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THE ACQUISITION OF ASPECT IN L2 PORTUGUESE & SPANISH EXPLORING NATIVE / NON-NATIVE PERFORMANCE DIFFERENCES

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This study investigates the possibility of native-like ultimate attainment by analyzing L2 knowledge of aspect as seen in the Preterit/Imperfect contrast of highly successful English L2 learners of Portuguese and Spanish. Building on innovative work by Montrul & Slabakova (2003) and Slabakova & Montrul (2003), we test knowledge of semantic entailments associated with the acquisition of [+/- perfective] features checked in higher AspP. Additionally, we investigate the possibility of a specific pattern of associated target-deviant L2 performance. We hypothesize that L2 performance can be affected by explicit positive evidence (pedagogical rules) despite otherwise demonstrable native-like competence. Indeed, the data reveal a pattern of target-deviant performance noted only in three specific contexts, all of which can be linked to traditional instruction: (a) with particular stative verbs not used in the Preterit (b) when preceded by certain adverbial phrases (e.g., *siempre*) and (c) so-called semantic shifting verbs (e.g., *sabia vs. supe*).

1. *Introduction*

The question of UG-continuity in adult second language acquisition has been debated for over two decades (see White 2003 for discussion). On the one hand, the reality of variably target-deviant L2 grammars have prompted some researchers to hypothesize that UG-accessibility is a domain-specific phenomenon associated with L1 acquisition only (e.g., Bley-Vroman 1990;

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Schachter 1989, 1996). On the other hand, *poverty-of-the-stimulus* (POS) effects in L2 grammars (*e.g.*, Dekydtspotter & Sprouse 2001; Dekydtspotter et al. 1997; Montrul & Slabakova 2003) are considered by others to be unassailable evidence that UG constrains adult L2 grammars, despite variable L2 target deviancy in some domains. One goal of contemporary L2 research has been to adequately account for target-deviant performance, despite syntactic competence that is demonstrably native-like (*e.g.*, Goad et al. 2003; Lardiere 2000; Prévost & White 1999, 2000; Sorace 2000, 2003).

Most recently (Chomsky 1995), we have come to understand cross-linguistic differences in terms of variation in the language-to-language selection of functional categories and their respective features (including feature strengths) from the universal set of possibilities provided by UG. Accordingly, each language is, in a sense, a uniquely specific subset of UG, and functional categories and their associated formal features serve as the principle locus of parametric variation. Under minimalist assumptions, the computational processes of Move and Merge are purported to be universal. As a result, cross-linguistic differences are accounted for in terms of variable morphological properties. In terms of adult L2 acquisition, achieving native-like competence necessitates the acquisition of new functional categories, L2 morphosyntactic features and their strengths from UG's inventory as they learn the language-specific morphological forms of the target language. According to the *Failed Functional Feature Hypothesis*¹ (FFFH) (Hawkins & Chan 1997), adult L2 learners are unable to acquire features not represented in the L1 and, therefore, are unable to attain native-like competence.

In accord with innovative work done on the acquisition of [+/- perfective] aspect in L2 Spanish (Montrul & Slabakova 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003; Slabakova & Montrul 2002, 2003), the present study seeks to confirm UG-continuity by examining the morphosyntactic competence of advanced English learners of L2 Portuguese and Spanish. Building on Montrul & Slabakova (2003), the L2 learners are tested for different *poverty-of-the-stimulus* (POS) knowledge of semantic entailments accounted for in conjunction with the acquisition of Portuguese and Spanish [+/- perfective] features encoded in the Preterit and Imperfect verbal morphology. Additionally, assuming it is possible to attain native-like morphosyntactic competence and still make errors in performance (*cf.* Lardiere 1998, 2000; Prévost & White 1999, 2000; Sorace 2000, 2003), the present study seeks to uncover a predictable pattern of

¹ It should be noted that the FFFH is a theory of local impairment (maturation of the functional component) as opposed to global impairment. While we will not comment on the difference herein, we note that they conceivably make different predictions since the FFFH allows for access to UG principles, and global impairment does not. Additionally, we acknowledge that more recent accounts of the FFFH (Hawkins 2005) make different predictions for the acquisition of interpretable vs. uninterpretable features by adult learners.

performance errors that even the most proficient of L2 learners make with the Preterit/Imperfect contrast in terms of how this contrast is formally taught.

Most pedagogical presentations of the Preterit/Imperfect distinction are simplified and tailored to L1 translatability. For example, the Preterit/Imperfect difference of some verbs like *saber* is taught lexically. (e.g. *saber* = ‘to know’ in the Imperfect but ‘to find out’ in the Preterit). This simplification cannot, however, account for the grammaticality of (1), in which the Preterit form *supe* clearly means ‘to know’ and follows *siempre* ‘always’, which is one of the most frequently cited trigger words pedagogically associated solely with the Imperfect.

