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Aspect selection in adult L2 Spanish and the Competing Systems Hypothesis

When pedagogical and linguistic rules conflict*

Jason Rothman

The University of Iowa (USA)

Native-like use of preterit and imperfect morphology in all contexts by English learners of L2 Spanish is the exception rather than the rule, even for successful learners. Nevertheless, recent research has demonstrated that advanced English learners of L2 Spanish attain a native-like morphosyntactic competence for the preterit/imperfect contrast, as evidenced by their native-like knowledge of associated semantic entailments (Goodin-Mayeda and Rothman 2007, Montrul and Slabakova 2003, Slabakova and Montrul 2003, Rothman and Iverson 2007). In addition to an L2 disassociation of morphology and syntax (e.g., Bruhn de Garavito 2003, Lardiere 1998, 2000, 2005, Prévost and White 1999, 2000, Schwartz 2003), I hypothesize that a system of learned pedagogical rules contributes to target-deviant L2 performance in this domain through the most advanced stages of L2 acquisition via its competition with the generative system. I call this hypothesis the Competing Systems Hypothesis. To test its predictions, I compare and contrast the use of the preterit and imperfect in two production tasks by native, tutored (classroom), and naturalistic learners of L2 Spanish.

Keywords: aspect, morphological performance, second language (L2) acquisition, English/Spanish

1. Introduction

While first language (L1) acquisition is characterized by uniformity in route and successful grammatical convergence, adult second language (L2) acquisition is typified by variation in path and ultimate attainment, even under the most favourable of learning situations. This fact is incontrovertible, something which seemingly obliges second language acquisition theories to address several related questions. One such question involves determining the significance of L2 variation and

the weight assigned to it in terms of its implications for second language acquisition theories.

It is an observable fact that language use, albeit a first, second or third language, varies at the macro (among people of the same language and dialects) and at the micro level (for the same individual language user, both over time and in the same moment). However, is L1 and L2 variation in language use the same? If so, such variation does not need to be addressed by second language acquisition theory specifically. In this case, variation can be accepted as a mere fact of language without further consideration. However, if variations in L1 and L2 language use manifest differently, the points at which variation between the two groups diverges must be adequately addressed in theoretical terms.

Variation in the use of morphology is such a case in light of the following facts. In L1 acquisition, there is an early mastery of bound morphology and a chronological emergence of inflection related to the development of syntax (Guasti 2002). Ultimately, morphology comes to be used almost invariably by native adult speakers, barring any particular pathology (e.g. Specific Language Impairment or severe Down Syndrome; cf. Rondal 1993, van der Lely and Wexler 1998). Conversely, L2 acquisition is typified by persistent problems in overt morphological use and later mastery of bound morphology. And so, must this L1/L2 dissimilarity be understood as evidence of the so-called fundamental difference (cf. Bley-Vroman 1989, 1990) purported to underlie the competence of primary and non-primary languages? If one takes the position that morphology drives syntactic competence, as Failed Features and Global Impairment models of L2 acquisition do (cf. Beck 1998, Clahsen and Hong 1995, Franceschina 2001, Hawkins and Chan 1997, Hawkins and Liszka 2003), then such differences can be interpreted accordingly. However, there is good evidence for the dissociation of morphological and syntactic development in adult L2 acquisition (cf. Bruhn de Garavito 2003, Lardiere 1998a and 1998b, 2000, 2005, Prévost and White 1999, 2000, Schwartz 2003), as advocated by Full Access models (Schwartz and Sprouse 1996, White 1989, 2003). In this case, L2 variation in morphological use cannot be considered sufficient evidence that the processes of L1 and L2 acquisition are fundamentally different nor can it be used to claim that L2 competence is morphosyntactically target-deviant. Nevertheless, in the absence of L1 variation in the domain of overt morphological use, L2 variation must be accounted for within a theoretical framework that is both descriptively and explanatorily adequate.¹

In this article, I address specific L2 variation in the use of preterit and imperfect morphology by highly advanced English learners of L2 Spanish. In light of recent generative L2 research demonstrating that English learners of L2 Spanish and Portuguese acquire aspect-associated phrasal semantic entailments conditioned upon the acquisition of L2 morphosyntactic features (Goodin-Mayeda

and Rothman 2007, Montrul and Slabakova 2003, Slabakova and Montrul 2003, Rothman and Iverson 2007), I investigate the role that pedagogical rules of L1/L2 grammar contrasts play in the L2 variation of preterit/imperfect morphological use at the level of performance in advanced learners. Assuming full access to Universal Grammar (UG), it is hypothesized that a system of learned pedagogical rules contributes to target-deviant L2 performance through the most advanced stages of L2 acquisition and thus explains some persistent performance problems in this domain. To test this, I compare and contrast the use of the preterit and imperfect in two production tasks for native Spanish, highly advanced classroom learners, and highly advanced naturalistic learners of L2 Spanish.

