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A TOOL TO EVALUATE GRAMMATICAL SPELLING SKILLS OF NATIVE FRENCH ADULTS: A TYPOLOGY BASED ON THE CAUSES OF ERRORS

FRENCH GRAMMATICAL SPELLING

French language has a variety of derivational and inflexional morphemes that makes its morphology very rich (Catach, 1986). French morphology is not written as it is pronounced (Jaffré, Fayol, 2014). Adding up to that difficulty for its scriptors, most of the inflexional morphology in particular is silent (Dubois, 1965).

Ex. the ADJECTIVE «bare»: nu (masculin) - nue (feminin): both pronounced [ny] This orthographic depth mainly explains why we find most of spelling errors in that particular area of written French (Fayol, Jaffré, 2008; Lucci, Millet, 1994).

Among the variety of forms that French inflexional morphology can display, our study case focuses on a particular linguistic skill that is how one transfers plural and gender traits from the word that triggers the agreement to the one that receives it. In other words we will specifically evaluate grammatical spelling skills (Gauvin, 2011).

Ex. La marée haute est montée (the high tide has risen)

The NOUN «marée» gives singular and feminin traits to the ADJECTIVE «haute» and the PAST PARTICIPLE «montée» and the 3rd person singular trait to the AUXILIARY «est».

WHY WOULD ONE MAKE AN AGREEMENT ERROR?

Got, 1991; Fayol, Largy 1992; Fayol, Pacton, 2005)

Various causes, sometimes several at the same time, may lead to a mistake in the transfer of agreement traits. Some of them are covered by our evaluation tool:

- declarative knowledge (Anderson, 1983) is deficient: metalanguage is not properly learnt and/or grammatical analysis is not precise enough to understand the rule nor trigger its application.
- declarative knowledge is acquired but revision skills are not thorough enough, leading one to leave a mistake while one knows the rule and how to apply it (Largy, 2001; Dédéyan & al., 2006). - cognitive ressources management lead to a mistake: an automatic procedure is triggered to avoid working memory overload in multitasking instead of applying the rule (Fayol,

HYPOTHESES

- 1.A. It is possible for a student to be able to make correct agreements without knowing the agreement rule (Gaux, Gombert, 1999): procedural > declarative knowledge 1.B. The opposite is possible as well: a student may know the rule, but still make mistakes when he or she writes (ibid.): declarative < procedural knowledge
- 2. A typology based on the causes of errors might reveal a scale of expertise more obviously than a typology based on grammatical categories.

COMPOSITION OF THE EVALUATION

6 agreement receivers are tested: NOUN, ADJECTIVE, VERB, PAST PARTICIPLE - ADVERB and INFINITIVE VERB (inhibited agreement).

- Each in various configurations: - distance between the word that gives and the one that receives the agreement traits,
- inversion of the typical order (the receiver is placed before the word that triggers the agreement),
 - existence of an homophonic word of a different grammatical category - presence of a candidate to trigger the agreement in the proximity zone.
 - Leading to 43 linguistic configurations = 43 sentences

- The evaluation tool is built on 5 exercices:
- 1. Sentence writing task (Largy, Fayol, Lemaire, 1996) = translating right after the planification process (Flower, Hayes, 1981) 2. Secondary task paradigm (Fayol, Got, 1991; Largy, Fayol, Lemaire, 1996) = multitasking to load the working memory 3. Revision task
 - 4. Mistake reproduction task (Gaux, Gombert, 1999): if one can replicate a mistake, one understands the rule 5. Grammatical analysis and use of metalanguage The instructions of each exercice are here described:

1. SENTENCE WRITING TASK

The student has to recall an entire sentence dictated once. The aim claims to assess their memory, not their spelling skills.

Ses parents pensent que certaines de ses fréquentations sont bizarres. [ADJ - plural] [NOUN - plural]

His parents think some of his *friends* are *weird*.

2.SECONDARY TASK PARADIGM

The subjet has to recall a sentence + a list of 3 phonologi- Reading the same sentences he had to The student reads two different senten- This exercice is divided into two parts. In the first one, cally confusable monosyllabic words.

Ces marchands ne me semblent pas dignes de confiance. [NOUN - plural] [ADJ - plural] Those **sellers** don't seem **trustworthy** to me.

BULLE - MULE - PULL /byl/ - /myl/ - /pyl/

3. REVISION TASK

sentence nor how many there could be. Ex.

