

The acquisition of negative constructions by Jamaican learners of French: a pedagogical orientation

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1. Introduction

In this article, we analyse the strategies used by adult Jamaican learners of French to express negative constructions in their automatic oral expression. Special attention is paid to the effects of the diglossic situation on the learners' foreign language acquisition. The study is based on data from a longitudinal corpus of oral productions recorded over a two-year period, during individual interviews with Jamaican learners of French at the University of the West Indies (UWI), Jamaica.

This research identifies difficulties with the expression of so-called partial negation used to express the equivalent of English *never*, *no longer*, *nobody*, etc., which persist at advanced levels of proficiency. This phenomenon is exemplified in more or less felicitous avoidance strategies used to express most negative constructions in combination with the marker of total negation *pas*. I hypothesize that these strategies, especially with temporal negative adverbials, are caused by transfer influence from the Jamaican Creole that relies on the interaction of negation with various adverbs of temporal perspective to express equivalents of 'never' and 'no longer.'

Once a 'problem' is identified, the practitioners can decide what pedagogical action should be taken to rectify it. I suggest how more appropriate avoidance strategies and specific communicative activities could help prevent long term fossilization.

3. The oral interlanguage corpus : a brief description

The development of interlanguage corpora is of interest both to researchers who, according to Florence Myles, need to have access to good quality large learner data to build « models of underlying mental representations and development processes » (2005, p.374), and to pedagogues who can identify more precisely difficulties which otherwise would remain elusive. Furthermore, it allows comparison with other oral and written learners' data from similar or different language background (Bartning, Schlyter 2004).

2.1. Purpose of the project

The objectives of this research are to gather precise oral interlanguage data of Jamaican undergraduate learners of French acquiring the language in a guided environment ; to document and analyze the state and the progression of these learners in a range of linguistic features ; to contribute to current theoretical debates on the process of language acquisition, and more specifically on the effects of foreign language acquisition in a diglossic context.

2.2. Data collection procedure and selection of participants

The present research follows a group of nine undergraduate students enrolled in the French language program at UWI, Jamaica. Interviews of these learners were recorded

over a nineteen-month period (from the second semester of the first year until the end of the first semester of the third year).

Table 1: Basic information on Corpus

Groups	Number of learners involved	Length of time the participants were investigated	Corresponding years /semesters of the language programme	Number of interviews
Pilot	7	From November 2002 to April 2004	From Year II (semester1) to Year III (semester2)	1 – 3
Research	9	From April 2003 to November 2004	From Year I (semester2) to Year III (semester1)	6 – 7

As indicated in Table 1, a pilot-group of seven students enrolled in a French linguistic course had been previously interviewed to practice the oral activities and the recording material, and to try out the socio-biographical questionnaire.

All participants were audio-recorded carrying on various production tasks in French (semi-guided conversations during French exams (a formal context), or during scheduled interviews (in a quite informal and relaxed atmosphere), with topics such as university life, leisure activities, future career plans, comments on recent events, etc., cartoon story retelling, description of a photo, or discussion about a famous personality, exposé or essay discussion, role plays on proposed scenarios)¹. All these interviews are in the process of being transcribed. The transcriptions from the interviews allow us to analyze the development of specific linguistic features. They constitute the raw data on which all qualitative and quantitative analyses are performed.

Apart from oral interviews, participants completed a standard socio-biographical questionnaire on previous and current exposure to the language, time spent in a French-speaking country, rank of French among languages learned as well as personal information. A cloze test and a metalinguistic judgment task were also administered during the last semester, and written samples of the participants were also collected at various stages. All interviews were conducted following standard codes of ethics².

The investigation is concerned with acquisition in a formal environment because this is the way the language is learned by most Jamaican who have little access to French-

¹ For more details on methodology, transcription conventions, and participants, see Hugues Peters (2005b).

² At all times, the participants were aware that the recording was taking place. At the end of the recording, they signed a consent form authorizing the use and the dissemination of the data solely for the purpose of research and ensuring that all steps will be taken to ensure anonymity of the participants. All personal information and all data are kept strictly confidential, in a secure location. In the transcription, the names of all participants are replaced by anonymous coding (in the form of a Loc followed by a two-digit number) and all sensitive information that might be used to identify the participants (place of work, high school attended, etc.) is deleted.

speaking territories, at least until they graduate from the university³. Therefore, only students who did not previously spend an extended period of time (set at less than a month) in a French-speaking country or region were selected for the study. Additionally, as we are interested in examining the effect of the diglossic / continuum language context, we limited the sample to Jamaican students resident in the country from birth.

