

Aspectual Shifts: Grammatical and Pragmatic Knowledge in L2 Acquisition

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1. Introduction

The outcome of first language acquisition is always a success: at about 5 or 6 year of age, normally developing children have mostly acquired the grammar of the language that surrounds them. By contrast, adult second language acquisition results in different degrees of success, with some speakers performing on a variety of linguistic tasks like native speakers and others diverging considerably from these. This contrast between L1 and L2 acquisition has led some researchers to support the view that L1 and L2 acquisition are different epistemological phenomena: L1 acquisition is regulated by UG while L2 acquisition utilizes general-learning inductive procedures (Bley-Vroman, 1989; Meisel, 1997).

Taking into account the fundamental distinction between competence (unconscious knowledge of a grammatical system) versus performance (how linguistic knowledge is used), other researchers have claimed that failure of learners to perform in experimental tasks like native speakers is not necessarily a direct indication that the

learners' linguistic competence is deviant as well. In L1 acquisition research, there is a substantive literature discussing how children respect grammatical principles of binding but for different reasons may fail to understand the pragmatic conditions for the operation of those principles (e.g., Avrutin, 1999; Avrutin & Wexler, 1992, 1999/2000; Chien & Wexler, 1990; Grodzinsky & Reinhart, 1993; McDaniel, Cairns & Hsu, 1990). In L2 acquisition research, Juffs and Harrington (1995) have suggested that L2 processing should be distinguished from L2 competence. In their study of subjacency violations, Juffs and Harrington showed that L2 learners respect linguistic constraints like the native speakers, while the learners' processing of sentences and their responses were slower, more labored and problematic. Continuing this line of inquiry, in this paper we explore whether explanations for competence/performance discrepancies in the L2 acquisition of syntax and semantics may also lie in the utilization of pragmatic knowledge, and more specifically, the integration of temporal discourse knowledge into the generation of meaning.

Recent developments in theoretical linguistics, e.g., the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995), have highlighted the importance of interfaces, suggesting that syntactic derivations are driven by the necessity to satisfy certain interface conditions. Using a modular approach (Reuland, 2001) and following Olsen (1997), de Swart (1998), we will make a distinction between grammatical features checked in the syntax, and pragmatic distinctions calculated at the interface between discourse and syntax. This interface has generally proved problematic for children acquiring the correct usage of their native language (see above-mentioned references). Therefore, L2 learners' competence in this area is a prime candidate for investigation if we want to discover what is causing their non-targetlike performance. By focusing on the L2 acquisition of predicates that shift aspectual class under different pragmatic conditions in Spanish we ask whether L2 learners' deviating linguistic behavior is due to pragmatic processing abilities or to differences in the operation of grammatical feature checking.

2. Pragmatic versus grammatical knowledge

Grammatical competence is the unconscious, implicit knowledge that a speaker has about language, and that comes from the module of the mind associated with the human language faculty (Chomsky, 1965; Lenneberg 1967).

Generative linguists and psycholinguists accept that this domain-specific linguistic structure, Universal Grammar,

may be due to our genetic endowment. Pragmatics, on the other hand, is informally defined as the real-world knowledge that speakers bring to the use of language. It is not innate. Rather, it is a result of the non-language-specific abilities and changes over the course of infant-to-adult cognitive development. For example, compare the sentence sequences below.

(1) Mary looked at Bill. He smiled.

(2) Mary looked at Bill. He was smiling.

The sentence in (1) suggests that Bill smiled after Mary looked at him. The sentence in (2), on the other hand, describes Bill as already smiling when Mary looked at him. Nothing in the overt grammatical form of these sentences suggests that in the case of (1) the two events are sequential, while in (2) one event in progress overlaps with the first-mentioned momentary event. Still, native speakers of English are aware of the pragmatic, or conversational, implications of (1) and (2). This awareness is due to their knowledge of the world, more specifically, to the knowledge that a prolonged event in progress may temporarily include the immediately preceding event, while two instantaneous events usually happen in succession. Recent investigations of child language development (e.g., Avrutin, 1999) suggest that pragmatic knowledge of this type is absent in 3-year-old children and appears at about 5 or 6 years of age. Avrutin argues that children's errors with pronominal anaphora may be due not to their lack of syntactic knowledge, but to their inability to integrate this knowledge at the syntax-discourse interface (see also Grinstead, 2004).

The linguistic study of pragmatics has concentrated on five main areas: conversational implicature (see examples in (1) and (2) above), conversational structure, presupposition, speech acts, and deixis (Levinson, 1983). Temporal deixis and spatial deixis are among the most visible ways of anchoring language choices into the physical world surrounding us. Temporal reference achieves this anchoring of language in reality through the use of indexical expressions, or pointers to variables along the dimension of time. The adverb "today" and the past simple tense are such pointers. Deictic expressions can never be taken at face value, since a degree of interpretive flexibility is crucial for linguistic communication. Consider the sentence in (3) from Verschueren (1999: 96):

(3) Today it is not easy to find a job.

The indexical expression "today" clearly does not refer to the day of speaking (its semantic meaning) but to a wider, and variable, interval surrounding the present moment. Depending on who the utterer is, and what the circumstances

are, any interpreter will form context-specific expectations about the length of that interval. Note that this reinterpretation of *today* is supported by the use of the present simple in the sentence.

To summarize, sentences are often taken from their literal interpretation to another level of contextually relevant interpretation. In this process, grammatical and lexical information necessarily interact with discourse-pragmatic information.

3. Aspect and Pragmatics

Before we elucidate the nature of this effect, some terminology should be introduced. The term ‘aspect’ refers to the internal temporal structure of events as described by predicates (verbs and their arguments) (Comrie, 1976; Chung & Timberlake, 1985; Smith, 1991). It is the property that makes it possible for a sentence to denote a complete or an incomplete event. Predicates in human language can be viewed as reflecting either a state or an event. Vendler’s (1967) classification of verbs into four lexical classes will be used in this chapter. A state (e.g., *be*, *have*, *seem*) is defined as a stable condition of some entity for a period of time, where no change appears from Time 1 to Time 2. Events, on the other hand, are dynamic situations where some change or changes obtain from Time 1 to Time 2. Some events are classified as activities. The verb *run* in the sentence *John is running in the park* denotes a homogeneous process going on in time with no inherent goal. A second type of event is an accomplishment, a situation that involves a process going on in time and an inherent culmination point, after which the event can no longer continue, as in *John ran a mile*. Thus an accomplishment is a complex event containing an activity and the culmination of that activity. Finally, an achievement is similar to an accomplishment in that it also has an inherent endpoint, but in this class the process that leads to the culmination is instantaneous. Such a momentary event is represented by sentences like *John found a wallet*.

However, aspectual interpretations are not fixed because lexical aspect interacts in curious ways with grammatical and pragmatic knowledge. In Spanish, grammatical aspect is signaled by inflectional morphology like the Imperfect and Preterite. Predicates can shift aspectual class (from activity to accomplishment, from state to achievement, etc.) depending on grammatical or pragmatic elements in the sentence or discourse. We start by giving examples of the former.

Grammatically-induced shifts signal aspectual transitions by means of overt grammatical elements. In Spanish, for example, aspectual shifts can be marked by a grammatical aspect operator, the Imperfect as in (4a) or

the Preterite as in (4b), an object, as in (5), or the reflexive clitic *se*, as in (6):

- (4) a. Juan sabía la verdad. *state*
Juan know-IMPERF the answer
'Juan knew the answer.'
- b. Juan supo la verdad. *achievement*
Juan know-PRET the answer
'Juan found out/realized the truth.'

