Compared to monolingual first language acquisition (L1), and adult second language acquisition (aL2), relatively little is known about child second language acquisition (cL2).

In the literature, differences between aL2 acquisition and L1 acquisition have been repeatedly confirmed, whereas it is still an open question as to whether cL2 acquisition proceeds like aL2, like L1 or like the simultaneous acquisition of two first languages (2L1). The studies on this question, still fairly scarce, are all but conclusive (cf. e.g Unsworth 2005, Montrul 2008, Tracy & Thoma in press, Meisel 2009).

In a pilot study (Granfeldt, Schlyter and Kihlstedt 2007), this question was addressed in comparing 14 children attending the same school (Lycée Français de Stockholm): 7 French cL2 children (5 and 6 years old), 5 2L1 children and 2 L1 control children of the same age. Despite similarities in general level (MLU and lexical diversity), a qualitative difference existed between cL2 and 2L1 children in four morphosyntactic phenomena (verb agreement, tense, gender and object clitics). The cL2 children showed similarities with aL2. As regards tense, this meant omissions of past tense marking (use of a present default form or a non-finite long form) and little and/or erroneous use of *imparfait*, which was restricted to state verbs and used in a small range of its possible values, as observed previously in adult L2 French by Dietrich *et al.* 1995, Schlyter 2003, Benazzo & Starren 2007, Howard 2002, Kihlstedt 2002). However, for past tense morphology, a clear evolution was observed in that the most advanced L2 children showed no or little difference with the simultaneously bilingual children.

In the present study, these two most advanced cL2-children are in focus. They are studied longitudinally from 6 years to 8 years, i.e. from 2 to 4 years of exposure. The data consists of spontaneous conversations, including questions supposed to elicit past tense and especially *l'imparfait*. All verbs forms were coded according to their form and the temporo-aspectual function they expressed.

At later stages of French cL2, children seem to catch up with their monolingual or bilingual peers and use past tense morphology as in (2)L1 (Harley 1992, Devitt 1992, Paradis & Crago 2000). Little is known however about the temporal relations and the functions expressed by past tense morphology in children’s L2. These aspects are focused in the present study and the following questions will be addressed:

1. What tense and aspect forms and functions are used at late stages of cL2 acquisition?

2. To what extent and in what manner do they differ from
   a. simultaneously bilingual children
   b. monolingual children
   c. adult L2 acquisition

The results clearly show that the gap between the “late” cL2 children and the (2)L1 children diminishes, and, more importantly, varies according to what aspect of temporality is at stake: whereas some deviant morphology lingers on even after 4 years of exposure to French, temporal relations between events and the functions expressed by the *imparfait* show little or
no difference as compared to the (2) L1 children. These differences will be discussed in the light of age of onset of acquisition, task variation and cognitive advantages of child L2 acquisition of temporality.


Devitt, S. (1992.) Form and function in the developing verb systems of five learners of French as a second language. PhD. University of Dublin, Trinity college.


