newspapers!  
→ Ne les jette pas !
11. *Connais-tu le frère de Julie et vois-tu le frère de Julie souvent?*  
know-you the brother of Julie and see-you the brother of Julie often  
→ Connais-tu le frère de Julie et le vois-tu souvent ?
12. *La maman conseille aux enfants de bien respecter les règles.*  
the mother advises to-the children of well observe the rules  
→ La maman conseille aux enfants de bien les respecter.
13. *A quels collègues avez-vous montré le résultat ?*  
to which colleagues have-you showed the result  
→ A quels collègues l'avez-vous montré ?
14. *Ecris une lettre et envoie la lettre à ta copine !*  
write a letter and send the letter to your girlfriend!  
→ Ecris une lettre et envoie-la à ta copine !
15. *Nicolas n'ose pas regarder le film.*  
Nicolas neg dares not see the film  
→ Nicolas n'ose pas le regarder.

16. *As-tu reçu mon message et as-tu lu mon message ?*  
 have-you received my message and have-you read my message  
 → As-tu reçu mon message et l'as-tu lu?
17. *L'enfant promet de respecter les règles.*  
 the child promises of respect the rules  
 → L'enfant promet de les respecter.
18. *Les professeur fait corriger les fautes.*  
 the professor makes correct the errors  
 → Le professeur les fait corriger.
19. *Veux-tu donner la réponse?*  
 want-you give the answer  
 → Veux-tu la donner?
20. *Gérard préfère ne pas connaître la vérité.*  
 Gérard prefers neg not know the truth  
 → Gérard préfère ne pas la connaître.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the Sigmund cartoons by Peter de Wit (Volkskrant, 12 May 2007).

<sup>2</sup> *Hebban olla vogala nestas hagunnan hinase hic enda thu wat unbidan we nu.* "All birds have started building their nests except me and you. What are we waiting for?"

<sup>3</sup> Following Den Besten (p.c.), Koster (2008:fn.9) observes, however, that in some cases weak pronouns can occur in Dutch in sentence-initial position. Much depends on the prosody.

- (i) Me is duidelijk geworden dat ...  
 me has clear become that ...  
 "It has become clear to me that ..."
- (ii) Ernaast stond een stoel.  
 next to it stood a chair  
 "a chair stood next to it."

<sup>4</sup> In fact there were two groups of learners: one group taking only French L2 courses (34 students), and another group that was also taking courses on French literature, French linguistics and French culture (16 students). The average number of errors made by the students of each group was 8.0 errors. Since an Anova-test showed that there was not a significant difference in the results of the two groups ( $f(1,49): 0,004; p = 0,951$ ), I do not present their results separately.

<sup>5</sup> See Smith (2002), who criticizes the demarcation of the Middle French period and who gives an overview of the various criteria on which the demarcation of the Middle French period have been based in the literature, and which have made that there is no clear demarcation of this period.

<sup>6</sup> 8% of the students used clitic climbing with the aspectual verb *commencer à* 'to start', although the infinitive is preceded by a preposition/prepositional complementizer. With aspectual verbs, however, clitic climbing was still accepted in the Middle French period, see §4.2.