In example (4), the verb phrase *know the truth* is interpreted as stative when the Imperfect is employed, which is the default interpretation. But it can also shift to an instantaneous event and take the meaning 'found out/realized the truth' if the Preterite is used.

- (5) a. Juan corrió en el parque. *activity*
Juan run-PRET in the park
'Juan ran in the park.'
- b. Juan corrió una milla. *accomplishment*
Juan run-PRET a mile
'Juan ran a mile.'

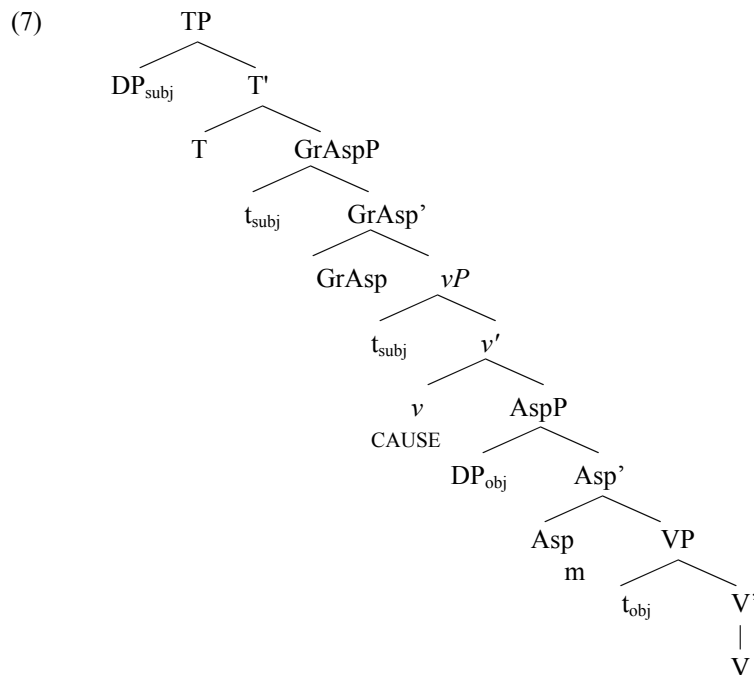
In (5a), the verb *run* without a direct object is interpreted as a discontinued activity, whose endpoint is not implied. In (5b), the direct object *a mile* measures the event out and provides an inherent endpoint. Thus, the sentence is interpreted as an accomplishment, in the absence of adverbials.

- (6) a. Juan leyó el libro (por una hora). *activity*
Juan read-PRET the book for an hour
'Juan read the book (for an hour).'
- b. Juan *se* leyó el libro (*por una hora). *accomplishment*
Juan SE read-PRET the book for an hour
'Juan read the book completely.'

The sentence in (6a) can be interpreted as an activity, especially in the presence of the optional adverbial *for an hour*. It is not obligatory to conceive of reading the book as necessarily complete. However, when the reflexive clitic *se* is added, the sentence can only be interpreted with the endpoint reached and the book read

through. A number of authors have recently argued that the Spanish reflexive clitic functions as a telic particle (Nishida, 1994; Zagona, 1996; Sanz, 2000; de Miguel, 1999; Fernández Lagunilla & de Miguel 1999), contributing an accomplishment interpretation to predicates which may optionally be interpreted as activities.

We follow Giorgi and Pianesi (1997) and Olsen (1997) in assuming that the Imperfect and Preterite aspectual morphemes check grammatical aspect features in a functional category GrAspP above the upper *vP* but below TP as in (7). We follow Borer (1994), van Hout (1996), Schmitt (1996), and Travis (1992) in assuming that the telicity feature is calculated in the functional category AspP. The object moves to the Spec of AspP to check accusative case and the verb moves to the head Asp. It is at this point, in a spec-head relationship with the verb, that the verb imparts its temporal properties to the object DP in English and Spanish. Depending on a verbal feature (or type of predicate) and on a nominal feature (quantized or not), the aspect of the whole VP is calculated. The Spanish telic particle *se* and English telic particles (e.g., *up* as in *eat up*) can optionally appear in the Asp head. Whenever these telic particles are not present, the default interpretation for a dynamic verb (*read*) and a quantized object (*a book*) is the telic interpretation; however, when a telic particle is present, the telic interpretation is not optional but obligatory (see examples in [12a,b] below).



However, lexical aspect also interacts in curious ways with pragmatic knowledge. Predicates can shift aspectual class (from activity to accomplishment, from state to achievement, etc.) depending not only on

grammatical cues but also on pragmatic elements in the sentence or discourse. We assume that pragmatic shifts do not involve checking of aspectual features (Olsen, 1997). Semanticists working within the Discourse Representation Theory label these transitions “aspectual coercion”. Coercion is a contextual reinterpretation process for which there is no overt *morphological* signal (de Swart, 1998). The following examples illustrate this point.

- | | | |
|------|--|---------------------------|
| (8) | a. I knew the answer. | <i>state</i> |
| | b. Suddenly, I knew the answer. | <i>achievement</i> |
| (9) | a. I read a book. | <i>accomplishment</i> |
| | b. I read a book for a few minutes. | <i>activity</i> |
| (10) | a. John played the sonata. | <i>accomplishment</i> |
| | b. John played the sonata for about eight hours. | <i>iterative activity</i> |
| (11) | a. The train arrived late. | <i>achievement</i> |
| | b. For months, the train arrived late. | <i>habitual activity</i> |

In the example in (8a), the neutral interpretation of the verb *know* is stative. However, the addition of adverbs like *suddenly*, *all of a sudden*, etc., encode a momentary change of state from not knowing to knowing the answer. In other words, the state is coerced into an achievement in (8b). The sentence in (9a) is interpreted neutrally as an accomplishment in the absence of context, with the endpoint of reading a book attained. The addition of the adverbial in (8b) coerces the accomplishment into an activity, since it is common pragmatic knowledge that most books cannot be read in full in a few minutes. The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for the examples in (10): common sense suggests that there is no sonata that lasts for about eight hours, therefore the iterative activity meaning comes to the fore. Finally, the examples in (11) illustrate a particularly “difficult” (i.e., marked) aspectual coercion process (H. de Swart, p.c.). The achievement verb *arrive* in the simple past encodes a one-time event in the past. The addition of the bounded interval adverbial, however, coerces the achievement into an iterative activity that is still bounded and in the past.

We will look at some aspectual shifts attested in Spanish. First, the animacy of subject NPs with certain verbs induces aspectual changes, as in (12):

- | | | |
|------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| (12) | a. Juan corría por la montaña | |
| | Juan run-IMPERF to the mountain | |
| | 'Juan ran to the mountain.' | <i>eventive interpretation</i> |

- b. El río corría por la montaña
 the river run-IMPERF to the mountain
 'The river ran to the mountain.' *stative interpretation*

Just as in English, accomplishments can be coerced into activities:

- (13) a. Juan leyó un libro. *accomplishment*
 Juan read-RET a book
 'Juan read a book completely.'
- b. Juan leyó un libro por un rato. *activity*
 Juan read-RET a book for a while
 'Juan read a book for a while.'