Ces marchands ne me semblent pas digne de confiance.

4. MISTAKE REPRODUCTION TASK

confiance. 2. Ses parents pensent que certaines de ses

fréquentations sont bizarres. --> bizarre.

5. GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

write in prior tasks, the student has to ces. In the first one lays an agreement mistathe the student is asked to draw a line to connect a specidetect an agreement mistake. The ins-ke, while the second one is correct. The stu-fic word with the one that triggers its agreement. In the tructions did not specify whether the dent is asked to reproduce the mistake of second part, the metalinguistic knowledge is tested as re was a mistake or not in the presented the first sentence in the second sentence. the subject has to write the name of given labels such as «noun», «verb», «direct object» etc... under the corres-1. Ces marchands ne me semblent pas digne de ponding words in a list of sentences. The labels are those that appear when they learn French agreement rules.

Ex. ADJECTIVE - NOUN

Ces marchands ne me semblent pas dignes de confiance.



COMBINATION OF RESULTS = DIAGNOSIS

We add up the results to each sentence of each task for each student. The combinaison of the results leads to a broad diagnostic as follows:

No error in both production tasks

Agreement is correct in the production task, but an error occurred in one of the other exercices Error in the production task The error is detected in the revision task

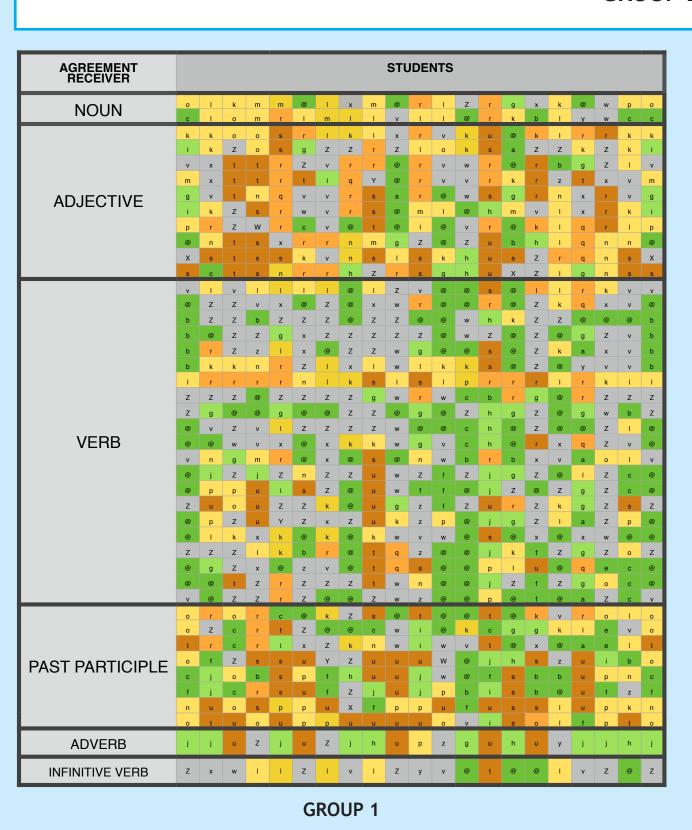
Error in the production task The error is not detected in the revision task Declarative knowledge OK

Error in the production task The error is not detected in the revision task Deficiency in the declarative knowledge

Working memory overload

STUDY CASE

Population: 2 classes of 20 students each, all of them were picked out by their teacher because of their various difficulties in French spelling and writing in general. GROUP 1: 1rst year of Bachelor degree in Modern French Litterature (18-21 year old). Students' background = graduated High School.