The participants were selected taking into account institutional constraints in the organization of the language program, as well as characteristics of the heterogeneous student population. Students placed together in the first year of the undergraduate language program can have very different previous exposure to the language, and often start at varied levels of proficiency.

Three main groups of students can be distinguished based on their previous exposure to the language : the students with a « Pass » in the Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC) in French administered by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC)⁴ ; those with a « Pass » in a two-semester intensive Beginners' program in French offered at UWI⁵ ; and finally those who have prepared the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE), or equivalent⁶.

As seen in Table 2, the sample of nine participants is constituted by three students of each group.

Table 2: Codes of participants classified with respect to their previous exposure to the language as well as to their enrollment in language programs at UWI

	French only	French & Spanish
A Level	Loc14	Loc20, Loc31
CSEC	Loc17, Loc18	Loc38
Beginner	Loc08	Loc12, Loc16

³ There are some exchange programs available to high school students, but they concern only a minority of the student population. After they graduate from the university, however, many French students take advantage of the opportunity provided by the French government to spend an academic year in France as English language assistants.

⁴ The CSEC normally requires a minimum of 200 hours of instruction. The main feature of these students is that they usually stay two years without practicing the language while they prepare their other advanced level subjects, and this situation of course adversely affects their proficiency.

⁵ The Beginners' program at the time consisted of two semesters of 130 contact hours each. Recent changes to this program are described by Marie-José Nzengou-Tayo (2005).

⁶ Since 2002, Cambridge GCE 'A' level French is progressively replaced in all schools of the English Caribbean by the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE). The CAPE syllabus consists of two units of 150 contact hours each. This certification is described in detail by Françoise Cévaër (2002), and by Cévaër and Peters (2005).

Thanks to the socio-biographical questionnaire, it became possible to determine the rank of French among foreign languages learned. As seen in Table 3, apart from Loc13, Loc17 and Loc18, all subjects had exposure to the Spanish language before French.

Table 3: Rank of French with respect to Spanish, as First or Second Foreign Language

	Rank 1	Rank 2
A Level	Loc14	Loc20, Loc31
CSEC	Loc17, Loc18	Loc38
Beginner		Loc08, Loc12, Loc16

3. Language situation in Jamaica : a Creole continuum

A specificity of the research is to examine the effects on acquisition of the rich diglossic language background that exists in territories where Creole languages constitute the vernacular (Chaudenson 1989, Christie 2003, etc.). Such situation creates a complex form of bilingualism, described as a *continuum* between an English-lexicon Creole and Standard Jamaican English, that is, Jamaican speakers of all classes constantly code switch between several varieties situated on a scale in their everyday informal conversations, as seen in the following example from Pauline Christie :

wi (d)a go > wi goin > wi is goin > wi is going > we are going (2003, p.33).

As the syntactic means of expression are so varied, the situation creates interesting problems with respect to L2 acquisition in potential cases of transfer from the L1 varieties to the L2 (see Zobl 1992, Klein 1995 on third language acquisition by bilinguals).

4. Data analysis : the structure of sentential negation

Let us analyze the structure of negation in the corpus. 248 instances of sentential negation have been collected, among which were just four instances of partial negation. Even though, the data is very limited quantitatively, hypotheses can be supported by our knowledge of the syntactic structure of each language, data from written composition, and a grammaticality judgment test.

4.1. The system of sentential negation in French and Jamaican tensed clauses

Negation in French is a two-part morpheme *ne...pas* which surrounds the tensed verb. The first element *ne* is a phonetically weak particle, generally omitted in speech⁷, although maintained in orthographic conventions, while the second element *pas* is the centre of negation (Gaatone 1971, Pollock 1989, Muller 1991). Negation with *ne* alone is no longer grammatical, although it survives in formal registers in a limited set of environments.

Mon chien (ne) chasse pas les voitures (My dog doesn't chase cars)

⁷ Unless, as pointed out to me by Sophie Moirand, *ne* facilitates pronunciation, for instance, by intervening between two vowels as in: *Il n'a pas...* pronounced [inapa].