As mentioned above, the sentence in (13a) is neutrally interpreted as an accomplishment. However, when the adverbial *for a while* is added as in (13b), there is a strong implication of the endpoint not being reached, the activity just being discontinued. The pragmatic shifter (*for a while*) has overridden the default telic interpretation.

- (14) a. El tren llegó tarde. *achievement*
 The train arrive-RET late
 'The train arrived late.'
- b. Por meses, el tren llegó tarde. *habitual activity*
 For months, the train arrive-RET late
 'For months, the train arrived late.'

Finally, in the absence of adverbials, the sentence in (14a) is interpreted as a momentary telic event, an achievement, just as in English. The addition of the durative adverbial *for months* shifts its interpretation to an open-ended sequence of momentary events, i.e., a habitual activity.

The latter is also the pragmatic coercion in which the most significant meaning shift is effected. First, the verb *arrive* is an achievement, and so marked as [+telic] [+punctual] in the lexicon (see Slabakova (2001) for justification of this idea). It does not need a quantized object to become telic, in fact, it is intransitive. Second, the Preterite also imposes a temporal boundary and in a sense confirms the telicity of the predicate. Without any adverbial, a sentence as in (14) would be interpreted as telic and not only bounded in time but also a one-time, punctual event. The adverbial *por meses* shifts the predicate to a habitual, open-ended activity thus canceling two

positive aspectual features: the telicity and the punctual nature of the event. We believe that the aspectual coercion as in (14b) is the most difficult to acquire and process. Compare, for example, the similar coercion in (13b). The verb *read* is not marked as telic in the lexicon and the Preterite is applied. Thus, the adverbial shifts only the default telicity value that is due to the quantized object, and leaves the grammatical aspect operator to provide a temporal boundary. In a sense, the adverbial cancels only one positive aspectual feature.

To summarize, in the examples (8)–(11) in English, and (12)–(14) in Spanish, there is a clash between the unmarked aspectual interpretation of the predicate and the context, as signaled by the adverbial or other discourse-related information. As a result of this clash, the unmarked meaning shifts to the meaning imposed by the context. The main difference between grammatical processes and coercion is that coercion is syntactically and morphologically invisible. Furthermore, while grammatical aspectual operators always denote a specific aspectual change, coercion may signal different possible aspectual transitions, as illustrated in (9) and (10). de Swart (1998) argues that coercion is regulated by pragmatic knowledge while aspectual operators are part of the grammatical system of a language, they are purportedly supplied by UG and check features in the syntax.

4. Previous Findings and Research Question

The natural question arises: are second language learners aware of this process of aspectual reinterpretation? And how much of their knowledge is universal, or comes from their native language? The relationship between discourse and temporal reference has been approached from a somewhat different perspective within the study of L2 pragmatic development. In a recent overview of pragmatics in the second language, Bardovi-Harlig (1999b) maintains that the most dominant areas of interlanguage pragmatics research are speech acts and conversational structure, with conversational implicature a distant third. Within conversational structure studies, narrative structure has generated a lot of research, because of its intimate relation to tense-aspect morphology use. Cross-linguistic investigations (Dahl, 1984; Godfrey, 1980; Hopper, 1979; and Longacre, 1981) have suggested that the distinction between background and foreground information is a universal in narrative discourse structure. In L2 discourse analysis studies the Interlanguage Discourse Hypothesis is formulated, predicting that "learners use emerging verbal morphology to distinguish foreground from background in narrative" (Bardovi-Harlig, 1994: 43). However, research

testing the Discourse Hypothesis is mainly interested in tense-aspect form distribution in L2 *production*. In this study, then, we stay within the broader area of interlanguage temporal reference but extend the field of interest to include L2 *comprehension* of grammatical aspect (as signaled by aspectual tenses) and the effect of pragmatic knowledge on that comprehension.

In recent years, the acquisition of tense/aspect morphology and the question of how learners come to map form and meaning in the aspectual domain has received considerable attention in L1 and L2 acquisition. Of particular interest in L2 acquisition has been to trace the emergence and development of aspectual morphology with the four predicate types proposed by Vendler (1967) (see Bardovi-Harlig, 1999a, 2000, for comprehensive overviews of these studies). In a previous experimental study investigating the interaction of grammatical and lexical aspect in Spanish by English-speaking learners (Montrul and Slabakova, 2002; Slabakova and Montrul, 2002), we found that intermediate and advanced learners showed depressed performance in judging achievement verbs in the Imperfect, as in the following example:

- (15) Los González vendían la casa pero nadie la compró.
the González sell-IMPERF the house but nobody bought it
'The González family were selling the house but nobody bought it.'

The learners' performance in judging contradiction with similar sentences in the Preterite (*#Los González vendieron la casa pero nadie la compró*) was much more accurate, especially for the advanced learners. Achievements like *notice*, *find*, *realize*, express momentary instantaneous change of states; other achievements like *win a game*, *sell a house*, etc. also denote instantaneous changes, but the process leading to the moment of change can be extended. Although the Imperfect in Spanish denotes an unbounded eventuality, it is possible for some achievement verbs to appear in the Imperfect. In these cases, this mechanism of extending the process part of the event leading to the change of state in achievements is a matter of pragmatics. Aspectual coercion resolves the conflict between the aspectual class of the predicate and the grammatical aspect meaning. We were surprised by the fact that, while English native speakers are perfectly capable of using this pragmatic mechanism in their own language, they do not readily transfer it to the L2, even when Spanish native speakers use similar mechanisms. We came to the tentative conclusion that pragmatics may be outside of UG-regulated linguistic competence, and acquisition of pragmatic contrasts is not guided by the same principles that guide the acquisition of grammatical contrasts.

Our explanation for these findings is indeed supported by recent proposals in linguistic theory, particularly by Reuland's (2001) economy perspective on interpretation. He maintains (p. 473) that four types of linguistic processes representing a relation between arguments can be distinguished: 1. processes relating the syntax-semantics interface representations to discourse; 2. processes applying at the syntax-semantics interface; 3. processes relating syntactic representations to ones at the interface; and 4. processes applying within narrow syntax. He further argues that a detectable amount of cost is associated with cross-modular operations. Assuming that syntactic objects and their discourse values belong to different linguistic modules (Chomsky, 1972), Reuland (2001) argues that processes that apply at the syntax-semantics interface are less costly than processes relating the latter with the discourse representation and hence easier to process. In support of such a view, Reuland cites Krämer's (2000) work on the L1A of Dutch indefinites. "[I]n a scrambling language like Dutch, children master the various syntactic operations before they master the correct interpretation, and that the interpretation for indefinites they master first is precisely the one they can compete without recourse to discourse information. (p.472)"

Similarly, Piñango, Zurif, and Jackendoff (1999), defining aspectual coercion as a combinatorial semantic operation requiring computation over and above that provided by combining lexical items through expected syntactic processes, conducted an experiment to investigate whether or not parsing of a string requiring coercion (in addition to syntactic composition) is more computationally costly than parsing its syntactically transparent counterpart. Their prediction of higher computational cost for coercion was borne out by the results.

In light of these findings, the research question motivating our study is whether aspectual shifts triggered by feature-checking aspectual operators like direct objects, the telicity marker *se*, and grammatical aspect inflection are easier to acquire than aspectual shifts triggered by more discourse pragmatic signals, such as adverbials, for English-speaking learners of Spanish. Assuming Reuland's (2001) economy perspective on interpretation we hypothesized that L2 learners would be more accurate with the grammatically induced shifts than with the pragmatically induced shifts.