- (1) *Siempre supe que un día me dejarías.*
 “I always knew that one day you would leave me.”

While the Preterit and Imperfect forms of certain verbs are, by far, more likely to be translated differently into English, it is ultimately not true to claim that in every possible context, the Preterit of these verbs will be equivalent to semantic value *X* while the Imperfect of the same verbs must be equivalent to semantic value *Y*. Additionally, most textbooks offer lists of trigger words that are associated with either the Preterit or the Imperfect (e.g., *siempre* ‘always’ and *todos los días* ‘every day’), despite the fact that contexts in which these trigger words are essentially ineffective abound. In this article, we investigate the possibility that such pedagogical conventions lead to the development of non-linguistic rules that affect L2 performance in spite of native-like competence. With the aforementioned discussion in mind, the research questions are the following:

- i. Is it possible for English L2 learners of Portuguese and Spanish to acquire the [+/- perfective] aspectual features associated with Preterit and Imperfect morphology?
- ii. If some of these advanced L2 learners continue to make errors, is there a pattern to these apparent errors? If so, is there a systematic way to account for these errors as performance phenomena?

This article is structured in the following manner. In section II, the morphosyntactic properties of lexical and grammatical aspect are reviewed for English, Portuguese and Spanish. In section 3, relevant L2 acquisition studies are discussed. In sections 4-7, the design of and data from the present empirical study is detailed and discussed. Given space limitations, only group data are analyzed herein.

2. *Grammatical & Lexical Aspect*

The choice between Preterit and Imperfect morphology forms of any verb is not arbitrary; it is contextually regulated in accord with a system of aspect, which correlates to one's perspective of the action of the verb. The Preterit form corresponds to [+ perfective] aspect, which is bounded (Depraetere 1995) in that the action is implicitly interpreted as having a beginning and end point, but the internal structure is disregarded. Thus, the Preterit is most often episodic in nature.

- (2) *O João falou com essa mulher ontem.* (Portuguese)
 “João spoke with that woman yesterday.”

In contrast, the Imperfect, which corresponds to [- perfective] aspect, is unbounded (Depraetere 1995) as the focus is on the internal structure of the action with no regard to any specific beginning or end point, and thus, it most often takes a characterizing reading.

- (3) *O João falava com essa mulher todas as noites.* (Portuguese)
 “João was speaking/used to speak with that woman every night.”

In referring to past actions in Portuguese and Spanish, not only tense but also aspect features are encoded in the inflectional verbal morphology. This, however, is not the case in English, whose simple past can take both episodic and characterizing readings depending on the context, as seen in (4) and (5).

- (4) I ate at Olive Garden yesterday. (episodic)
 (5) I ate at Olive Garden all the time when I lived in NY. (habitual)

However, since the English simple past is most often associated with an episodic reading, English uses other conventions, such as modal verbs ‘*would*’ or the ‘*copula (be) + gerund*’ construction to express past generalizations.

In earlier work (Coppetiers 1987), it was suggested that aspect distinction of this kind did not derive from principles of UG. However, more recent theoretical accounts (*e.g.*, Bonomi 1997; Giorgi & Pianesi 1997; Lenci & Bertinetto 2000; Menéndez-Benito 2002) demonstrate that aspect distinction does derive from universal principles of grammar. Following Giorgi & Pianesi (1997), it is assumed that grammatical aspect manifests as a functional category, higher AspP. Both lexical and grammatical aspects are represented in the clausal projection of the verb, but in different positions. Lexical aspect is represented as a lower AspP where [+/- telic] features are checked in Portuguese, Spanish and English. Grammatical aspect is represented as a higher

AspP (just below TP) where [+/- perfective] features are checked in Portuguese and Spanish. Following Giorgi & Pianesi's analysis, Portuguese, Spanish and English project higher AspP, however, English differs parametrically in terms of which available features it instantiates in regards to this functional category: Portuguese and Spanish instantiate both [+ perfective] and [- perfective] features, while English only instantiates [+ perfective]. In English, Portuguese and Spanish, all verbs move to higher AspP; however, English verbs are already lexically marked as [+ perfective], whereas higher AspP in Portuguese and Spanish serves as the locus for [+/- perfective] feature checking via Preterit and Imperfect morphology (Giorgi & Pianesi 1997). Therefore, English L2 learners of Portuguese and Spanish must acquire the [- perfective] feature associated with the Portuguese and Spanish higher AspP to have native-like target-language competence in this domain. This is only possible if L2 learners are able to acquire features of functional categories not instantiated in their L1, *in contra* so-called failed features approaches.