This article is structured in the following manner. The background section is divided into (i) an explanation of the morphosyntax of lexical and grammatical aspect, highlighting their differences in English and Spanish and (ii) a discussion of relevant L2 theories and studies on the L2 acquisition of the preterit and imperfect. Sections that describe the hypothesis, design and methodology of the present study follow this. Lastly, I present the results, which are accompanied by a discussion and conclusion section.

2 Background

In languages with fairly sophisticated aspectual systems, such as Spanish, aspect plays an integral role in anchoring and determining the temporal role between states and events (or eventualities) in the discourse. As Bonomi (1997) has pointed out, grammatical aspect also plays a deterministic role in relating appropriate quantification over these eventualities. As a result, languages, like English, that do not have articulated aspectual systems must dispense of other grammatical processes to mediate the semantic intention of aspectual morphology. Moreover, the fact that Spanish is a relatively morphologically rich language and English is not is yet another confounding factor. That is, there are important morphosyntactic differences between Spanish and English in terms of how their respective inflectional systems encode person, number, tense, mood as well as aspect. These differences are not just morphological and, as one might expect, thus have syntactic and semantic consequences. In this section, I explain the differences between Spanish and English with respect to grammatical aspect. In doing so, I highlight how aspect is realized differently in these languages and, therefore, what the English L2 learner must acquire to converge on a target-like grammar for L2 Spanish. I assume a particular paradigm to explain these differences, the generative paradigm (Chomsky 1981), as well as a particular model within this approach, namely the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995, 2000)

2.1 Grammatical and lexical aspect

Mastering the difference between the preterit and the imperfect involves much more than learning the associated overt morpho-phonological forms (e.g., *-é* vs. *-aba*). Selecting the preterit vs. imperfect, at least for native speakers, is consistent with the aspectual perspective of the verb in context. The preterit form corresponds to [+ perfective] aspect, which views the action from outside, such that it is a closed, finished action. Accordingly, [+ perfective] aspect is bounded (Depraetere 1995) in that the action is seen as having an implicit beginning and end point.

- (1) *Roberto dijo la verdad.*
 “Roberto told the truth.”

According to Bonomi (1997), preterit morphology is the overt realization (identifier) of an null existential operator. And so, the preterit correlates to only one reading, that being an episodic one. This is not to suggest that the preterit cannot be used after adverbial expressions with universal force (such as ‘always’ or ‘from time to time’), but that the preterit itself signals a perspective that is only felicitous in a context in which the temporal relation between eventualities is framed as closed within the discourse.

Conversely, the imperfect, which corresponds to [- perfective] aspect, considers the action from within, whereby the action is ongoing, habitual, progressive or not fully closed. Therefore, [-perfective] aspect is unbounded (Depraetere 1995) as the focus is on the internal structure of the action without regard to any beginning or end point.

- (2) *Roberto decía la verdad.*
 “Roberto was telling/used to tell the truth.”

It is important to note that the distinction between the preterit and the imperfect is not a difference of tense, as both are used to indicate the past. In languages like Spanish, it is somewhat difficult to tease this apart by looking only at the morphological system, which seemingly encodes person, number, tense and aspect in the same morphology. As can be appreciated by juxtaposing Spanish and Chinese examples in (3) and (4) it can be seen that aspect is independent of tense, since in Chinese the free morpheme *le* denotes [+ perfective] aspect regardless of time (e.g., past, present or future).

- (3) a. (Chinese) *Zuótiān wǒ zuò wǎn le*
 Yesterday I do finish PFV. PARTICLE
zuòyè jiù lái le.
 homework IMMANENCY ADV. came PFV. PARTICLE.
 “Yesterday, after I finished the homework, I came.”