5. Experimental Study

5.1. Participants and Materials

Sixty English-speaking learners of Spanish and 27 native speaker controls participated in the experimental study. The participants' average age, age of first exposure to Spanish and length of stay in a Spanish-speaking country (in months) are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants's Biographical Data (ranges are in brackets)

	Age	Age of exposure to Spanish	Length of stay in a Spanish-speaking country (in months)
Controls (n=27)	27.3 (19-50)	n/a	n/a
Advanced (n=27)	27.5 (18-40)	14.3 (12-19)	8.37 (0-48)
Intermediate (n=33)	18.6 (18-20)	13.5 (12-18)	0.5 (0-4)

The learners were divided into Advanced (n=27) and Intermediate (n=33) on the basis of an independent proficiency measure (adapted from the *Diploma de Español como Lengua Extranjera* (DELE) (Embajada de España, Washington, DC) consisting of a vocabulary test with 30 items and a cloze test with 20 blanks. The experimental test was a meaning judgment task comprising 49 pairs of grammatically and pragmatically induced activity-accomplishment and stative-eventive aspectual shifts. Sentences were presented in pairs because we were interested in the perceived semantic contrast between the two sentences. Participants had to judge on a scale from 1 (unacceptable, I would never say this) to 5 (perfect, I would say this) whether the sentences were logical, odd, or contradictory, as presented below. See all test sentences in the appendix.

(16) Pedro leyó el capítulo anoche pero le faltan leer 2 párrafos.

Pedro read the chapter last night but has 2 more paragraphs left to read.

1 2 3 4 5

(17) Pedro *se* leyó el capítulo anoche pero le faltan leer 2 párrafos.

Pedro SE read the chapter last night but has 2 more paragraphs left to read.

1 2 3 4 5

Sentence (16) could be logical if *read the book* is construed as an activity, although this is not obligatory. Sentence (17), however, is contradictory because the clitic *se* makes the predicate an accomplishment, but the second clause denies the reaching of the endpoint. We included 3 conditions testing grammatically induced shifts (activity shift to accomplishment based on object, activity shift to accomplishment with and without *se*, stative-eventive shift signaled by grammatical aspect) and 3 conditions testing pragmatically induced shifts (achievement coerced into habitual by adverbial, animate vs. inanimate subject with eventive predicate, accomplishment coerced into activity

by adverbial), although we duly acknowledge that this distinction is not clear-cut. There were 7 pairs of sentences per condition, and 7 distracters (see all test sentences and distracters in the appendix.)

5.2. Results

5.2.1. *Proficiency test.* Results from the proficiency test allowed us to divide the L2 learners into advanced and intermediate groups. The average scores, ranges and standard deviations are given in Table 2. One-way ANOVA indicates that the two learner groups were significantly different in their proficiency ($F(1,58) = 193.37, p < .0001$).

Table 2: Mean Scores on the Proficiency Test (maximum possible = 50)

	Intermediate (n =33)	Advanced (n =27)
range	19-34	35-49
mean	26.12	43.03
sd	3.85	5.54

5.2.2. *The Meaning Judgment Task*

Mean responses of the semantic interpretation task were submitted to a repeated measures ANOVA. There was a main effect for group and for condition ($F(2,84) = 123.2, p < .0001$ and $F(2,84) = 74.2, p < .0001$, respectively). Contrasts between sentences in each condition were examined by running single-factor ANOVAs. All significant results reported were significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. In what follows we discuss the results of the grammatically induced shifts (5.2.2.1) and the pragmatically induced shifts (5.2.2.2).

5.2.2.1 *Grammatically induced shifts.* The first condition tested sentences like those in (18) and (19), where an activity shifts to an accomplishment by the presence of a direct object and a clitic referring back to the same object in the conjoined clause.

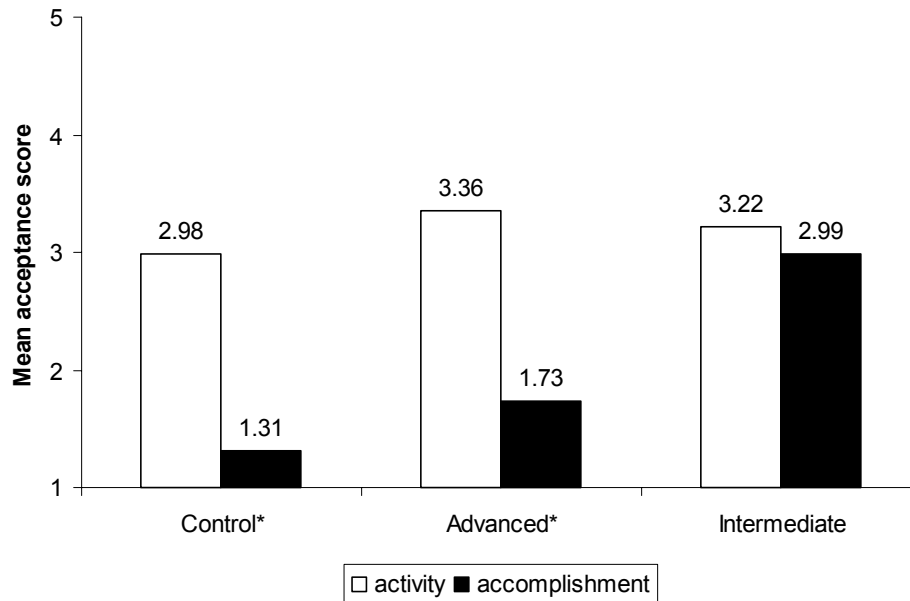
(18) El artista dibujó en el parque y todavía está dibujando. (activity) *non-contradiction*

The artist drew in the park and he is still drawing.

(19) El artista dibujó **un círculo** y todavía **lo** está dibujando. (accomplishment) *contradiction*

The artist drew a circle and he is still drawing it.

Figure 1. Grammatical contrast: Activity shifts to accomplishment by object

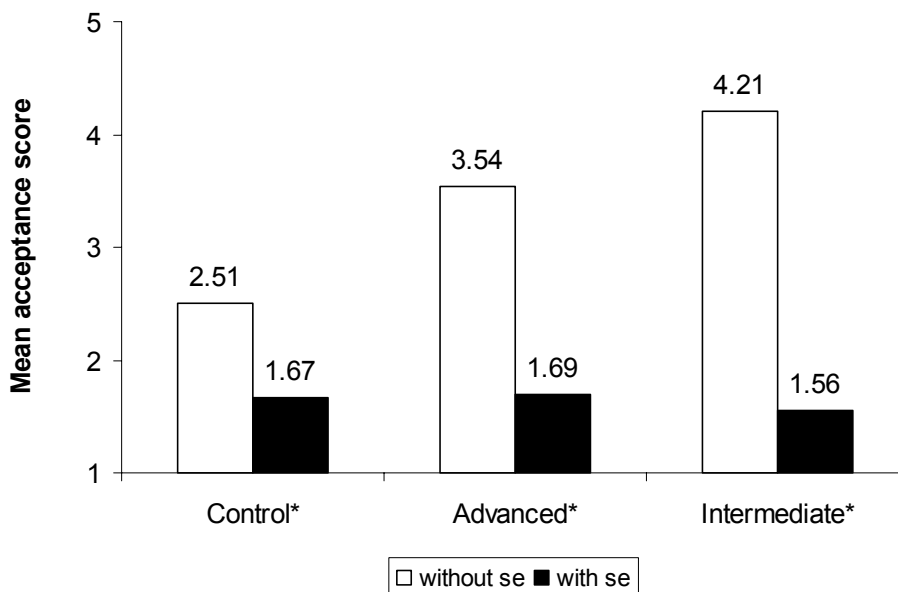


The controls and the advanced learners distinguished reliably between the two types of sentences, while the contrast was not significant for the intermediate learners. In this one and the figures that follow, a star after the group label indicates that the relevant contrast is significant according to ANOVA at $p < .05$.

