

Processing and learning pronominal forms in French and Chinese

Two offline experiments in two different languages

L1 and L2 interpretational preferences of overt and null pronouns were investigated in:

Experiment 1 | French (non-pro-drop language)

Participants



Type of speakers	Proficiency level	N
L1-French	Natives	47
L1-Chinese L2-French	High intermediate or high	48

Conditions

Anaphora	
Overt	Éric a observé Albert avant qu'il range ses affaires. Eric observed Albert before he put his things away.
Null	Éric a observé Albert avant de PRO ranger ses affaires. Eric observed Albert before PRO putting his things away.

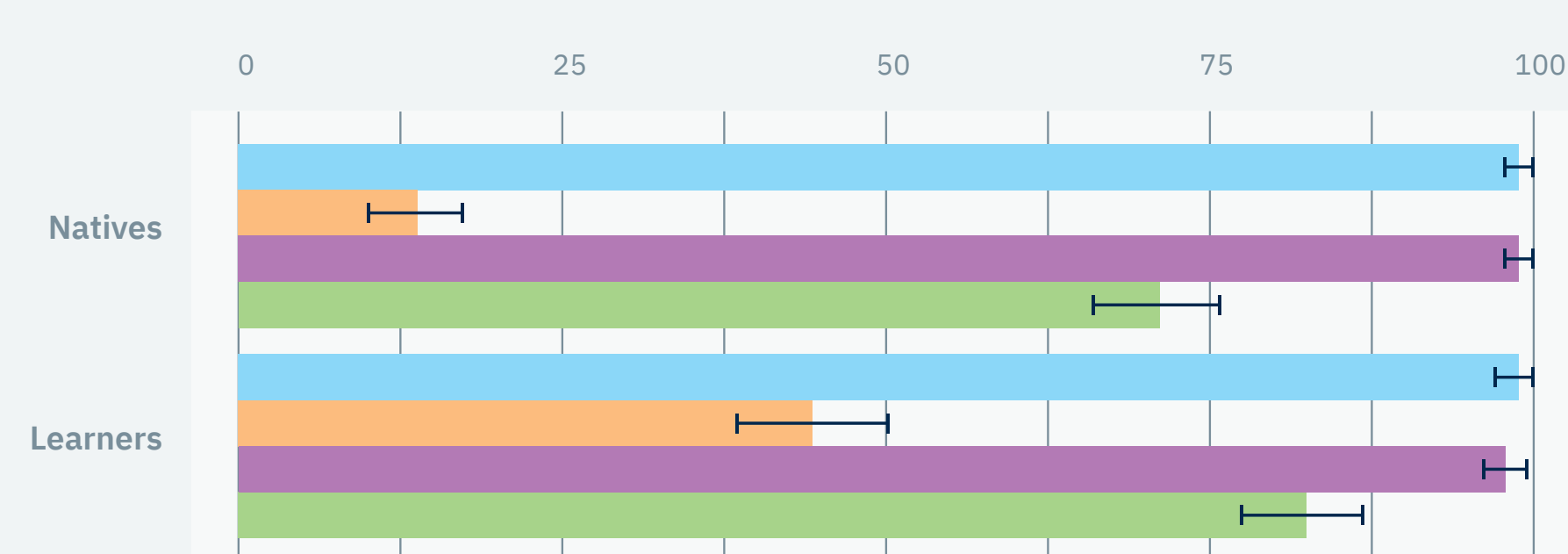
Cataphora	
Overt	Avant qu'il range ses affaires, Éric a observé Albert. Before he put his things away, Eric observed Albert.
Null	Avant de PRO ranger ses affaires, Éric a observé Albert. Before PRO putting his things away, Eric observed Albert.

Predictions

In anaphora conditions	
L1 French	Unambiguous condition: Éric a observé Albert avant de PRO ranger ses affaires. As previously observed, object-preference due to exposure to the alternative construction: Éric a observé Albert avant qu'il range ses affaires.
L2 French	Object-preference for the overt pronoun more difficult to acquire than the subject-preference for the null pronoun.

In cataphora conditions	
L1/L2 French	Active search mechanism → subject-preference

Results



Subject-preference

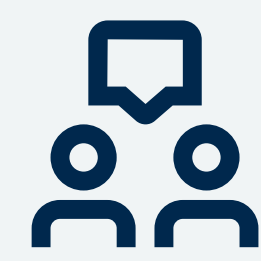
Condition
Null + Anaphora
Overt + Anaphora
Null + Cataphora
Overt + Cataphora

Conclusions

In anaphora conditions	
L1 French	Éric a observé Albert avant de PRO ranger ses affaires. Éric a observé Albert avant qu'il range ses affaires.
L2 French	The difference between overt pronouns and PRO in French seems easy to acquire. However, learners have not acquired the French native object-preference , probably because it needs more exposure to the alternative construction.