The use of aspectual morpho-phonological forms in performance does not necessarily entail that the semantic distinction (inclusive of all semantic entailments) has actually been acquired. The semantic alternation between [+perfective] and [- perfective] aspect is often transparent; however, sometimes the nuance is considerably subtle yet paramount to native interpretation. In some cases, the input alone does not provide sufficient positive evidence in light of the ensuing knowledge. Let us consider the following associated POS semantic entailment², which we employ to test L2 knowledge in the empirical portion of the present study. We have already discussed the fact that the prototypical reading of the Preterit is an episodic one. However, multi-clausal Preterit sentences with overt adverbial quantifiers are interpreted as generalizations with a specific reading, namely a [+accidental] one (Lenci & Bertinetto 2000; Menéndez-Benito 2002). When there is no overt adverb of quantification, the distinction is more explicit, whereby the Preterit denotes an episodic interpretation and the Imperfect denotes a characterization or generalization (Menéndez-Benito 2002) as can be seen in (6) and (7), for Portuguese.

- (6) *Episodic*
Quando a gente foi á universidade, a gente estudou na biblioteca.
 "When we went to the university, **we studied** in the library."

² See Montrul & Slabakova (2003) and Slabakova & Montrul (2003) for another associated POS semantic entailment, which underscores an associated constraint on available specific vs. generic interpretations with impersonal subjects.

(7) *Generalization**Quando a gente ia á universidade, a gente estudava na biblioteca*“When we used to go to the university, **we would study** in the library.”

Bonomi (1997) accounts for the apparent relationship between grammatical [+/- perfective] distinction and the episodic/characterizing distinction, as seen in (6) and (7), by arguing that there is a formal correlation between aspectual categories and quantificational structures. The claim is that [+ perfective] aspect correlates to existential quantification over eventualities while [- perfective] aspect correlates to contextually restricted universal quantification over eventualities. However, when there is an overt adverb of quantification, the semantic interpretations of the [+/- perfective] distinction are not explained by Bonomi’s theory³, according to which there should be no interpretable difference between (8) and (9). Lenci & Bertinetto (2000) have demonstrated for Italian and Menéndez-Benito (2001, 2002) for Spanish that when there is an adverbial quantifier present, both the Preterit and Imperfect refer to generalizations about a certain event, as can be seen in (8) and (9), but there is an interpretable difference.

(8) *Siempre que fuimos a esa tienda, compramos mucha porquería.*“Whenever we went to that store, **we ended up** buying a lot of junk.”(9) *Siempre que íbamos a esa tienda, comprábamos mucha porquería.*“Every time we went to that store, **we bought** a lot of junk.”

Menéndez-Benito (2001, 2002) maintains that the perfective/imperfective distinction is not neutralized when an adverbial quantifier is present, but that the distinction is interpreted with an accidental/non-accidental dichotomy whereby perfective sentences express accidental generalizations and imperfective sentences express non-accidental ones. She supports this claim by demonstrating that only imperfective sentences support the truth of counterfactuals and can be paraphrased with the conditional while only perfective sentences block the kind-referring reading of the subject DP and coerce individual-predicates into stage-level ones. She suggests that this might be explained if, like NPs, one envisages VPs as being able to denote either kinds of events or sets of events. Accordingly, the same VP could either denote a kind or a set, and in Romance languages this distinction is grammatical, mediated by the alternation of [+/- perfective] morphology.

³ Bonomi claims that overt adverbial quantifiers with universal force override the inherent quantificational structure associated with the [+perfective] feature. Thus, there should be no discernable difference between sentences like (8) & (9).

We use this semantic alternation to test for L2 acquisition of aspect because this associated semantic entailment is not taught to L2 learners, nor is it derivable from input alone.

3. *Aspect & L2 Acquisition Studies*

It is important to note that the acquisition of aspect in L2 Spanish has received a privileged amount of attention in L2 research, and from a multitude of perspectives (*e.g.*, Anderson 1986, 1991; Camps 2005; Liskin-Gasparro 2000; Montrul & Slabakova 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003; Ramsay, 1990; Salaberry 1999, 2000, 2002; Slabakova & Montrul 2002). However, most of these studies have exclusively examined the acquisition of Preterit and Imperfect morphology as it relates to the proper usage of these verbal paradigms in IL development following the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (see Anderson 1986, 1991). That is, these studies examine the use of Preterit and Imperfect morphemes with different verb classes (*e.g.*, stative vs. eventive) in a particular discourse context. Based on L2 morphological usage, it is inferred what semantic interpretation L2 learners assign to these morphemes. The aforementioned trend is important to keep in mind in relation to contemporary generative L2 research. So-called syntax-before-morphology approaches maintain a dissociation between syntactic and morphological development and have demonstrated that L2 learners tend to use overt inflectional morphological forms variably, often despite an underlying syntactic competence that is native-like (see Goad et al. 2003; Lardiere 2000; Prévost & White 1999; Schwartz 2003 for discussion). Accordingly, the ubiquitous target-deviancy in L2 morphological production is understood as problems in surface morphology realization. Therefore, it is not clear that the lack of use of one morphological paradigm with a particular class of verbs would entail that an L2 learner is unable to produce and interpret such verbs in that same aspectual paradigm (*cf.* Montrul 2004).

