Clause linking, or the act of combining multiple predications into one complex whole, is an essential aspect of efficient language use and thus one of the main linguistic devices to be mastered in the process of both first and second language acquisition, as reflected by a considerable body of research on the topic (Diessel & Tomasello 2001, Benazzo 2004). The principles at work in both forms of acquisition, however, appear to differ, as L2 learners can rely on the repertoire of discourse-organisational strategies developed in the process of acquisition of their mother tongue (Berman & Slobin 1994). The present contribution considers the development of clause linking in L1 and L2, analyzed according to the syntactic and semantic linkage model proposed within Role and Reference Grammar (Van Valin 2005). It compares the evolution of clause linking forms in the oral narratives of Dutch-speaking adolescents simultaneously learning L2 French and English to Van Valin’s (2001) findings on L1 development. Results show that L2 clause linking development relies to a degree on linkage features relevant to L1 acquisition, such as the syntactic integration required by subordination, but that L1 and L2 learners’ overall linking repertoire develops in different ways; while beginner L1 acquirers mainly limit themselves to predicate-level connections, for instance, L2 learners master a wide range of linkage mechanisms at various structural levels even from the earliest stages of development onwards.

Keywords: clause linking, L2 English, L2 French, L1 acquisition, syntax.