- b. (Spanish) *Ayer después de que terminé la tarea,*
 Yesterday, after PRO finish-1PSG-PFV. the homework,
 PRO *vine*
 I come-1PSG-PFV
 “Yesterday, after I finished my homework, I came.”
- (4) a. (Chinese) *Míngtiān wǒ zuò wǎn le*
 Tomorrow I do finish PFV. PARTICLE
zuòyè jiù lái.
 homework IMMANENCY ADV. come.
 “Tomorrow, after I finish the homework, I will come.”
- b. (Spanish) *Mañana, cuando termine la tarea,*
 Tomorrow, when PRO finish-1PSG-SUBJ. my home-work,
vendré
 PRO come-1PSG-FUTURE
 “Tomorrow, when I finish my home work, I will come.”

In both Spanish and English, lexical aspect is encoded in the lexical verb (e.g., [\pm telic] features). That is, in both Spanish and English verbs are either telic or atelic and this is learned lexically as part of verbal meaning.² However, English and Spanish differ in terms of grammatical aspect realization. Following Giorgi and Pianesi (1997) and others, it is assumed that grammatical aspect is realized as a functional category, higher AspP (or outer AspP). Schematized in Figure 1, it can be seen that both Spanish and English project higher AspP, English differs parametrically in terms of which available features it associates with this functional category (see Kempchinsky and Slabakova 2005 for greater detail).

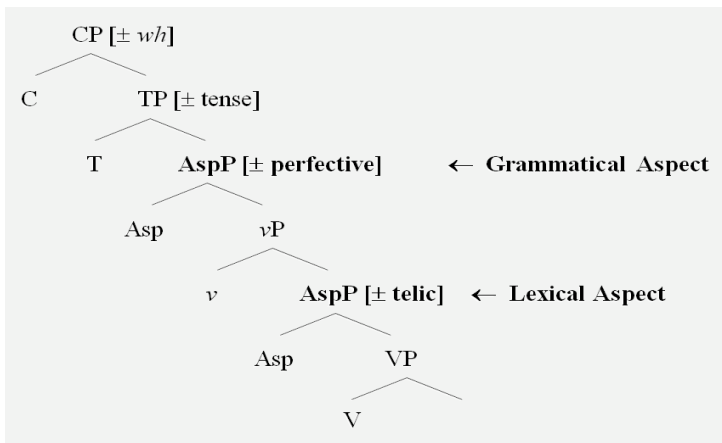


Figure 1. AspP in English and Spanish.

Spanish encodes both [\pm perfective] aspect features, which are checked in higher AspP against preterit [+ perfective] or imperfect [- perfective] morphology. Conversely, English only has a [+ perfective] feature associated with this functional category. This means that the [\pm perfective] aspect distinction is not realized morphologically in English. As a result, the simple past morphology of English is most often associated with an episodic reading. English, therefore, often expresses past characterizations or generalizations with modal verbs, such as 'used' to and 'would' or with the copula ('be') + gerund construction.

Although the simple past in English most often correlates to an episodic reading, depending heavily on adverbial modifiers, as shown in (5) and (6), the past morphology of English can readily convey an episodic or a habitual reading.

- (5) I always walked to the park when I was younger.
- (6) I walked to the park yesterday afternoon.

Conversely, in Spanish, only the imperfect (i.e. not the preterit) can correlate to two types of readings, although they are different ones (habitual and progressive, see Bonomi 1997). This can be a source of confusion for English learners of L2 Spanish since the Spanish form most closely related in function to the simple past of English, the preterit, can only support an episodic reading, whereas the imperfect is poly-functional in that it can support different interpretations. This difference can be seen in the parallel sentences in (7) and (8).

- (7) a. *Yo compré una rosa para mi novia ayer.*
 b. *#/*Yo compré una rosa a menudo para mi novia.*
 c. **Mientras compré una rosa para mi novia, ella llegó.*
- (8) a. I bought my girlfriend a rose yesterday.
 b. I often bought a rose for my girlfriend.
 c. *#/* While I bought a rose for my girlfriend, she arrived.*

These English/Spanish differences all fall out from particular-language differences with respect to the composition of features they associate with the functional projection higher AspP.