Only Montrul & Slabakova (2000, 2002, 2003) and Slabakova & Montrul (2002, 2003) have looked at the L2 acquisition of Preterit and Imperfect morphology in Spanish as they relate to formal linguistic features and their syntactic/semantic distributions. Their pioneering work has demonstrated that L2 learners are able to acquire functional features associated with verbal morphology. Particularly interesting are the Montrul & Slabakova (2003) and Slabakova & Montrul (2003) studies in which they demonstrate target language L2 *poverty-of-the-stimulus* semantic knowledge stemming from a semantic universal (Chierchia 1995), which English L2 learners of Spanish must access via the acquisition of [+/- perfective] grammatical aspect features. In fact, the present study builds on this work, investigating the knowledge of entailments in semantic interpretation associated with the acquisition of the Preterit/Imperfect morphological contrast.

4. *The study*

The present study employs two tests to examine the L2 acquisition of grammatical aspect: (i) a context sentence match test; and (ii) a production task. There were two control groups of Spanish (n=5) and Portuguese (n=4) native speakers as well as English-speaking learners of L2 Spanish (n=17) and L2 Portuguese (n=5). Each of the L2 learners was an advanced learner of the target L2 and employed as a university-level instructor of the target L2. They were purposefully selected for their advanced ability in the L2 as well as their knowledge of prescriptive grammar. Given their superior knowledge of prescriptive grammar and pedagogical conventions, we believed them to be excellent candidates to pursue the question of whether or not a separate system of pedagogical rules could result in target-deviant performance despite underlying competence that is otherwise demonstrably native-like.

4.1 *Test 1*

In addition to episodic and generalization sentences without adverbs of quantification for which the choice of Preterit or Imperfect is more transparent, this task utilizes the semantic entailment associated with the Preterit and Imperfect examined in examples (8) and (9) of section 3. As we saw, there is a non-predicted interpretive asymmetry associated with the use of the Preterit and Imperfect following an overt adverb of quantification. In these sentences, the universal force of adverbs like *siempre* should override the null-operator associated with [+perfective] morphology, resulting in no interpretable difference between the Preterit and Imperfect (Bonomi 1997). However, while it is true that following overt adverbial quantifiers both the Preterit and the Imperfect are interpreted as generalizations, there nonetheless exists a difference in interpretation whereby the Preterit correlates to an accidental interpretation and the Imperfect to a non-accidental interpretation. This accidental/ non-accidental distinction in the verbal domain is not taught to L2 learners in formal situations, nor is it directly discernible from the input. Menéndez-Benito (2001, 2002) maintains that this distinction occurs because VPs can denote either kinds of events or sets of events mediated grammatically via perfective and imperfective accordingly in Romance languages. As can be seen in test examples (10) and (11), the L2 learners were asked to match contexts to the sentence with an adverb of quantification that most appropriately depicts the context. The participants were asked to give an immediate (timed) response only. A context that implies an accidental interpretation should be most accurately described with the Preterit, as in (10).

- (10) *Os meus bons amigos Kelly e Kyle estão muito apaixonados. De fato, há quem diz que estão obsessionados. Sempre estão juntos, dia e noite. Eu não posso pensar em um só momento em que os vi separados em todos*

esses anos. Mas, esta semana uma coisa imprevista aconteceu; eu me encontrei com eles várias vezes e...

“My good friends Kelly and Kyle are very much in love. In fact, some would say they are obsessed. They are always together, day and night. I can’t think of even one instance in which I saw them apart in all these years. But, this week something crazy happened; I saw them by chance several times and...”

- a. *Sempre que os vi, os vi separados.* (+ accidental)
“Every time I saw them, I saw them apart.” [+perf.]
- b. *Sempre que os via, os via separados.*
“Every time I saw them, I saw them apart.” [- perf.]

(11) *Para mim, o esporte mais legal é, sem dúvida, o futebol. Claro que não se pode jogar sozinho. É por isto que, na minha casa,...*

“For me, the most awesome sport is, without a doubt, soccer. Of course it cannot be played alone. It is for this reason that, in my house,...”

- a. *Sempre que os amigos visitaram, nós jogamos futebol.* [+ perf.]
“Each time my friends came over, we played soccer.”
- b. *Sempre que os amigos visitavam, nós jogávamos futebol.* (-accidental)
“Whenever my friends came over, we played soccer.” [- perf.]