In cataphora conditions	
L1/L2 French	Active search mechanism

Experiment 2 | Chinese (pro-drop language)



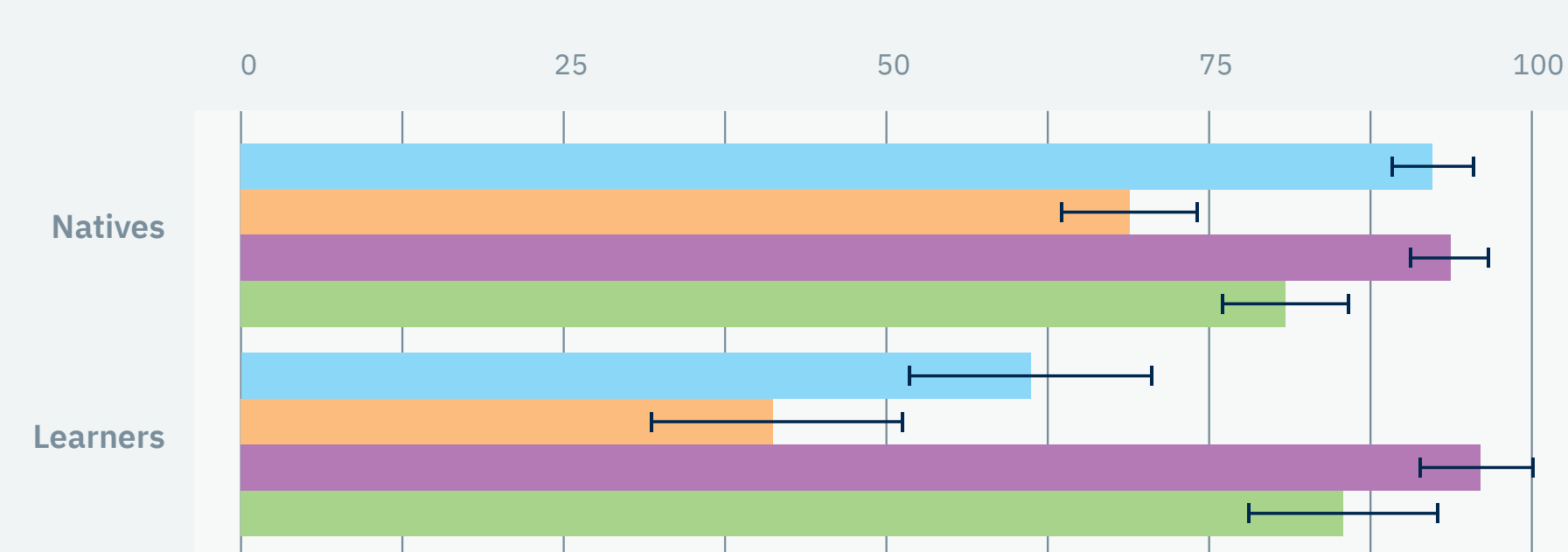
Type of speakers	Proficiency level	N
L1-Chinese	Natives	40
L1-French L2-Chinese	Intermediate or high	16

Anaphora	
Overt	Jùndé zhuàng le Jiànháo, zài tā zhēnglǐ dōngxī qián Junde hit Jianhao before he put his things away.
Null	Jùndé zhuàng le Jiànháo, zài pro zhēnglǐ dōngxī qián Junde hit Jianhao before pro putting his things away.

Cataphora	
Overt	Zài tā zhēnglǐ dōngxī qián, Jùndé zhuàng le Jiànháo Before he put his things away, Junde hit Jianhao.
Null	Zài pro zhēnglǐ dōngxī qián, Jùndé zhuàng le Jiànháo Before pro putting his things away, Junde hit Jianhao.

In anaphora conditions	
L1 Chinese	As previously observed, subject-preference for both null and overt pronouns: Jùndé zhuàng le Jiànháo, zài pro/tā zhēnglǐ dōngxī qián
L2 Chinese	Is the native object-preference for the overt pronoun transferred to the L2? Or is the L2 subject-preference acquired for both null and overt pronouns?

In cataphora conditions	
L1/L2 Chinese	Active search mechanism → subject-preference



In anaphora conditions	
L1 Chinese	Difference between null and overt pronouns (93% vs 73%), but less division of labour than it has been observed in romance prodrop languages — overt pronoun does not have the same function of topic-switch marker as in romance prodrop languages.
L2 Chinese	Difference between null and overt pronouns , but more object-preference for anaphoric (overt and null) pronouns than in natives. → Transfer from the L1 of the object-preference for the overt pronoun? Or learner-specific strategy (recency strategy)?

In cataphora conditions	
L1/L2 Chinese	Active search mechanism