2.2 Previous L2 studies

Although it was claimed in earlier work on adult acquisition of aspect (Coppieters 1987) that this distinction did not derive from principles of UG, recent theoretical work has demonstrated that aspect distinction does derive from universal principles of grammar (cf. Bonomi 1997, Giorgi and Pianesi 1997, Lenci and Bertinetto 2000, Menéndez-Benito 2002, Schmitt 1996, Slabakova 2001, Smith 1991).³ As

discussed above and schematized in Figure 1, this grammatical aspectual contrast, in accord with Minimalist Program assumptions (Chomsky 1995, 2000, Adger and Smith 2005), is now understood in terms of features related to a functional category. As a result, English learners of L2 Spanish must acquire a new L2 feature, the [-perfective] feature associated with Spanish higher AspP, to achieve native-like morphosyntactic competence in this domain. Within Minimalism, language-to-language differences are isolated to the functional lexicon, which is to say, parameters are hypothesized to be set (or reset in L2 grammars) via the acquisition of functional categories and their associated features. If adults continue to access UG, as advocated by Full Access approaches (Schwartz and Sprouse 1996, White 1989, 2003), then English learners of Spanish should be able to acquire this contrast. Although [\pm perfective] interpretable features have morpho-phonological corollaries (i.e. preterit and imperfect Spanish verbal inflection), assuming a syntax-before-morphology position, it is possible for an L2 learner to have a mental representation of these features that is not always evident in performance via invariably proper use of their overt morpho-phonological forms (see e.g. Prévost and White 2000, Lardiere 2000, 2005). This is true because features are not morphological forms themselves, but abstract properties that are mapped onto them (Schwartz and Sprouse 1996). As a result, a function-to-form mapping problem, as suggested by the Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis (MSIH) (Prévost and White 2000), may explain some errors in the use of Spanish aspectual morphology. This is especially important to consider in light of an important body of literature outside the generative paradigm that has investigated the development of grammatical aspect in L2 grammars of adult learners whose L1 is English.

The preterit and imperfect in adult L2 acquisition in general and in particular L2 Spanish has been widely studied from non-generative perspectives to language acquisition (cf. Andersen 1986, 1991, Bardovi-Harlig 2000, Andersen and Sharai 1994, 1996, Camps 2000, 2005, Hasbún 1995, Lafford 1996, Liskin-Gasparro 2000, Salaberry 1999, 2000, 2002, Ramsay 1990). The majority of these studies focus exclusively on the acquisition (emergence) of preterit and imperfect morphological forms as they relate to interlanguage (IL) development following the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (Andersen 1986, 1991).⁴ Taken together, these studies have offered discrepant results in terms of support for this hypothesis (see Bardovi-Harlig 2000, Salaberry 2000 for discussion). These studies examine the use of preterit and imperfect morphemes in interlanguage development with different verb classes and in particular discourse contexts. Based on analyses of L2 morphological usage in these studies, the semantic value L2 learners assign to these morphemes is later inferred. This methodology is perhaps unintentionally fallacious, related to the longstanding discussion on performance — the production of language — versus competence — the underlying knowledge of grammaticality — and the MSIH .

Variation in language use is simply a fact of all output, non-native and native. As a result, any given linguistic performance does not always accurately represent underlying competence. In the case of adult L2 language learners, however, understanding the significance of differences between performance and competence seems to be more urgent. Nevertheless, in the absence of a uniform way to gauge performance versus competence the usefulness of such terminology is not immediately clear. After all, the likelihood that language use at any given moment, systematized or not, accurately depicts linguistic competence is tentative at best. To assume that performance, even in the case that it demonstrates an accurate system, is the window by which competence should be gauged weakens the functional value of competence as a separate entity. This provision is heralded by Full Access approaches to adult L2 acquisition, which assume a dissociation of morphology and syntax in L2 acquisition (cf. Bruhn de Garavito 2003, Lardiere 1998a and 1998b, 2000, 2005, Prévost and White 1999, 2000, Schwartz 2003). In light of the L2 tendency to variably use overt morphology despite sophisticated knowledge of target-language syntax (see Lardiere 1998 a and 1998b, 2000, 2005, 2006), it is not clear that the over or under-usage of preterit or imperfect morphology with a particular class of verbs in performance entails that an L2 learner's underlying competence in this domain is necessarily non-native-like. As a result, it is somewhat dubious that analyses heavily dependent on overt production of L2 morphology achieve their intended goal of determining underlying linguistic competence.

Montrul and Slabakova (2003), Slabakova and Montrul (2003), Goodin-Mayeda and Rothman (2007) and Rothman and Iverson (2007) have investigated the possibility of L2 native-like morphosyntactic convergence in this domain, as opposed to developmental patterns alone. Assuming the generative linguistic paradigm, these studies demonstrated that advanced English learners of L2 Portuguese and Spanish achieve a competence level for the preterit/imperfect contrast that is fundamentally native-like and that intermediate Portuguese and Spanish learners also demonstrate knowledge of semantic entailments associated with the acquisition of the necessary aspectual features.