4.2 Test 2

This fill-in-the-blank production task employs contextualized paragraphs in the form of conversations, as in (12). There are thirty verbs to be conjugated, equally divided between stative and eventive verbs. Approximately half of the contexts were designed to elicit the Preterit while the other half elicited the Imperfect. Eventive verbs are further subdivided equally into 3 subgroups: achievements, accomplishments, and activities. In some contexts, particular verbs are chosen (most often stative verbs), which are explicitly taught to English L2 learners in terms of their English translations, so-called ‘semantic shift’ verbs (*e.g.*, *sabía* vs. *supe* ‘I knew’ & *quería* vs. *quiso* ‘he wanted’), in an effort to see if these particular verbs pose a problem for L2 learners when the context requires a use in contrast to pedagogical simplification. Another common pedagogical convention for teaching the Preterit/Imperfect contrast relies on matching one or the other form to certain adverbial complements (*e.g.*, *siempre* ‘always’ & *a menudo* ‘often’ = Imperfect; and *de repente* ‘suddenly’ and *hasta que* ‘until’ = Preterit). We tested for atypical uses of the Preterit and Imperfect in these contexts as well. In light of the possibility of demonstrating POS knowledge associated with the acquisition of the relevant morphosyntactic features in Test 1, the ultimate goal of Test 2 was to determine any discernible

connection between L2 target-deviant performance and explicit positive evidence in the form of simplified pedagogical rules, despite a competence that is otherwise quantifiably native-like.

(12) *Conversação 1* ‘Conversation 1’

Paulinho: *Eu nunca pensei (pensar) que você ia me deixar. Não sei como eu vou viver sem você. Você sempre fazia (fazer) coisas lindas para mim. Eu vou sentir muito a sua falta.*

“I never thought that you were going to leave me. I don’t know how I am going to live without you. You always did nice things for me. I am going to miss you.”

Maria: *Desculpe, Paulinho. Você tem que lembrar que o ódio não pode existir entre dois amigos que um dia foram (ser) namorados.*

“Sorry, Paulinho. You must remember that hatred can’t exist between two friends that once were lovers.”

Paulinho: *Por que você disse que me amava (amar) mas no final me deixou?*

“Why did you say that you loved me but in the end you left me?”

Maria: *Bom, eu sempre me dei (dar) bem com os seus pais até que eu soube (saber) que eles não gostam das relações interracialais. Não posso ser parte de uma família que não me aceite.*

“Well, I always got along well with your parents until I learned that they don’t approve of interracial relationships. I can’t be part of a family that doesn’t accept me.”

5. Results

5.1 Test 1

As can be seen in Figure 1 below, the L2 learners perform, more or less, native-like on this task. Accidental-non-accidental readings come from sentences with adverbs of quantification while episodic-general readings come from sentences that are not adverbially quantified.

As we compare native Portuguese speakers to L2 Portuguese speakers we note that there is no statistically significant difference in their performances for any of the test sentences: (i) accidental ($p=.295$); (ii) n-accidental ($p=.621$); (iii) episodic ($p=.374$); (iv) general ($p=.815$). With and without adverbs of quantification, these L2 learners interpret these contexts in line with the native controls, highly favoring the use of the Preterit in episodic and accidental generalization contexts and the Imperfect in other generalization contexts.