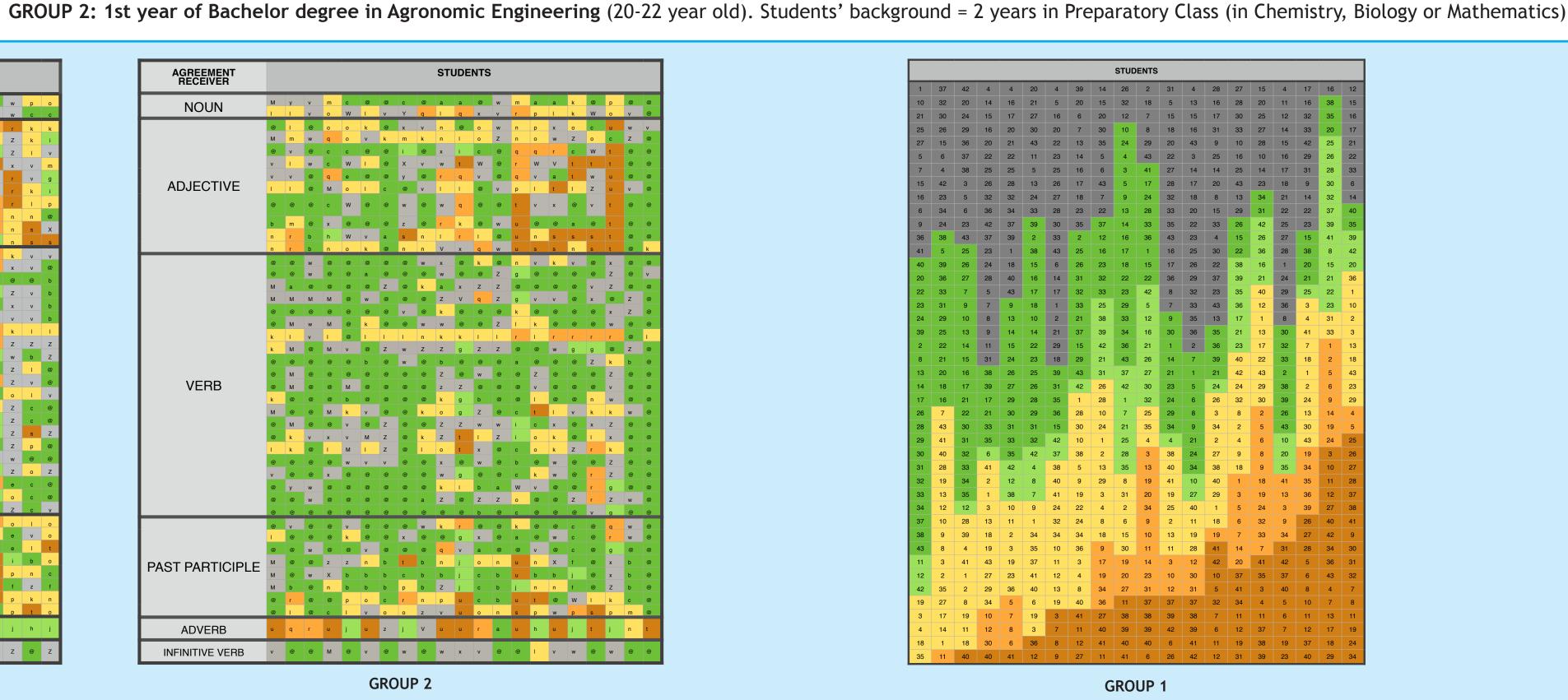


TABLE 1 - Students' evaluation according to the grammatical category of the agreement receiver

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In each little square, the letter refers to a code that specifies the cause of the error, based on the combination of the results of all 5 exercices. Vertically, the table is sorted according to a linguistic typology (i.e. according to the grammatical category of the agreement receiver: NOUN, ADJECTIVE, VERB, PAST PARTICIPLE, ADVERB AND INFINITY VERB).

This «map» may confer a general impression of scattered skills from one student to the other, which reflects how a teacher may feel towards any class, as all classes are generally very heterogeneous, even among the same curriculum.

In dark green squares, the letters a, b and c correspond to correct agreements in both production tasks for a specific linguistic structure associated with incorrect declarative knowledge. In other words, the student knows how to make the agreement properly but is not able to explain the rule nor make a correct grammatical analysis using the proper metalanguage.