As discussed above, Spanish uses an optional telicity marker *se* in order to signal that the sentence denotes an accomplished event. Without this telicity marker, sentences with accomplishment predicates could be construed as activities as well as accomplishments (Nishida, 1994; Zagona, 1996; Sanz, 2000; de Miguel 1999; de Miguel and Fernández Lagunilla 1999). The second condition tested this grammatical shift. The first clause in sentence (20), if construed as an activity, will not contradict the negative conjoined clause. In the case of (21), however, such construal is impossible.

- (20) Sebastián leyó el libro pero le faltan leer dos capítulos. *?non-contradiction*
 Sebastian read the book but he still has two chapters to read.
- (21) Sebastián *se* leyó el libro pero le faltan leer dos capítulos. *contradiction*
 Sebastian *SE* read the book but he still has two chapters to read.

Figure 2. Grammatical contrast: Activity shifts to accomplishment with and without telicity marker *se*



While the native speakers are aware of the marginality of example (20), they still consider examples like (21) significantly worse. The same is true for the advanced learners, albeit to a lesser extent. Although the intermediate learners seem to be aware of the contrast—even more than the native speakers—this result may be misleading. We suspect that these learners have not acquired *se* as a telicity marker and that is why they simply judge (21) to be ungrammatical. A body of existing research on the L2 acquisition of the reflexive clitic *se* with different verbs (a telicity and inchoativity marker) attests to the fact that L2 intermediate proficiency learners whose L1 is English readily omit this clitic in Spanish (Montrul, 1999; Toth, 1999). Advanced and near native speakers are more aware of the aspectual properties of this clitic (Bruhn de Garavito, 1999).

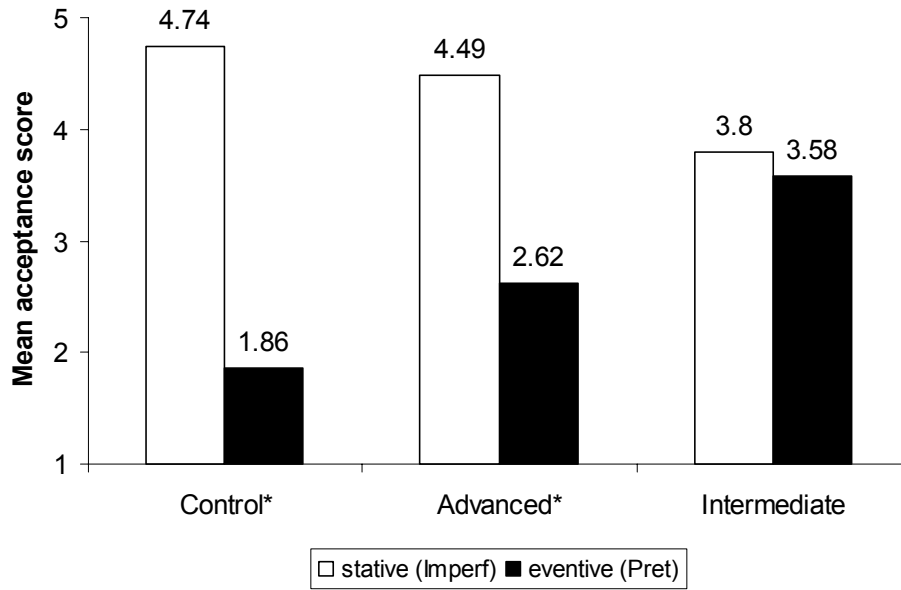
The third grammatical aspectual shift involves the use of the Imperfect and Preterite. With an inanimate subject, only the Imperfect produces a logical sentence, since it evokes a stative interpretation, as in (22). The eventive interpretation contributed by the Preterite makes sentences as in (23) infelicitous. The native speakers and the advanced learners are aware of this contrast, unlike the intermediate learners.

(22) El río **corría** (Imp.) por la montaña. (stative) *felicitous*

The river ran through the mountain.

- (23) El río **corrió** (Pret.) por la montaña. (eventive) *infelicitous*
 The river ran through the mountain.

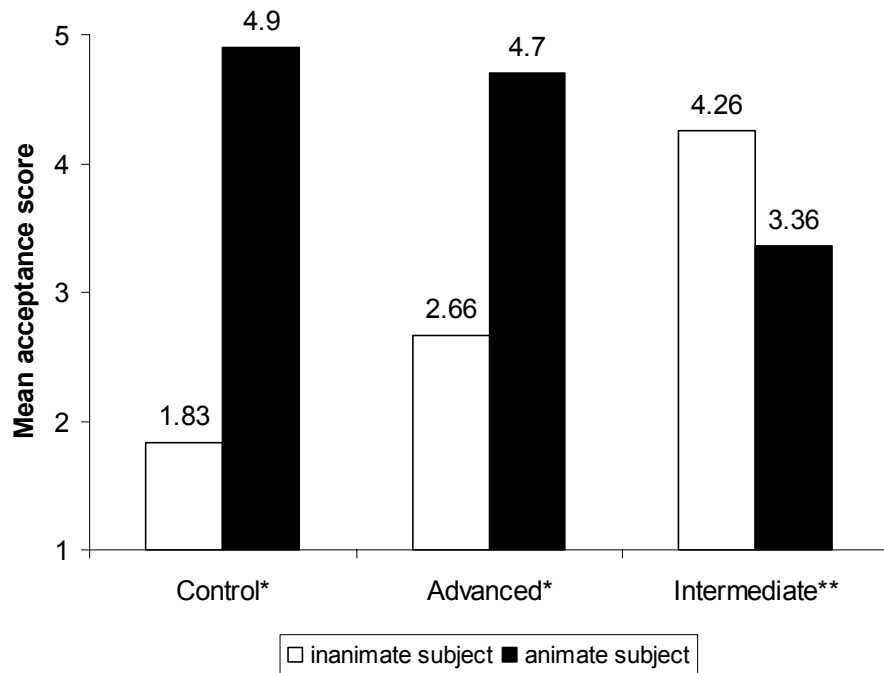
Figure 3. Grammatical contrast: Stative predicate shift to eventive signaled by grammatical aspect



5.2.3. *Pragmatically induced contrasts.* The first pragmatic coercion process has to do with subject animacy. An inanimate subject like *the river* is infelicitous with the eventive interpretation evoked by the Preterite, while an animate subject is perfectly fine. Note that the grammatical aspect in the two clauses (24) and (25) is the same, and they only differ in the animacy of their subjects. (For Levin (1993) these would be two different verbs *corer* ‘run’.)