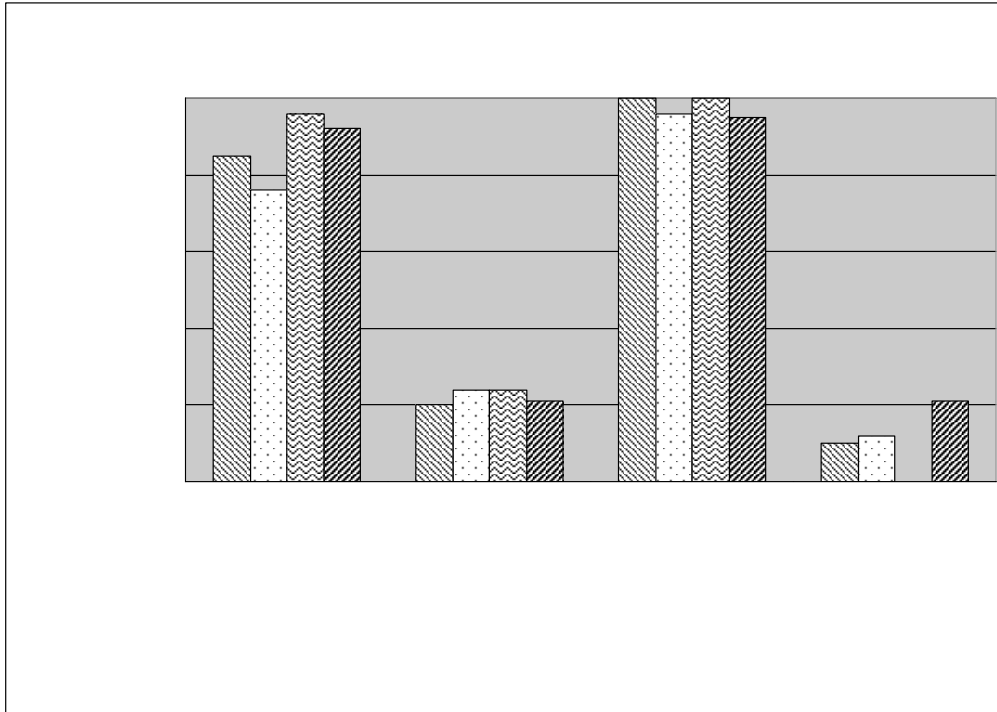


Figure 1: *Results of Test 1*

*Percentages reported here are uses of the Preterit in relation to the type of reading favored by the context provided. The remaining percentage needed to equal 100% reflects the percent use of the Imperfect in any given context.

Comparing native Spanish speakers to L2 Spanish speakers we observe that there is no statistically significant difference in their performance for the relevant semantic entailment sentences: (i) accidental ($p=.288$); (ii) non-accidental ($p=.527$). While it is possible that there is a statistically significant difference in native/non-native choice of the Preterit in episodic contexts, the difference is marginally significant at best ($p=.041$), and is more indicative of the native invariance (100% Preterit) and the relatively small sample size. In these contexts, L2 Spanish learners choose the Preterit 95% of the time.

There is a clear difference, however, in native/non-native performance in the generalization contexts without adverbs of quantification. Native Spanish speakers never use the Preterit in these contexts while the L2 group matches the Preterit with this context 21% of the time, yielding a statistically significant difference ($p<.001$). It is important to remember that 21% really means that, on average, 1 of 5 relevant sentences was matched differently as compared to the native control. Therefore, the significant difference must be considered in light of the fact that the natives showed no variation. The L2 performance is,

however, in line with native use of the Imperfect in these contexts well above the level of chance (79% Imperfect). Importantly, both L2 Portuguese and L2 Spanish groups clearly have native-like knowledge of the accidental vs. non-accidental generalization distinction with the Preterit/Imperfect contrast in sentences with adverbial quantifiers with universal force.

5.2 Test 2

As hypothesized, there was more variation between native and non-native speakers in Test 2⁴. In addition, the results followed a pattern that could be predicted based on pedagogical rules that simplify this aspectual contrast.

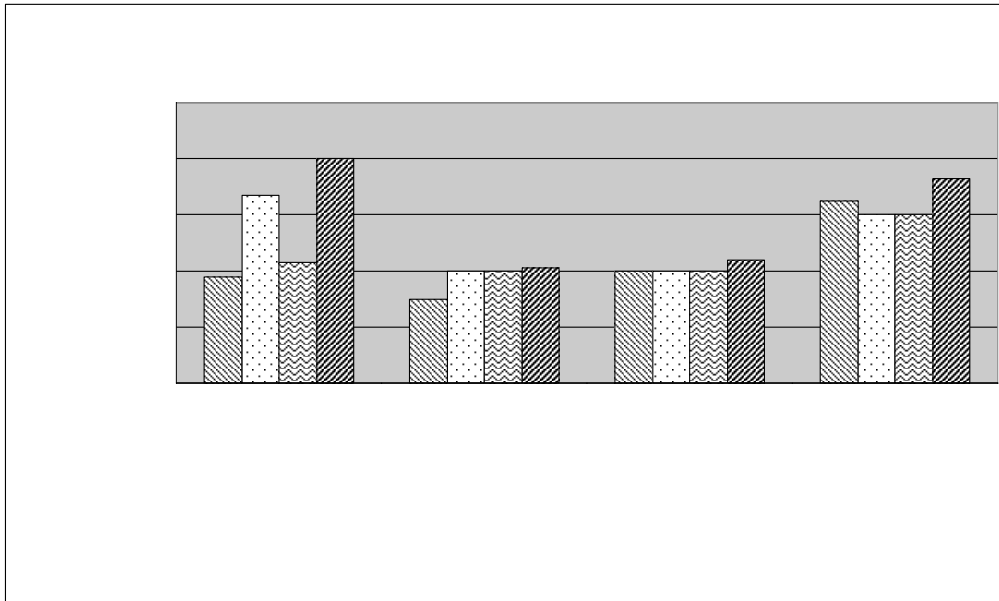


Figure 2: Results of Test

*Percentage of use of the Imperfect in Stative and Eventive (further divided into Accomplishment, Achievement and Activity) contexts.