Montrul and Slabakova (2003) tested L2 knowledge of available semantic interpretation restrictions of the subject with generic pronouns associated with the use of the preterit versus imperfect (cf. de Miguel 1992, Montrul and Slabakova 2003, Schmitt 1996), as in (9) and (1). In (9) only a specific subject interpretation (speaker is implicated as a participant) is available as opposed to (9), in which both a specific and a generic interpretation are available.

(9) *Durante la dictadura, se vivió muy mal en Chile.*

During the dictatorship, we lived very poorly. (+ specific)

*During the dictatorship, one (they) lived very poorly. (+ generic)

(10) *Durante la dictadura, se vivía muy mal en Chile.*

During the dictatorship, we lived very poorly. (+ specific)

*During the dictatorship, one (they) lived very poorly. (+ generic)

Montrul and Slabakova (2003) argue that the restriction of available semantic interpretations in (9) as compared to (10) derives from a semantic universal (Chierchia 1995) that stipulates that habitual clause readings entail generic pronominal subjects and episodic clause readings entail a specific pronominal subject. It is argued that this principle must be accessed via the acquisition of the [- perfective] feature associated with Spanish higher AspP.

Goodin-Mayeda and Rothman (2007) and Rothman and Iverson (2007) demonstrated that advanced English learners of L2 Spanish and intermediate learners of L2 Portuguese respectively acquired knowledge of another POS semantic entailment associated with the acquisition of the preterit and the imperfect. Following overt adverbial quantifiers (e.g., *siempre que*), there is an obligatory alternation of [\pm accidental] interpretations of the preterit and imperfect respectively (cf. Lenci and Bertinetto 2000, Menéndez-Benito 2002), as in (11) and (12). Although (11) is somewhat awkward without a context, it is completely (and only) felicitous with a discourse context that denotes a sense of unintentionality.

(11) *Siempre que fuimos a la universidad, estudiamos en la biblioteca.*

“Whenever we went to the university, **we ended up studying** in the library.”

(12) *Siempre que íbamos a la universidad, estudiábamos en la biblioteca.*

“Every time we went to the university, **we studied** in the library.”

Except for the use of the preterit and imperfect, sentences (11) and (12) are identical. Moreover, given the presence of *siempre que* (an adverbial quantifier with universal force) both sentences are necessarily interpreted as generalizations. Nonetheless, a semantic distinction between the preterit and imperfect in this context exists. The preterit, as in (11), within a proper context, is understood as an unforeseen [+ accidental] generalization, whereas the imperfect, as in (9), is interpreted as an expected [- accidental] generalization (Lenci and Bertinetto 2000, Menéndez-Benito 2002).

The preterit/imperfect contrast is quite complex and involves convergence on associated semantic knowledge that is not available from input and is not explicitly taught to tutored learners. Since English does not have the preterit/imperfect distinction, L2 learners cannot transfer such knowledge from their L1. Under the assumption that investigating associated semantic entailments provides stronger evidence for determining linguistic competence than examining overt morphological use, generative studies have demonstrated target morphosyntactic compe-

tence for the preterit/imperfect contrast in advanced and intermediate L2 Portuguese and Spanish.

In light of this, what explains target-deviant L2 use of the preterit and imperfect in these very same populations? While variation in language use is a ubiquitous phenomenon for both L1 and L2 output, variation in bounded morphology use is not terribly common among L1 speakers. Should it be assumed that L1/L2 disparity in the use of the preterit and imperfect points to a necessary difference in competence? The Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis (MSIH) claims that the answer to this question is: not necessarily. However, the MSIH alone may not be able to explain this disparity entirely, especially if one observes lingering effects in highly advanced learners and it is discovered that there is a particular pattern to these errors. The goal of this article is to shed some light on this line of investigation by providing a complementary hypothesis, the Competing Systems Hypothesis. In the next section, I detail the hypothesis, which attempts to integrate the fact that, on the one hand, even highly advanced tutored English learners of L2 Spanish use the preterit and imperfect differently (although systematically) than natives with the fact that, on the other hand, learners at this level have been shown to have acquired associated POS semantic entailments.