- (24) **El río** corrió por la montaña. (stative) *infelicitous*
 The river ran through the mountain.
- (25) **Roberto** corrió por la montaña. (eventive) *felicitous*
 Roberto ran through the mountain.

Figure 4. Pragmatic contrast: Animate vs. inanimate subject with eventive predicate



As Figure 4 illustrates, both the native speakers and the advanced learners demonstrate reliable knowledge of the contrast, while the intermediate speakers also show a significant contrast, but in the wrong direction.

The second pragmatic coercion process is effected by ‘for X time’ or ‘in X time’ adverbials:

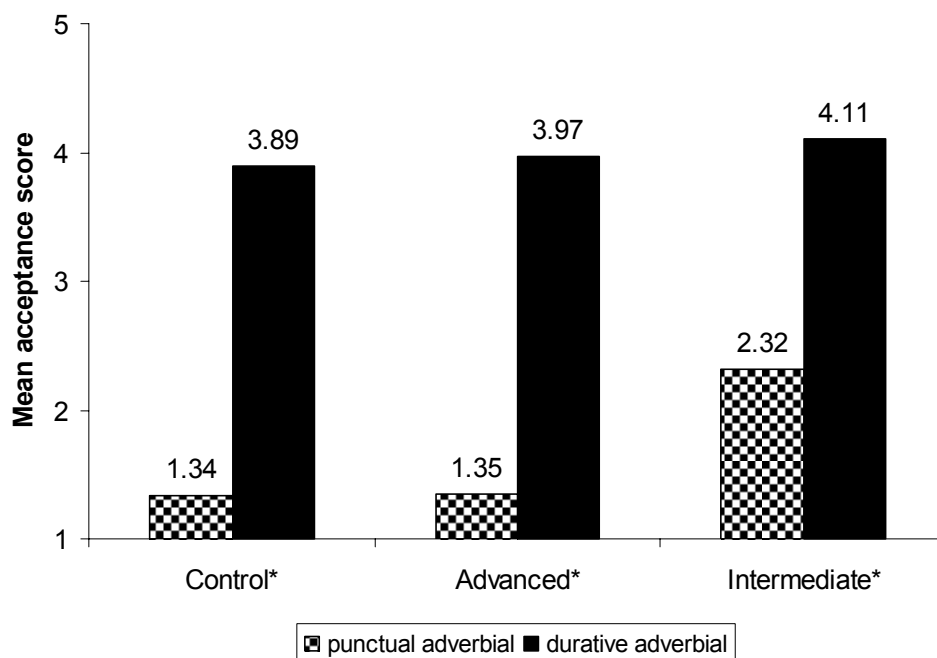
(26) El jardinero cortó el pasto **en una hora** y todavía lo sigue cortando.

The gardener mowed the lawn in an hour and he is still mowing it *contradiction*

(27) El jardinero cortó el pasto (**por**) **una hora** y todavía lo sigue cortando.

The gardener mowed the lawn for an hour and he is still mowing it *non-contradiction*

Figure 5. Pragmatic contrast: Accomplishment coerced into activity by adverbial

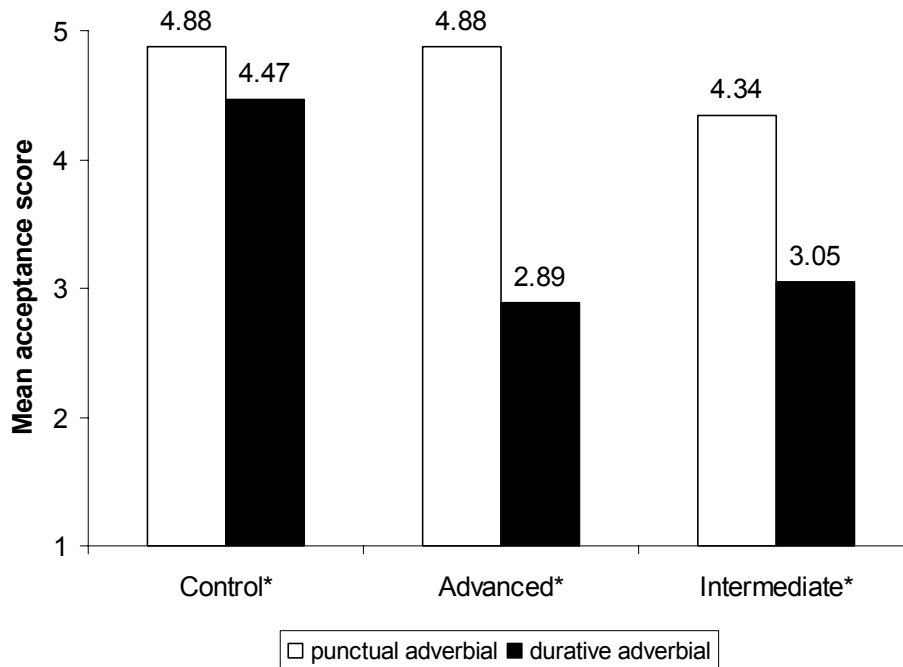


All three participant groups are clearly aware of this pragmatic coercion process.

The third (and most interesting) pragmatic coercion process is brought forward by the time-frame adverbial. In (28), the time-point adverbial like *yesterday* supports the default interpretation of the predicate. In (29), however, the adverbial *for many months* clashes with the (grammatical) meaning of one-time finished event that is brought forward by the Preterite and the achievement predicate. Thus, the durative adverbial forces the interpretation into a habitually repeated activity within a specific time frame. As we argued in section 3, this may be the most difficult aspectual shift to acquire, since the adverbial cancels two grammatical features: the telicity checked in AspP and the one-time nature of the event, checked in GrAspP.

- (28) **Ayer** el tren del mediodía llegó tarde. (achievement) *non-contradiction*
 Yesterday the 12 o'clock train arrived late.
- (29) **Durante muchos meses** el tren del mediodía llegó tarde. (habitual) *non-contradiction*
 For many months the 12 o'clock train arrived late.

Figure 6. Pragmatic contrast: Achievement coerced into habitual by adverbial



Although all three groups of participants showed a significant contrast between sentences as in (28) and (29), it is clear from Figure 6 that the native speakers coerce achievements into habitual activities much more easily. The English natives do not have clear intuitions about the felicity of this coercion process, which is surprising, since the same process is available in English, as the gloss of example (29) indicates.

5.3. Individual results

The group results reported in sections 5.2.2.1 and 5.2.2.2 above may be concealing some developmental tendencies that can only be uncovered by looking at individual judgments. The individual performance of each participant on any one of the contrasts (or non-contrast, as in examples [28] and [29]) was established in the following way. Paired t-tests were performed on the raw scores of each participant for each condition. When the participant's judgments of each sentence in a pair were significantly different, in the case of expected contrast, we assumed that the participant could perceive the contrast. If the t-test was not significant, we assumed that the participant did not perceive the

contrast.¹ The number and percentage of individuals per participant group who have acquired the contrasts are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Number of individual participants per group who have acquired aspectual shifts (percentage in brackets)

	Grammatically induced shifts			Pragmatically induced shifts	
	<i>Object animacy</i>	<i>Se</i>	<i>Gr. Asp.</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Adverbial</i>
Controls (n=27)	23(85%)	18(67%)	27(100%)	27(100%)	27(100%)
Advanced (n=27)	25(93%)	23(85%)	18(67%)	21(78%)	26(96%)
Intermediate (n=33)	8(24%)	30(91%)	8(24%)	16(48%)	11(33%)

The last pragmatic condition, however, whose group results are reported in Figure 7, is different. In this condition, we expected the participants to be able to coerce an achievement into a bounded habitual activity, and judge the two sentences as equally logical. That is why we assume that the participants are successful in their acquisition if they *did not* perceive a significant contrast between the pairs of sentences in this condition. The individual results for this last condition are reported separately in Table 4. The large majority of native speakers accept that achievements can be coerced into an activity by the addition of a durative adverbial, while the large majority of advanced learners do not accept that pragmatic coercion.