Comparing native Portuguese speakers and L2 Portuguese speakers, there is a significant statistical difference in the use of the Imperfect with stative verbs ($t= 3.29$, $p=.030$) only. Figure 2 illustrates that L2 learners were much more likely to use the Imperfect with stative verbs, regardless of the aspect given the context. So-called ‘semantic-shifting verbs’, taught lexically, such as *saber* and *querer* were particularly problematic. When the context called for a stative use, but the aspect was clearly [+ perfective], the L2 learners were much more likely to produce the Imperfect *in contra* the native control’s uniform

⁴ The percentages reported for the native controls correspond to the designed distribution of Preterit and Imperfect in this task, which is to say, the roughly 40% use of the Imperfect, for example, with stative verbs is what was expected given the design breakdown of the task.

Preterit response. It is important to note that there was very little variation among native speaker readings, meaning that, for the most part, native speakers responded with the Imperfect in the same contexts (remember that 7 out of 15 of the contexts were designed to elicit the Imperfect). Moreover, L2 learners also responded with the Imperfect in those contexts that elicited [-perfective] readings from native speakers; however, they differed in their performance in contexts of a [+perfective] reading of a stative verb, choosing the Imperfect more often in spite of contexts presenting [+ perfective] aspect. There was no statistically significant native/non-native difference for any types of eventive verbs, which means that, more or less, natives and L2 learners produced Preterit and Imperfect morphology in the same eventive verb contexts. For achievements the L2 group performed exactly like the natives ($t=0$, $p=1.00$). While there was slight L1/L2 variation for accomplishments ($t= 1.58$, $p=.189$) and activities ($t= .46$, $p=.672$) these difference were not statistically significant.

A similar pattern arises between L1 and L2 Spanish speakers. L2 learners of Spanish performed significantly differently from the native Spanish speakers with stative verbs ($p < .001$), preferring Imperfect more often than native speakers. Not surprisingly, the instances with the highest rate of deviance by the L2 learners were the same in both the L2 Spanish and Portuguese groups (*i.e.*, with lexically taught so-called semantic-shift verbs as statives in the Preterit). Similar to the Portuguese L2 learners, L2 Spanish speakers' performance on achievements and accomplishments did not differ significantly from the native Spanish speakers ($t= 1.85$ $p=.083$ and $t=.32$, $p=.75$ respectively). Different than the L2 Portuguese learners, however, there is a significant difference between Spanish natives and L2 learners for activities ($t=3.8$, $p=.002$). We note that this significant difference occurs as a result of considerable L2 variation on only one of five relevant sentences, whose verb was *correr* 'to run'. Although the context clearly called for an activity reading of the verb *correr* whose aspect was [- perfective], we believe that the L2 variation for this sentence resulted from the fact that this verb can be interpreted as an accomplishment if it selects for an NP complement. Interpreted as such, [+ perfective] aspect is possible in this environment.

Space does not permit us to explore individual data for all participants, however, two L2 learners, both Spanish speakers, performed completely native-like on all tests. On Test 2, there was no significant difference in the L2 performance of non-native Spanish subjects 3444 (stative $t=1.63$ $p=.178$, accomplishment $t=0$ $p=1.00$, achievement $t=0$, $p=1.00$, activity $t=0$, $p=1.00$) and 2099 (stative $t=2.45$, $p=.070$, accomplishment $t=0$, $p=1.00$, achievement $t=0$ $p=1.00$, activities $t=0$, $p=1.00$) for any of the verb types.

6. *Discussion & Conclusions*

In accord with similar previous research (Montrul & Slabakova 2003; Slabakova & Montrul 2003), the data of the present study demonstrate that native-like adult L2 ultimate attainment is possible in the domain of [+/-perfective] contrast, substantiated by L2 knowledge of an associated semantic entailment in Test 1. Accordingly, the data demonstrate that features not selected from UG in L1 acquisition – in this case the [- perfective] feature associated with higher AspP in Portuguese and Spanish – can be acquired in adult L2 acquisition. This provides counterevidence for the FFFH (Hawkins & Chan 1997; Hawkins & Liszak 2003), at least in its original formulation⁵. While some variability exists between native and L2 participants in this study, which we account for in section 5 as performance phenomena, it is important to highlight that each individual adult L2 learner demonstrates native-like knowledge of the relevant semantic entailment in Test 1.