Mon chien (n') a pas chassé ta voiture (My dog hasn't chased your car)

In Jamaican, the main negator is *no*, often realized as *don(t)* or *neva*, the latter usually encoding a 'Past+Negation' meaning. *No* interacts with other Tense-Mood-Aspect particles, and always precedes the lexical verbs (Adams 1991, Durrleman 2001, Cassidy, LePage 2002).

Him no/don' say (He does not say) (Adams 1991, p.34)

Mi neva tell him no lie ! (I didn't tell him a lie!)

Dem don' cook herly (They don't cook early) (ibid.: p.35)

As in many English vernacular dialects, Jamaican is a *negative concord* language (Labov 1972): several negative words co-occur within a sentence with the meaning of a single negation. The specificity of Jamaican is that (one of) the main negators either *no*, *don(t)*, or *neva* must always be present for the sentence to be grammatical.

Im no wan gi nobody none (He doesn't want to give anybody any) (ibid., p.36)

Notn neva du it (Nothing ever happened to it) (Stewart 2002, p.4)

In sum, French tensed verbs raise overtly to the inflectional level, pick up the defective head of NegP, *ne*, on their way to Tense, and thus appear to the left of the quantificational negator *pas*, as well as other short adverbs (Pollock 1989). In Jamaican, the morpheme *no* is the head of negation and, since verbs do not move overtly to Tense, lexical verbs remain behind the negator. This contrast can be schematized in the form of two syntactic trees.

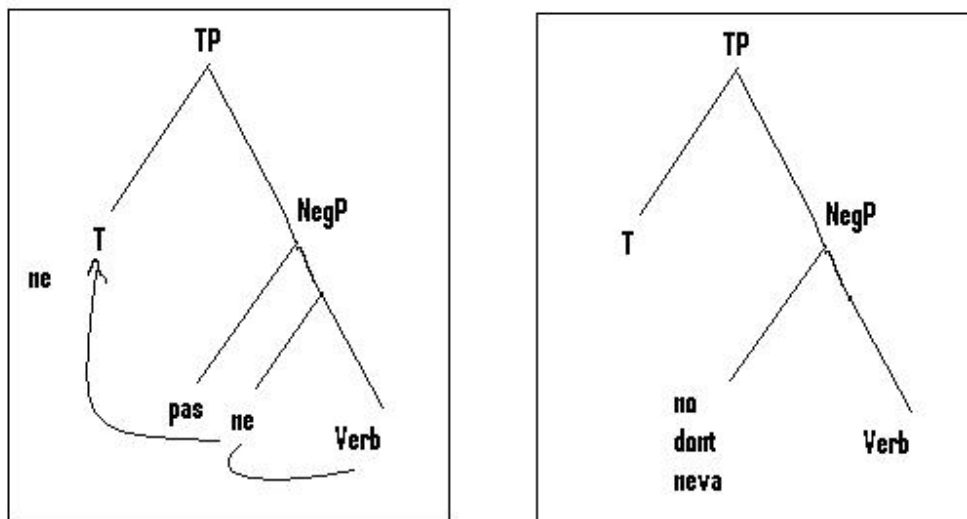


Figure 1 : Syntactic representation of sentential negation in French and Jamaican.

Interestingly, the Jamaican equivalents of English *never*, *not anymore*, *no longer* are realized by interaction of the main negator with adverbs of temporal perspective such as *yet*, *again* (alternatively: *no more*).

Mi neva do it yet (I never did it)
Mi no do it again (I don't do it anymore)
Mi no luv im again (I don't love him anymore)
Nobody no eat meat no more (Nobody eats meat anymore)
Mi no going to beat you (again) (I decided not to beat you)

In Standard French, several negative words usually have a negative concord interpretation when co-occurring with each others, but co-occurrence with the negator *pas* automatically triggers a reading of double negation, as illustrated in the following examples.

Il (ne) veut plus jamais rien dire (He never wants to say anything anymore)
Ce (n') est pas rien (It is not nothing)

To summarize, the Jamaican learner of French must realize that :

- *ne* is not the centre of negation, is deficient, and must be reinforced by at least one negative word, usually *pas* ;
- that temporal and aspectual aspects are encoded within the negative adverbs such as *jamais*, *plus* ;
- that the negator *pas* does not enter in negative concord constructions with other negative words.