3. Hypothesis

The linguistic concept of aspect is not introduced in the formal instruction of Spanish as a foreign language, and with good reason. The formality of the above-presented explanation of grammatical aspect is not appropriate for linguistically naïve learners. As a result, the preterit/imperfect contrast is most often taught in absolute terms and in line with English/Spanish contrast equivalencies. For example, habitual acts, descriptions and generalizations, which are often expressed via modal auxiliaries (i.e. would or used to) and the copula ('be') + gerund construction in English, are taught as requiring the imperfect in Spanish. Equally, one-time events, which most often take simple past morphology ('-ed') in English, are taught to select the preterit in Spanish. In general, these explanations hold true, but they are hardly absolute. Furthermore, the preterit/imperfect distinction of particular verbs is more difficult to explain. Often, the preterit/imperfect distinction for these verbs is taught lexically in line with their translatability to English equivalents. Needless to say, Spanish is not a translation of English. As a result, explanations dependent on translation equivalency will, in due course, meet with the inevitability of failing to account for what it seeks to explain with 100% accuracy.

For example, the verb *saber* is commonly taught as meaning 'to know' in the imperfect and 'to find out' in the preterit (similar examples abound). Accordingly,

this translation based explanation is unable to account for the interpretation of example (13), in which the preterit is not only used meaning ‘to know’ but also follows *siempre*, one of the most frequently cited trigger words pedagogically associated solely with the imperfect.

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

Although the preterit and imperfect forms of certain verbs are, by far, more likely to be translated differently into English, it is inaccurate to claim that in every possible context, the preterit of these verbs will be equivalent to English translation value X, whereas the imperfect of the same verbs is equivalent to value Y. In other words, it is not that the meaning of the verb itself changes, but that the aspect may be more accurately conveyed through a different English translation. Thus, instead of saying that *supe* must mean ‘I found out’ and *sabía* must mean ‘I knew’, students could be taught (I stress in an accessible way) that what is really happening is that the verb *saber*, which is stative in the imperfect (and thus atelic), becomes an achievement (and thus is telic) in the preterit. And so, in both forms the verb still means ‘to know’ it is just that the preterit is inchoative in nature and marks the beginning point of knowing (i.e. from that point on), which often happens to nicely correlate to the English phrasal verb ‘to find out’. However, the meaning of the verb itself does not actually change, as the translation technique of teaching the difference would suggest.

Similar pedagogical conventions are prolific. For instance, particular words are often taught to trigger either the preterit or imperfect exclusively, at least at early levels of instructions. However, while this tendency holds true in general, it fails to account for particular uses of both the preterit and the imperfect. In (14) and (15), for example, the preterit is the most appropriate choice, notwithstanding the accompanying trigger words *mientras* ‘while’ and *todos los días* ‘every day’, which are often taught as being strictly associated with the use of the imperfect. So-called trigger words do not automatically cue the preterit or the imperfect. Ultimately, the most important considerations are the meanings that the speaker wishes to communicate and the aspect that best fits this.

- (14) *Entre 1993 y 1995 mientras viví en Galicia, aprendí a hablar gallego.*
“Between 1993 and 1995, while I lived in Galicia, I learned how to speak Galician.”
- (15) *Durante aquella semana, les di de comer a sus perros todos los días.*
“During that week, I fed their dogs every day.”

Finally, similar to the emergence of the preterit and imperfect in children, L2 learners have been observed to use the preterit first with punctual verbs and the imperfect with stative verbs. The Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (Andersen 1986, 1991) discussed above attempts to explain this and related patterns of morphological use via an L2 aspectual primacy position. However, it is possible that this pattern has more to do with a pedagogical basis, which is to say the order of presentation and the repetition of ad hoc rules by which these verbal paradigms are taught. The preterit is most often taught with achievements and accomplishments verbs well before states, which are introduced first in the imperfect. Moreover, the copula verbs *ser* and *estar* are often taught as defaulting almost exclusively to the imperfect given their inherent function of describing. As a result, L2 learners tend to have problems with sentences like (16) not in comprehension *per se*, but in their production of similar sentences.

(16) *No cabe el odio entre dos amigos que un día fueron novios.*

“There should never be ill-will between two friends who were once lovers.”

There is good reason for the difficulty encountered by English-speaking learners of Spanish as it relates to the acquisition of this aspectual distinction and their production of preterit and imperfect morphology. Not only is aspect encoded differently in English and Spanish morphology, but, textbooks and formal instruction, which must simplify the rules in order to make them manageable and accessible even to beginning students, may promote faulty intuitions. In the present study, I examine the usage of the preterit and the imperfect by highly successful English learners of L2 Spanish to see how they perform in a general sense and in particular with uses of the preterit and imperfect that seem to contradict pedagogical explanations. Comparing advanced learners of two types, tutored (classroom learners) and untutored (naturalistic learners), to each other and to native speakers, I explore and discuss the possibility that formal instruction plays a role in target-deviant performance through the most advanced stages of adult L2 acquisition.