Upon analyzing the data from Test 2, a pattern emerges whereby target-deviant L2 performance is noted exclusively in three specific contexts: (a) with particular stative verbs (*ser, estar, haber, tener*) avoided in the Preterit; (b) when they follow certain adverbial phrases (e.g., *nunca, siempre, todos los días*); and (c) so-called ‘semantic shifting verbs’ in stative contexts (e.g., # 23 of test 2 *nunca quise*). We hypothesized that L2 target-deviant performance would be explainable in terms of how the Preterit/Imperfect contrast is taught to L2 learners. In an effort to facilitate the acquisition of the Preterit/Imperfect contrast, frequently used stative verbs are taught as defaulting to the Imperfect, certain adverbial ‘tag’ words are taught as absolute ‘triggers’ of the Preterit or Imperfect, and some verbs are taught in terms of their closest English translation equivalent (e.g., the aforementioned *supe* ‘(I) found out’ vs. *sabía* ‘(I) knew’). Examples (13) and (14) below, taken from Conversation 1 and 3, respectively, of Test 2, illustrate the target-deviant performance of non-native speakers compared to the native speaker consensus (underlined). While all the native speakers used the Preterit in these contexts, only 7 non-native speakers (2 L2 Portuguese, 5 L2 Spanish) did so in context (13) while in context (14) a mere 5 non-natives did so (1 L2 Portuguese, 4 L2 Spanish).

- (13) *Tienes que recordar que no cabe el odio entre dos amigos que un día fuieron (ser) novios.* (stative verb in the Preterit)
 “You have to remember that there is no room for hate between two friends that were once boyfriend/girlfriend.”

⁵ Most recently, the FFFH (Hawkins, 2005) differentiates between interpretable and uninterpretable features whereby it is only the uninterpretable ones that are lost if not selected during L1 acquisition.

- (14) *Siempre supe (saber) que él _____ (ser) un sinvergüenza.*
 (semantic shifting verb with its canonical meaning in the Preterit)
 “I always knew that he _____ (be) shameless.”

Strictly adhered to, the notion of semantic-shifting verbs, as opposed to aspect-shifting verbs, does not account for the use of these verbs in the Preterit with its canonical meaning, as in (14). To suggest that *supe*, the first person singular form of *saber* in the Preterit ([+ perfective]) can only mean “I found out” to the exclusion of “I knew” is, simply put, not accurate. Given the nature of the verb *saber*, used in the Imperfect, its unbounded aspect correlates closely to the English semantic value of ‘to know’ and the Preterit with bounded aspect often most accurately correlates to the inherent endpoint of the English phrasal verb ‘to find out’. Nonetheless, aspect is ultimately determined by the perspective of the action of the verb given a particular context, which accounts for the possibility of the stative ‘to know’ translation of *saber* in the Preterit given particular contexts (e.g., #21 of test 2 *Siempre supe que...*).

It is possible that pedagogical explanations of fixed patterns that are accurate tendencies, yet in practice, are less than absolute, can affect L2 performance even at the highest levels of proficiency. Since they are stored as conscious knowledge, it is reasonable to believe that these rules, which compete with underlying competence, can prevail in performance. We believe that this very possibility explains the pattern of target-deviant L2 performance we observed, whereby the highest target-deviancy was noted in exemplars like the aforementioned⁶. While Anderson’s (1986, 1991) *Lexical Aspect Hypothesis* anticipates problems with stative verbs being used in Preterit forms, he bases this prediction on his claims about the strong relationship between the inherent lexical aspect of predicates and the subsequent morphology to which L2 learners default to in marking those verbs with past tense reference. Based on the data we provide; however, it is very possible that L2 learners have enduring problems with Preterit uses of stative verbs not due to an aspect learning hierarchy, but rather because of the way they are taught this aspectual contrast. This would explain why our participants have problems only with particular stative verbs in the Preterit (which coincide with pedagogical rules) and not others.

It is also important to highlight that despite L2 target-deviancy with stative verbs, there were two L2 learners who performed completely native-like on both tests. If our hypothesis in regards to the competition of conscious

⁶ We acknowledge that the evidence for this connection we present here are somewhat circumstantial. Notwithstanding, they strongly support the possibility of the present hypothesis’ tenability. In further research, testing other domains of grammar for which pedagogical methods do not completely match linguistic rules as well as comparing the performances of tutored vs. untutored L2 learners may provide conclusive evidence to further support our conclusions here.

simplified pedagogical rules and actual linguistic competence at the level of performance is on the right track, the fact that these two learners performed completely native-like suggests that such interference is not inevitable. Therefore, a preponderance of the evidence presented favors the Full Access Hypothesis of adult UG-continuity. The acquisition of the [-perfective] feature needed to achieve native-like morphosyntactic competence by adult English learners of L2 Portuguese and Spanish provides evidence against the idea that adults are unable to acquire critical settings of L2 syntactic features (Hawkins, 2005; Hawkins & Chan 1997).

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