4.2. Learners' data from the oral corpus

In this study of the system of negation among Jamaican learners, I identify difficulties with the negative constructions *jamais* (never), *rien* (nothing), *plus* (no more, no longer), or *personne* (nobody) that remain at advanced levels of proficiency, even though the distribution of the two-part marker of sentential negation surrounding the tensed verb is apparently well mastered.

I say *apparently* because correct surface word order, even in most cases, does not necessarily entail identical underlying syntactic structure, because some structures are missing, for instance, one never find anything intervening between the negator and the tensed verb⁸, and because occasional errors still appear.

For instance, eleven negative sentences (over 248) are still incorrectly produced with the preverbal *ne* as the sole marker of negation, a structure normally observed at early stages of acquisition (Bartning, Schlyter 2004, Stoffel, Véronique 2003, Sanell 2007, etc.).

⁸ See below when the incorrect construction *pas toujours* is used in place of the targetlike constructions *toujours pas* or *pas encore*.

However, as shown in Table 4, this phenomenon is marginal and mainly produced by just one student, Loc16, who accounts for half of the examples.⁹

Table 4 : Use of *ne* as sole negator : 12 tokens, classified according to the learners (Loc) who produced them, and the year / semester they were produced

	Loc				
	16	18	20	38	
I 2	1				*le suicide ne [rezolve] votre problème
II 1	1 1 1 1				*qui ne vont avoir l'opportunité *qui n'ont l'argent *ils n'ont payé *le bureau ne veut donner l'argent *maintenant je ne pense que...
II 2			1	1	*le demande pour le français n'existe je ne sais où (This use is grammatically correct) *je ne certain
III 1	1		1		*je ne vais à l'école lundi et jeudi *je n'avais voyagé à la France avant *la majorité de la classe ne poursuivent une langue étrangère
Total	6	3	2	1	

Note: The year and the semester of study are indicated in the leftmost column with Roman and Arabic numerals. The * indicates the ungrammatical sentences.

Inversely, although native speakers generally omit 'ne' in informal conversation (Coveney 1996), *ne* is rarely omitted in the speech of L2 learners (Dewaele 1992). In the Jamaican corpus, 43 instances of omission are found, and this omission occurs mostly with idiomatic language chunks such as *je sais pas* (I don't know) or *je suis pas sûre* (I'm not sure) or stereotypical clauses *c'est pas...* (It's not...), as seen in table 5. Interestingly,

⁹ Curiously, another student, Loc18, shows some signs of regression by producing three negative copula-less adjectival predicates during semester 2 of Year 2, either preceded by *ne*, or by an idiomatic negative chunk *ne pas* (pronounced /n@pa/), a structure usually observed at early stages of acquisition (Bartning, Schlyter 2004, Stoffel, Véronique 2003).

je ne certain (I'm not certain)
le temps ne pas droit (Time isn't right)
l'économie ne pas certaine (The economy isn't certain)

Even though this pattern is the exact translation of Jamaican predicative clauses in which the copula is absent (Winford 2001), the structure is not otherwise instantiated at this level of L2 proficiency. This could indicate that some reorganization is taking place for this student. Alternatively it could simply be a pronunciation mistake due to a confusion between *n'est pas* and *ne pas*.

more than half the examples of *ne*-omission (28 over 48) are produced by one student, Loc12, who is able to make a more and more productive use of these chunks.

Table 5 : *ne* omitted : 48 tokens

	Loc							
	08	12	14	17	20	31	38	
I 2		2			1			je sais pas (3 x)
				1				ils recherchent rien (see below)
III1		3			1			je sais pas (4 x)
		1						je suis pas sure
		1						c'est pas possible
II2		1				1		Loc12: je suis pas sure maintenant; Loc31: j'ai pas sûre
		1			1			Loc12: je sais pas si c'est le mot; Loc20: je sais pas quoi je veux faire
			2					c'est pas problème (twice)
III1	9	11			1			je sais pas... (*)
		2	1					Je suis pas sûre (3x)
	1							je suis pas certaine
		1						je pense pas maintenant
	1	5					1	c'est pas... (**)
Total	11	28	3	1	4	1	1	