Based on the research I have discussed that shows advanced learners have sophisticated knowledge of related syntax and semantics despite errors in morphological production, I take the position that native-like ultimate attainment is possible at the underlying level. In addition to other interceding factors, the present hypothesis claims that pedagogical simplifications as discussed above form a separate system of learned knowledge and that this system can override linguistic competence (the generative system) of the L2 learner at the level of performance. These separate systems remain intact through advanced stages and essentially provide two filters for linguistic performance. This means that even when interlanguage reaches a steady-state in advanced learners that is representationally native-like in particular domains, the learned knowledge system can intercede, especially in

highly monitored output, resulting in systematic errors. The prediction, therefore, is that once grammatical properties have been acquired at the mental representation level this system can interfere with production, but not comprehension. This explains how learners can have knowledge of semantic entailments of particular morphosyntactic properties at proficiency levels where they do not use the corollary overt forms entirely like natives. I call this hypothesis the Competing Systems Hypothesis. If this hypothesis is on the right track and native-like attainment of the preterit and imperfect in its underlying form (acquisition of the L2 feature [-perfective]) is achievable by advanced English learners of L2 Spanish, then the only errors in performance we should observe in highly successful learners should coincide with contexts unaccounted for by pedagogical rules and language-to-language translation equivalencies. Additionally, this hypothesis is falsifiable if the errors observed are not isolated to tutored learners, since naturalistic learners would not have such a separate system.

4. Methodology

4.1 Subjects

There are three participant groups. Group 1 is a Spanish native control group. Group 2 is a group of highly advanced tutored English learners of L2 Spanish. Group 3 is a group of highly advanced naturalistic English learners of L2 Spanish.

All of the subjects in groups 1 and 2 were sampled from university-level instructors of Spanish from two U.S. universities. The 20 participants in the native group were from various Hispanic countries (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico and Spain) and came to the United States in their twenties, at the earliest. While all members of the control group are Spanish-dominant, they are all relatively fluent in English. It is important to note that dialectal variation among the native speakers is not relevant for the purposes of this study, as aspect distinction as in the preterit/imperfect contrast is not subject to notable dialectal differences⁵. The average age of the NS group was 29.45 with a range of 21–48.

Group 2, the tutored L2 learners, was comprised of twenty subjects, with an age range of 26–54 and a mean age of 34.5. Participants were selected if (a) English was their L1, (b) they were not child bilingual speakers of another language, (c) they reported having learned Spanish with 5 years of explicit instruction, (d) they teach Spanish and are therefore very familiar with pedagogical Spanish grammars and (e) a group of native speakers judged their Spanish as “near-native”. All but four of the twenty subjects reported having lived in a Spanish speaking country for a year or more (mean = 2.054 years, range = 0–7 years), while only one reported never

having spent time abroad. The average total time since Spanish was first studied in a consistent manner was 17.9 years. With the exception of one participant, all began learning Spanish at least 11 years prior to data collection. While there is intra-group difference in terms of time spent abroad and time since the individual onset of learning Spanish (the latter of which understandably correlates to age) all of the L2 learners received the same amount of formal education in Spanish. That is, all L2 learners in this group reported five years of language courses (i.e., not courses in literature, civilization or linguistics) in which they received pedagogical instruction on the structure of the Spanish language, which include four years in high school and one year in college.

Group 3, the untutored L2 learners, was comprised of 11 subjects, with an age range of 34–62 and mean age of 45.3. All of the subjects learned Spanish in a naturalistic environment as adults without ever receiving formal instruction in Spanish. Participants were selected for this group if (a) English was their L1, (b) they were not child bilingual speakers of another language, (c) they never studied Spanish formally, (d) they learned Spanish exclusively via exposure to naturalistic input (e) they resided in a Spanish speaking country (Chile, Mexico or Spain) at the time of data collection and had lived there for at least 7 years (mean= 15.5, range 7–35 years) and (f) and a group of native speakers judged them as “near-native”.

4.2 Design

The present study employed two types of tests: a cloze paragraph multiple-choice test and a fill-in-the-blank production task. The participants were asked to code their tests with a 4–6 digit code of their choice. These numbers correspond to the numbers reported in the following statistics for each individual.