Table 4 : Number of individuals per participant group who accept/do not accept aspectual coercion

	Participants who accept coercion	Participants who do not accept coercion
Controls (n=27)	21 (78%)	6 (22%)
Advanced (n=27)	3 (11%)	24 (89%)
Intermediate (n=33)	12 (36%)	21 (64%)

¹ This test may be not sufficiently sensitive to smaller distinctions, due to the few tokens used to calculate it (n=7). Thus, even some native speakers were found not to be aware of one or another contrast (see Table 3). However, this is the only test that can reliably gauge whether an individual demonstrates knowledge of a contrast.

6. Discussion

We can summarize the results of the intermediate L2 learners of Spanish as follows: They do not recognize aspectual shifts induced by grammatical or pragmatic devices, with one crucial exception. No obvious primacy of grammatical over pragmatic clues can be observed for these learners. The only kind of aspectual shift the intermediate learners as a group have reliably acquired is the one signaled by overt ‘in/for X time’ adverbials. (Even so, note that only 11, or 33%, of them are showing a statistically significant contrast in that condition.) Taken together, group and individual results suggest that quantized objects, subject animacy, and grammatical aspect fail to trigger aspectual shifts for these learners. It seems that it is actually overt, unambiguous aspectual shifters that are easier to acquire than the “covert” signals of aspectual shift, at the initial stages of L2 acquisition. Similar findings are widely attested in the L1 acquisition of aspectual properties of language (see for example van Hout, 1998; Wagner, 1999). In this sense, our study confirms for L2 acquisition the Transparency Principle (proposed for L1 acquisition by van Hout, 1998), stating that “[L]earning is easier for overt and unambiguous cognitive-linguistic mappings than for covert and/or conflated ones.”

It is also the case that the overt signal of aspectual shift that the intermediate learners do recognize is the same in their native language, so L1 transfer may have contributed to their accuracy. The specific contrast we have in mind is the pragmatic contrast induced by overt ‘in/for X time’ adverbials as in (26) and (27). However, the issue of L1 transfer with these intermediate learners is far from straightforward. Among the aspectual shifts we tested, there are those which have exact equivalents, or work similarly, in the learners’ native English and in the second language: the activity-accomplishment shift signaled by object (a grammatically-induced shift as in [18] and [19]) and the achievement-activity shift effected by a durative adverbial (a pragmatically induced shift as in [28] and [29]). The intermediate learners display no knowledge of either. Therefore, we feel justified in asserting that neither pragmatic, nor grammatical aspectual shifts are part of these learners’ interlanguage, and the native language does not play a significant role with respect to this aspectual phenomenon.²

The advanced learners, on the other hand, displayed patterns of response similar to that of native speakers’ in the three grammatical conditions and in two out of three pragmatic conditions. The only condition in which their

² This may be due to the proficiency level of these participants: they are intermediate learners and not beginners. It is at the very beginning of L2 acquisition that L1 transfer is usually expected to manifest itself (cf. Schwartz and Sprouse, 1996).

performance differed markedly from that of the native speakers is in the case of the most “difficult” pragmatic coercion: that of an achievement into a bounded habitual activity (see Figure 6). What is concealed by the group means reflected in Figure 6 comes out very clearly when we look at the participants’ individual judgments. Twenty-four out of 27 (or an overwhelming 92%) advanced speakers do not rate the coerced sentence as high as its uncoerced counterpart. This deviation of the advanced speakers’ competence from native pragmatic computation is even more surprising, given that their native language coerces similarly to the target language. Thus, we have once again uncovered a specific pragmatically-induced aspectual shift, for which very advanced learner competence differs markedly from native speaker competence. Taken together with our earlier findings, this result is a strong indication that pragmatic and grammatical knowledge may differ in interlanguage grammar. It is important to note that it is with the advanced speakers, rather than the less proficient ones, where this dissociation between grammatical knowledge and pragmatic knowledge in the second language comes to light.

The question of whether the advanced speakers display differential knowledge of grammatical, feature-based aspectual meaning and pragmatic (context or adverbial-based) meaning appears to have a positive answer. We defined grammatical features as the features that are checked in the aspectual functional categories GrAspP and AspP as in (7). Recall that a quantized object and a dynamic verb bring forward the default telic interpretation. When the aspectual *se* is present in this aspectual head, it checks the telicity feature and makes the telic interpretation obligatory. Furthermore, Preterite and Imperfect morphemes check grammatical aspect features in the higher functional category, GrAspP. On the other hand, aspectual shifts depending on subject animacy and adverbials were assumed not to be checking any grammatical features but to be active at the semantics-pragmatics interface. Comparing knowledge of the two types of properties, it seems that our advanced learners have successfully acquired all grammatical features. At the same time, they have acquired only two of the pragmatic shifts and do not display categorical knowledge of the third, most difficult shift. We tentatively defined difficulty in terms of how many grammatically checked features a pragmatic shifter has to cancel (see section 3). Much more research in linguistic theory is needed in order to refine this “measuring” diagnostic and make it testable in acquisition research.

Our study has at least one more limitation that deserves comment. In some conditions, it was difficult to tease apart clear cases of grammatically-induced aspectual shifts versus pragmatically-induced shifts. Since all the test sentences (and most natural language sentences, for that matter) contain (non-)quantized objects, and

grammatical aspect cues, it is hardly possible to tease apart their contribution from the contribution of the pragmatic cues, especially in the conditions testing pragmatic contrasts. This disclaimer should not preclude researchers, however, from trying to improve these, as well as devise new tests and materials, to better tease apart the grammatical from the discourse contribution to the aspectual interpretation of sentences.

In discussing the implications of our findings, the advanced group's performance allows us to argue that even at a high level of second language acquisition proficiency, some pragmatic coercion processes are not successfully acquired. This otherwise surprising inaccuracy may be due to the higher computational costs that such sentences incur (cf. Krämer, 2000; Piñango, Zurif, and Jackendoff, 1999). These results certainly support Reuland's (2001) economy of interpretation proposal, and in particular, the implied hierarchy of difficulty in acquisition. In addition, the intermediate learners' accuracy reveals that although grammatical knowledge doesn't guarantee pragmatic knowledge, pragmatic knowledge may in fact be dependent on the presence of grammatical knowledge, as without narrow syntactic and syntax-semantics interface knowledge, sentences cannot be interpreted in the first place.³ More evidence for this conclusion comes from a recent study by Montrul and Rodríguez Louro (2004) looking at morphosyntactic and discourse pragmatic aspects of the Null Subject Parameter in Spanish L2. The intermediate learners in this study, who were still in the process of resetting the morphosyntactic properties of the parameter, were unaware of the pragmatic import of the use of null or overt subjects. By contrast, advanced and near-native speakers, who already had the morphosyntax of the parameter reset were also sensitive to the pragmatic discourse rules regulating subject expression in Spanish. Thus, syntax-semantic interface knowledge and discourse-pragmatic knowledge appear to be ordered in terms of difficulty of acquisition.