* Loc08: je sais pas (8 x), je sais pas le mot en français ; Loc12: je sais pas; je sais pas comment vous expliquer; je sais pas où; je sais pas quand exactement; je sais pas après combien d'années ; je sais pas toujours; je sais pas quoi; je sais pas où est le meilleur pays; je sais pas pourquoi

** Loc08: c'est pas vingt-et-un c'est vingt-cinq étudiants; Loc12: c'est pas plus d'une semaine ; c'est pas mal; c'est pas bon mais sans essayer beaucoup; c'est pas le même chose avec le français; c'est pas bon ; Loc38: c'est pas le même langue

If we compare the last two tables, we notice that two speakers, with approximately the same language background (see table 3 and 4), exhibit radically opposite behaviours : Loc12 tends to omit *ne* while Loc16 tends to use it as the sole negator. This observation emphasizes the importance of taking into account individual differences among learners.

The difficulties with other types of negatives of temporal perspective are exemplified in the various more or less felicitous avoidance strategies used by the learners to express the meaning of partial negation. The tendency is to reduce all partial negations to forms of total negation.

In the first strategy, *pas* is used in conjunction with adverbs or quantifiers. The first sentence is indicated as ungrammatical because of the position of the adverb 'toujours' (always) in between the subject pronoun and the verb, and crucially not because of the 'toujours + pas' (always not) construal.

*peut-être elle parlait franchement des choses qu'on toujours ne parle pas
(Maybe she spoke openly of things that people never speak about)

(Loc01, Year II Semester 1, November 2002, Pilot group)

toutes les guerres ne sont pas nécessaires
(All wars aren't necessary) (Intended meaning: *No war is necessary*)
(Loc34, Year I Semester 2, April 2003)

il n'y a pas quelque chose de concret
(There isn't anything concrete)
(Loc01, Year II Semester 1, November 2002, Pilot group)

So, in these examples, *toujours... pas* (always not) is used instead of *jamais* (never) and *toutes... pas* (all not) instead of *aucune*. Such constructions are quite subtle, as the order of adverbs /quantifiers with respect to the negative marker is significant ('always + not' or 'all + not' are logically different from 'not + always' or 'not + all'). The third one consists in using 'not something' instead of 'nothing' /'not anything' which gives the wrong semantics as *quelque* here must have wide scope over negation, which is not usually possible. Although they are not ungrammatical, and although they are easily understood, at least as far as the negative construction is concerned, these forms are idiomatically awkward in French.

In the second strategy, the marker of negation is combined with a multipurpose *maintenant* (now) to express the various meanings of *pas encore* (not yet), and even, in a constituent negation, the meaning of *plus* (not anymore) apart from the literal interpretation *not now* which is also found.

pas maintenant (Not now) (Intended meaning: *not anymore*)
(Loc17, Year I Semester 2, November 2003)

je ne trouve pas un professeur spécifique maintenant¹⁰ (I don't find a specific teacher now) (Intended meaning: 'not yet')
(Loc18, Year II Semester 1, April 2004)

je ne peux pas penser maintenant (I can't think now)
(Loc38, Year II Semester 1, April 2004)

This second strategy is communicatively less successful than the first one in the sense that it is three-way ambiguous, and forces the interlocutor to rely more heavily on the situational context to arrive at the intended interpretation.

Thirdly, other attempts at expressing the meanings of *pas encore* (not yet) or *jamais* (never) with adverbs of temporal perspective typically result in awkward or ungrammatical structure, so much so that they are often accompanied by errors in the choice of verbal tense.

¹⁰ The present tense is used instead of the expected present perfect.

*je n'ai pas trouvé déjà¹¹ (I haven't found already)
(Loc17, Year II Semester 1, April 2004)

*et bien je n'avais voyagé à la FRANCE avant (I did not travel to France before)
(Loc20, Year III Semester 1, November 2004)

*je sais pas toujours (I don't know always)
(Loc12, Year III Semester 1, November 2004)

In the first example, *pas... déjà* (not already) is used with the intended meaning of *pas encore* (not yet) and, in the second one, *ne...avant* (not before) is used with the intended meaning of *jamais* (never).