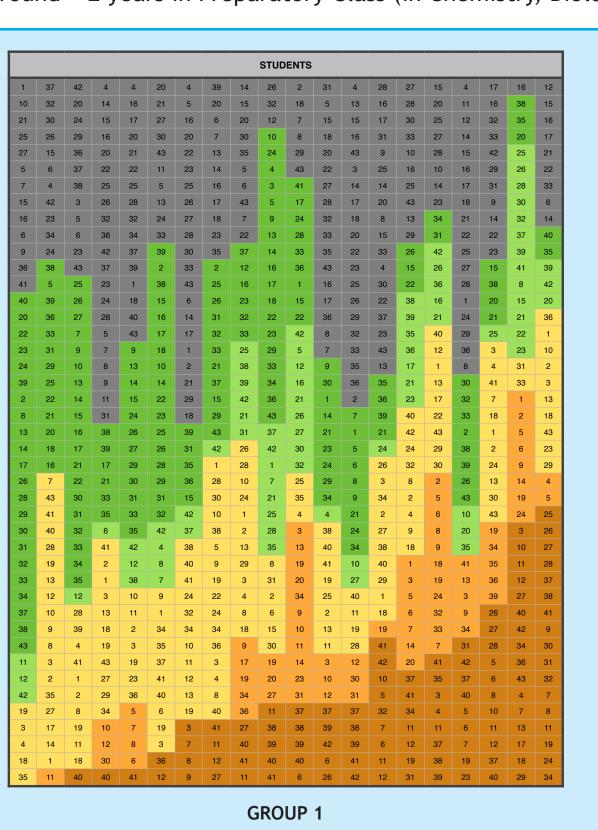
	GROUP 1 (number of occurence)	GROUP 2 (number of occurence)
a & b = production OK but doesn't know or understand the rule	154	189
c = production OK but grammatical analysis is incorrect	98	108

Hypothesis 1.A. «It is possible for a student to be able to make correct agreements without knowing the agreement rule (Gaux, Gombert, 1999)» is validated.

In yellow squares, the letters k and l reveal cases where the production is incorrect but declarative knowledge is learnt proper-

		GROUP 1 (number of occurence)	GROUP 2 (number of occurence)
•	ction is incorrect but de- wledge is learnt	387	324

Hypothesis 1.B. «The opposite is possible as well: a student may know how to explain the rule, but still make mistakes when he or she writes (ibid.)» is validated.



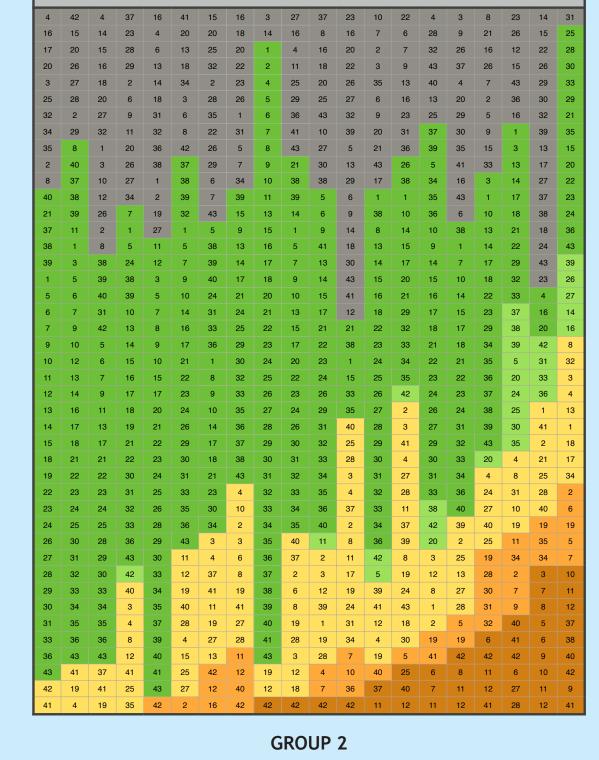


TABLE 2 - Students' evaluations according to the type of errors

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In each little square, the number representents a specific structure of agreement so that the student and the teacher can spot specifically the linguistic context where the error occured. Vertically, this table is sorted according to the cause of errors that each student makes for each linguistic structure.

Scale of expertise

In terms of remediation, if we consider that teaching declarative knowledge needs more ressources than enhancing revision skills for example, a scale of expertise may be established according to the «depth» of defficiencies. That scale is very visible with TABLE 2.

If we compare TABLE 1 on the left with TABLE 2 above, it appears that it is easier to assess the skills of a class if we use a typology based on the causes of the errors rather than the grammatical categories. We might then want to reconsider how sequences are built in remediation; it probably has to differ from how the same skills are aquire at school, one rule after another.

Hypothesis 2 «A typology based on the causes of errors might reveal a scale of expertise more obviously than a typology based on grammatical categories» is validated but still needs to be discussed as it requires class interventions using a typology based on the causes of errors to assess the efficiency of such a scale of expertise.

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