Does phonology have less impact on spelling in L2 than in L1? Results from a double-task experiment.

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Previous studies in written production by French L2 learners and French L1 children, have shown that, in a homophony context, L2 learners make much less spelling errors than L1 children (Gunnarsson-Largy 2013). Therefore it seems as if, during the formulation/translation process (Hayes 1996; Kellogg 1996), L2 writers do not transcribe what they have planned to write in the same way as L1 writers. Possible explanations to this difference between L1 and L2 writers are:

1/ L2 writing is less guided by the phonological information than L1 writing (cf. Cripps (2005) on hearing impaired writers); or

2/ L2 writers use more attention and control, i.e. cognitive resources, for low level linguistic aspects such as vocabulary, grammar and spelling than L1 writers (Barbier 1997)

To investigate these two hypotheses, we designed an experimental protocol quite unusual in SLA research, but frequent in studies in cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics, the double-task. The subjects were to write dictated sentences while having to count the number of beep-sounds they heard when writing. The double-task paradigm is commonly used to induce a cognitive overload, which makes the writer rely on automatisms not being able to control, especially the low level linguistic aspects of the writing (see for example Barrouillet & Camos 2015). The sentences used in this experiment had been tested on French L1 children and French L2 learners in a previous study which explored the impact of phonology on spelling in contexts with and without liaison, where the L2 learners made less errors induced by phonology than the L1 children (Gunnarsson-Largy & Largy 2015). The protocol was submitted to 2 groups of 20 French L2 learners, 1 intermediate and 1 advanced, and a control group of French L1 adults.

The results are in progress.

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