We notice the tendency to place temporal adverbs at the end of the sentence. The result is ungrammatical with *déjà* (still), a short adverb supposed to be located between the auxiliary and the past participle. The third example exemplifies the fact that learners tend not to separate the negator *pas* from the tensed verb, even if it lead to ungrammaticality in the target language. So, *pas toujours* is produced instead of *toujours pas / pas encore*.

It could be argued that the learners simply have failed to learn these other sentential negative expressions. However, the data shows that such expressions are occasionally attested in the oral corpus, although not without problems. This is the fourth strategy used by learners to express the meaning of negative words of partial negation.

*personne ne peut pas hum euh voyager pour le travail (Nobody cannot travel for work) (with the intended meaning: Nobody can travel for work)
(Loc17, Year I Semester 2, November 2003)

The first example illustrates a well-attested difficulty with *personne* (nobody) (Sannell 2007, p.106) that appears at advance stages of acquisition. In this example, the learner erroneously adds a post-verbal negator *pas*.

parce que ici ils recherchent euh = rien (Because here they research nothing)
(Loc17, Year I Semester 2, November 2003)

The second example provides us with a target-like use of a post-verbal pronominal *rien* (nothing). However, I suggest that this construction does not represent sentential negation, but rather constituent negation, in the interlanguage of this learner. This hypothesis is based on the fact that, even though the omission of 'ne' is grammatical in spoken French, it is abnormal for this participant as it is never otherwise instantiated in her production. It is also based on the observation that 'rien' is preceded by a marked hesitation and a pause, and followed, in the next turn of the conversation, by a clear constituent use:

¹¹ The pluperfect is used instead of the expected compound past.

- rien ? (nothing?) (Asked by the interviewer)
- pas rien mais un petit peu (not nothing but a little bit).

Finally, the last two examples are target like grammatical uses of *jamais* (never).

je n'ai jamais dit ça (I never said that)
(Loc38, Year II Semester 2, April 2004)

je n'ai jamais mangé de cuisine française (I have never eaten French cuisine)
(Loc08, Year II Sem. 2, April 2004)

Before presenting an hypothesis on this avoidance phenomenon, let us examine some additional data.

4.3 Additional data on learners' language

Written samples, characterized by higher levels of planning, and metalinguistic monitoring, confirm that negative constructions appear in a quite native-like fashion in formal modalities for these same learners.

Year I, Semester 2:

Loc12: Il n'y a plus d'examens (There are no more exams)

Loc16: Beaucoup d'instituteurs n'ont aucune formation professionnelle (Many teachers have no professional training)

Loc17: Ici il n'y a que des enseignants qui n'ont pas des bonnes qualifications (Here there are only teachers who don't have good qualifications)

Loc20: *mais toujours les professeurs recevaient presque rien (but still teachers would receive almost nothing)

Notice again the orthographically incorrect absence of *ne* with *presque rien* (almost nothing). This suggests a constituent negation value in the mind of this other student.

Year II, Semester 1:

L16: *il a jamais écrit un mauvais chanson (he never wrote a bad song)

Year III Semester 1:

Loc12: *le gouvernement ne va sponsoriser plus le 80% des frais de scolarité... (the government is no longer going to sponsor 80% of tuition)

Loc14: Il ne fait guère de doute que... (There is little doubt that...')

Loc14: ...car ils ne peuvent guère acheter leurs médicaments. (because they can't buy a lot of prescription drugs)

Loc20: Il n'y a guerre (= guère) d'argent (There is little money)

All these examples show that the learners might very well have a conscious (learned) knowledge of these forms (information in the declarative memory) while being unable to automatically access that information in the flow of the conversation (processed in the Procedural memory), indicating that acquisition in the unconscious grammar has not taken place (Bialystoc 1982 for a view of proficiency relative to the modality of use, and Krashen 1977, Zobl 1995 for a distinction between 'learning' and 'acquisition').

Grammaticality judgment tasks offer some interesting light as well. When 10 learners were asked to judge whether negative sentences are grammatical or not, the percentage of learners giving the correct judgment, that is, correctly predicting that a sentence is grammatical when grammatical in the target language or ungrammatical when ungrammatical in the target language, tends to confirm the observation that the Jamaican learners' interlanguage requires some post verbal negative (*pas, jamais, plus*), but will accept only one. The three post-verbal adverbs therefore compete for a single position and cannot co-occur. Of course, this can be traced back to the Jamaican L1 use of *no, don'* and *neva* as sentential negators with the temporal /aspectual values expressed by separate adverbials.