Furthermore, individual results indicate that aspect interpretations are acquirable in a second language, even though by few. Some non-native speakers can attain similar competence as native speakers in this domain (cf. Montrul and Slabakova, 2001, 2003).

In conclusion, how exactly and why learning a first language is different from learning a second language as an adult seem to be two of the more intriguing research questions in the field of L2 acquisition. We consider the investigation of the semantics-pragmatics interface to be an exceptionally promising direction in this respect. We have tentatively established that acquiring L2 pragmatics can be dissociated from acquiring L2 grammar. The next

³ We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this interpretation.

step in this research program would be to look at which aspects of the pragmatics are easily acquirable by L2 learners and which are not. Only then can we start looking at the question of why L1 and L2 performance diverge.

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Appendix

Battery of sentences included in the Meaning Interpretation Task

Distractors (all contradictions)

Fui a la escuela en auto y llegué en bicicleta
Iba a la escuela en auto y llegué en bicicleta

Habia 5 personas en el cine y no habia nadie
Ayer habia 5 personas en el cine y no habia nadie

La farmacia cerró a las cinco pero todavía no cerró
La farmacia abrió a las 8 pero ya son las 8 y no abrió

Los padres de Julieta se fueron de viaje pero no viajaron
Los padres de Julieta se fueron a Europa pero no fueron a Europa

Para no mojarse, los niños jugaron bajo la lluvia
Para no mojarse, los niños jugaban bajo la lluvia

Ayer vendí mi motocicleta pero nadie me la compró.
Ayer he vendido mi motocicleta pero nadie me la compró

El jarrón se cayó al suelo y por eso está sobre la mesa.
El jarrón se cayó al suelo y por eso quedó sobre la mesa.

Grammatical contrast: activity shift to accomplishment based on object

Juan corrió una hora y todavía está corriendo.
Juan corrió la carrera y todavía la está corriendo.

El bebé durmió dos horas y todavía está durmiendo.
El bebé durmió la siesta y todavía la está durmiendo.

María cantó un rato y todavía está cantando.
María cantó una canción y todavía la está cantando.

Marcos y Estela bailaron un rato y todavía están bailando.
Marcos y Estela bailaron un tango y todavía lo están bailando.

Carlos comió en el bar y todavía está comiendo.
Carlos comió una manzana y todavía la está comiendo.

El artista dibujó en el parque y todavía está dibujando.
El artista dibujó un círculo y todavía lo está dibujando.

Pedro nadó en la playa y todavía está nadando.
Pedro nadó un milla y todavía la está nadando.

Grammatical contrast: activity shift to accomplishment with and without se

Sebastián leyó el periódico pero le faltan leer dos artículos.
Sebastián se leyó el periódico pero le faltan leer dos artículos.

Pedro comió el pastel pero le quedan por acabar unos bocados.
Pedro se comió el pastel pero le quedan por acabar unos bocados.

Marisa estudió la lección pero le faltan estudiar dos temas más.
Marisa se estudió la lección pero le faltan estudiar dos temas más.

Francisco bebió la botella de vino pero todavía le quedan unos tragos.
Francisco se bebió la botella de vino pero todavía le quedan unos tragos.

Antonia memorizó el poema pero le faltan memorizar las últimas dos estrofas.
Antonia se memorizó el poema pero le faltan memorizar las últimas dos estrofas.

Pablo fumó un cigarrillo pero le quedan dos pitadas.
Pablo se fumó un cigarrillo pero le quedan dos pitadas.

Patricia miró la película pero se fue antes del final.
Patricia se miró la película pero se fue antes del final.

Grammatical contrast: stative-eventive shift signaled by grammatical aspect

El río corría por la montaña.
El río corrió por la montaña.

El puente colgante conducía a la frontera.
El puente colgante condujo a la frontera.

El volcán dominaba el territorio.
El volcán dominó el territorio.

Las vías del ferrocarril doblaban hacia el oeste.
Las vías del ferrocarril doblaron hacia el oeste.

El camino bajaba de la montaña al pueblo.
El camino bajó de la montaña al pueblo.

La autopista pasaba por el aeropuerto.
La autopista pasó por el aeropuerto.

Extensos campos de maíz rodeaban la ciudad.
Extensos campos de maíz rodearon la ciudad.

Pragmatic contrast: Achievement coerced into habitual by adverbial

Durante muchos meses el tren del mediodía llegó tarde.
Ayer el tren del mediodía llegó tarde.

Por muchos años Julia se acordó del accidente.
En ese instante Julia se acordó del accidente.

A través de los años Carmen descubrió el verdadero carácter de su marido.
De repente Carmen descubrió el verdadero carácter de su marido.

Durante las dos horas de entrevista, José se dio cuenta de que no era un buen candidato para el puesto.
Inmediatamente José se dio cuenta de que no era un buen candidato para el puesto.

Después de volver en sí, el paciente no reconoció a su esposa por un mes.
Después de volver en sí, el paciente no reconoció a su esposa inmediatamente.

Todo el día Juan notó que Mónica estaba distraída.
De pronto, Juan notó que Mónica estaba distraída.

Por unos cuantos años Luisa se olvidó del cumpleaños de su hermana.
Ayer Luisa se olvidó del cumpleaños de su hermana.

Pragmatic contrast: Animate vs. inanimate subject with eventive predicate

Roberto corrió por la montaña.
El río corrió por la montaña.

El rey dominó este territorio.
El volcán dominó este territorio.

El esquiador bajó de la montaña al pueblo.
El camino bajó de la montaña al pueblo.

La caravanas de refugiados doblaron hacia el oeste.
Las vías del ferrocarril doblaron hacia el oeste.

Graciela pasó por el aeropuerto.
La autopista pasó por el aeropuerto.

El turista de Alemania condujo a la frontera.
El puente colgante condujo a la frontera.

Grandes batallones de soldados rodearon la ciudad.
Extensos campos de maíz rodearon la ciudad.

Pragmatic contrast: Accomplishment coerced into activity by adverbial

Leí el libro (por) unas horas y voy a seguir leyéndolo unas horas más.
Leí el libro en una hora y voy a seguir leyéndolo unas horas más.

El jardinero cortó el pasto (por) una hora y todavía lo sigue cortando.
El jardinero cortó el pasto en una hora y todavía lo sigue cortando.

Mi abuela miró la telenovela (por) media hora y la va a seguir mirando hasta el final.
Mi abuela miró la hora de telenovela y la va a seguir mirando hasta el final.

Limpié mi cuarto (por) 10 minutos y todavía lo sigo limpiando.
Limpié mi cuarto en 10 minutos y todavía lo sigo limpiando.

Andrés pintó la puerta (por) media hora y le falta pintar la mitad.
Andrés pintó la puerta en una hora y le falta pintar la mitad.

Mi madre cocinó el pastel (por) una hora y todavía no está hecho.
Mi madre cocinó el pastel en una hora y todavía no está hecho.

Teresa secó la ropa (por) 10 minutos y todavía está húmeda.
Teresa secó la ropa en 10 minutos y todavía está húmeda.