How do German L2 speakers process pronouns in their L2 Dutch?

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In our study we investigated how German second language learners of Dutch process reflexive and personal pronouns in their second language. The idea behind this was that according to ULLMAN (2001) and CLAHSEN AND FELSER (2006) L2 speakers are assumed to be unable to apply syntactic operations in the way as L1 speakers do, as Ullman argues because of maturational constraints. Pronoun processing provides an interesting basis to test this hypothesis as a syntactic operation has to be applied to interpret reflexive pronouns where personal pronouns are –mostly- interpreted through discourse operations (see REULAND, 2001), the question is how far this is reflected in L2 processing. In our self-paced reading study, we found support for the assumed processing differences between L1 and L2 speakers. L1 speakers read reflexive pronouns faster than personal pronouns in line with Reuland's theory that assumes that syntactic processes involve fewer interpretational steps than discourse operations; L2 speakers did not show differences in reading between the two kinds of pronouns, and thus do not seem to apply syntax.