Table 6 : Metalinguistic Judgment task : percentage of correct judgment

Je ne veux plus jamais lui parler	10%
Je ne fais plus confiance à Paul	80%
Je n'irai jamais plus dans ce magasin	20%
*Il ne fume plus pas	90%
Paulette n'a jamais joué au tennis	80%

The requirement to use a post verbal negator in these learners' interlanguage could also explain the negative concord of the pronominal subject *personne* with the post verbal negator *pas* in the spontaneous example, repeated below:

*personne ne peut pas hum euh voyager pour le travail (Nobody cannot travel for work) (with the intended meaning: Nobody can travel for work)
(Loc17, Year I Semester 2, November 2003)

5. Discussion

Firstly, we notice no difference between our heterogenous groups of students with respect to the expression of negation. We have however pointed out some individual preferences : one student tending to omit *ne*, another one to use it as sole negator.

As the main negator in Jamaican Creole *no* (not), and its variants, is a syntactic head, we could have expected more instances of *ne* as the sole negator. This prediction is not borne out. Indeed, the saliency of *pas* in the French input seems to ensure that the double

marking of negation surrounding the tensed verb will be noticed, and rapidly acquired, by the learners¹². However, the fact that *ne* is never reduced in pronunciation¹³, as well as the rather limited number of *ne* omission tends to indicate that, except maybe in various ready made chunks (*je sais pas*, etc.), this particle is still perceived as a integral part of the negative construction, possibly at its centre.

I have hypothesized that the difficulties, especially with respect to negative adverbials, are caused by transfer influence from the Jamaican Creole language that relies on the interaction of negation with various adverbs of temporal perspective to express English equivalents of *never*, *not anymore*. The structures observed in the oral corpus can be deduced from the comparison of the syntactic structures of the languages at the relevant level of abstraction. Now I would like to clarify the transfer mechanism.

According to Schachter (1992, p.32), transfer is not at all a process, but a constraint on the learner's hypothesis testing process : it is both a facilitating and a limiting condition. Transfer, therefore, is as likely to be manifested, not just in errors, but in avoidance or overgeneration of certain constructions. Zobl (1982) makes the link between language transfer and developmental processes as interacting processes rather than opposing ones : Transfer cannot change the route of acquisition of syntactic patterns. However, it has the potential of bringing about a delay or a plateau, if there is a developmental stage in the acquisition of the second language that corresponds to a pattern in the learner's first language. This delay can turn into a fossilized structure.

We have seen that, for Jamaican learners of French, mastery of sentential negation is not accompanied by mastery of other negative constructions of partial negation, but mainly by avoidance strategies that persist at advanced levels in their automatic oral productions. Within this limited corpus, we have not been able to show evidence of an acquisition route for negation, but other developmental studies clearly show such a route (Bartning, Schlyter 2004, Sanell 2007).

6. Pedagogical remediation

Once a specific 'problem' is identified, the practitioners decide what pedagogical action should be taken to rectify it. We have to keep in mind however that a specific linguistic construction will not be acquired no matter how much it is taught until the right level of cognitive maturation has been reached.

Some level of leniency must therefore be exercised at lower levels of proficiency with those deviant language uses that are proven to remain at higher levels of proficiency (if these structures do not impede communication).

At the intermediate level, learners should be made aware of the diversity of structures of sentential negation. Their errors could be pointed out using forms of recast or prompts

¹² Of course, we would need to include in this corpus participants at a beginners' level (Rule, Marsden 2005) to find about this possible influence from the Jamaican language.

¹³ This fact was pointed out to me by James Lee (personal communication).

(Lyster 2004). Additionally, more appropriate avoidance strategies should be pointed out. For instance, better adverb placement, especially with temporal adverbials like *toujours*, *maintenant*, *avant*, etc., or better choice of tenses would indirectly improve the quality of their avoidance strategies in automatic uses of the language.

At more advanced levels, however, students are expected to show evidence of mastering negative structures. Form-focused instruction, on the one hand, accompanied by opportunities for meaningful communicative activities designed to elicit negative expressions, on the other hand, could help prevent long term fossilization of erroneous patterns.

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