INTRODUCTION

Contemporary linguistic theory has to account for both second language acquisition and language loss in fully fluent adults (‘ideal speakers’). Most have mainly looked for universals that guide the language faculty. Current psycholinguistic work, however, also shows the central role of linguistic diversity in order to better understand the nature of language and of acquisitional processes in normal and pathological states.

More specifically, languages differ substantially in the way they map semantic elements of space onto lexical and syntactic structures. With respect to the expression of motion events and the ways particular spatial meaning components are associated with particular morphemes, languages have been classified [1] into: satellite-framed languages, which lexicalize Manner (e.g., English: The boy swam across the river), and Verb-framed languages, which lexicalize Path (e.g., French: Le chat monte le poteau (en courant)).

Recent research indicates that such language-specific properties constrain how native speakers represent motion [2; 3] and that these constraints also affect second language learners [4; 5], as well as the syntactomotory of aphasic speakers who show lexical/syntactic dissociations resulting in productions that resemble those of L2 learners (semantic reduction, difficulties with morphology) [6; 7; 8; 9; 10].

The present study aims to determine the role of typological vs. language-independent (e.g., syndrome/acquisition-related) factors in accounting for similarities and differences in verbalizations of second language users and agrammatics, and more generally shed light and contribute to a deeper understanding of both language learning and language loss.

METHOD

Experimental procedure
In order to measure the relative role of language-independent and language-specific factors, we compared several groups of speakers described in a Production task involving animated cartoons presented visually (see Figures 1&2). After they saw each stimulus, participants were asked to describe what had happened.

Participants
• English (N=12) and French (N=24) monolingual controls;
• English learners of French: low (N=12), high-intermediate (N=12), and advanced (N=12); and
• French (N=1) and French (N=2) monolingual agrammatic aphasic speakers;
• English-French bilingual (N=1) agrammatic aphasic speaker.

Data coding procedure
The data were transcribed in CHAT format (MacWhinney, 1995) and coded for semantic information, parts of speech, and utterance type. Data were coded with respect to information density (the quantity of the information expressed in the utterances), focus (Manner and Path information as identified in all parts of speech) and focus (Manner and Path information as expressed in the main verbs and in other linguistic means).

DISCUSSION

The analyses examined:
• Density: how much information was expressed in the utterances of the speakers.
• Focus: what information speakers focused on (Path, Manner).
• Locus: by what verbal means such information was expressed (verbs, adverbs).

The results show:
• Overall, typological linguistic differences in the structures used by natives resulting in more semantic density in English (Manner verbs with Path adjuncts) than in French (Path verbs, infrequent Manner).
• Learners and aphasics express less information than controls.
• Learners also produce idiosyncratic morphology and non-target-like structures that show some influence of their L1 and that decrease with proficiency.
• Monolingual and bilingual aphasics produce Path verbs without morphology in French and two patterns in English: Path/Goal adjuncts (down, top) without verbs; Manner verbs without Path or tensed auxiliaries (running).
• Specific comparisons between learners and aphasics revealed different compensatory strategies beyond apparent similarities: learners rely on a “disjoint” distribution of information across separate clauses: aphasics on omissions that depend on the language spoken.

In conclusion:
• Typological factors constrain verbalizations in all groups.
• There are some similarities between L2 learners and aphasics due to language-independent factors (including acquisition- and/ or syndrome-related).
• Diverging strategies, however, reflect different processes underlying verbal representations between second language learners and speakers with agrammatism.

REFERENCES