4.2.1 Test 1.

Test 1, the cloze paragraph multiple-choice task, consisted of a well-known fairytale written in Spanish adapted from a pedagogical website (www.colby.edu/~bknelson/exercises/index.html). The task provided binary choices, either the preterit or imperfect, for 55 verbs from the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, as exemplified in (17)

- (17) 1. (Hubo, Había) una vez tres osos que 2. (vivieron, vivían) en el bosque: Papá Oso, Mamá Osa, y Bebé Oso. Un día Mamá Osa 3. (hizo, hacía) una sopa de arroz con pollo y 4. (puso, ponía) tres platos en la mesa. Como ya (fue, era) mediodía, los osos 6. (se sentaron, se sentaban) para comer porque 7. (tuvieron, tenían) muchísima hambre.

“Once upon a time three bears lived in the forest: Papa bear, Mama bear and baby bear. One day Mama bear made a soup of rice and chicken and put three bowls on the table. Since it was noon, the bears sat down to eat because they were very hungry.”

The definition of a consensus among the control group for Test 1 was an agreement (either preterit or imperfect selection) of at least 18 out of 20 of the control group members for all stimuli. However, for 53 of 55 verbs the consensus was, at least, 19 of 20. Furthermore, in 49 of 55 exemplars the native control agreement reached 20 out of 20, or 100% agreement.

4.2.2 Test 2.

Test 2 was an aspect production task for which the subjects were required to fill in blank spaces with either the preterit or the imperfect. Each of the twelve sentences was specifically designed with a use of the preterit or imperfect that would contradict traditional pedagogical explanations. For example, particular stative verbs that often pose aspectual selection difficulties for English learners of L2 Spanish, such as *ser*, *haber*, *estar*, *tener* and *poder*; less common uses of the preterit preceding particular triggering adverbs (e.g., *siempre* and *a menudo*) as well as the imperfect with phrases like *hacía años que* and *era obvio que* were included.

- (18) a. *Hubo (haber) varias manifestaciones de los afro-americanos durante los años sesenta en los EE.UU.*
“There were various protests by the African-Americans during the sixties in the United States.”
- b. *Tus padres siempre me cayeron (caer) bien hasta aquel día inesperado que todo sucedió.*
“You parents and I always got along well until that unforeseen day in which it all happened.”

The definition of native consensus for Test 2 was agreement of at least 18 out of 20 for the control group, although it should be noted that in all but two of the twelve stimuli, the native speaker consensus was 20 out of 20, or 100% agreement. In the other two sentences there was 90% agreement.

5. Evaluation/results

This section is divided into two main sections, which correlate to each of the two tasks. The results for each task are further divided into two subparts. First, I provide a descriptive analysis of the results for each group. Second, I provide a statistical comparison of the mean score performances of the tutored L2 learners and the

naturalistic L2 learners against each other and against the native speakers for both tasks. I employ a one-way ANOVA as an initial measure of inferential statistics, which is followed up by Tukey pairwise comparisons. The statistics were conducted using the mean number correct for each group and the alpha was set at 0.05 for both tests. Additionally, the data are presented in such a way to address whether or not there is a pattern of tutored L2 learner divergence in preterit/imperfect contrast performance from both natives and naturalistic L2 learners.

5.1 Task 1: Descriptive analysis

The data are presented as number of correct selections of the preterit or imperfect out of 55 total verbs (also provided as overall group percent deviation in Table 1, 2 and 3). A response was deemed “correct” if it matched the native consensus selection of the preterit or imperfect. As can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 2 below, there was very little intra-group variation for the NS group.

Table 1. Group 3: NS group average deviation = 0.72%

ID No.	No. correct of 55	% divergence	ID No.	No. correct of 55	% divergence
1155	55	0%	5432	55	0%
1111	54 (#55)	1.8%	7771	55	0%
5454	55	0%	2391	55	0%
7331	55	0%	3116	55	0%
9910	55	0%	8553	54 (#21)	1.8%
7610	55	0	1899	55	0%
1234	54 (#3)	1.8%	1445	53 (#10 & 11)	3.6%
1969	54 (#43)	1.8%	4792	55	0%
1028	53 (#10 & 11)	3.6%	6619	55	0%
3778	55	0%	1976	55	0%

As can be seen in Table 2 and Figure 3 below, the tutored learners performed well individually and as a group. The range of individual tutored learners’ divergence from the native speaker use of the preterit and imperfect was between 0%-14.5% (55–47 correct) on this task, which resulted in a group divergence rate of 4.6% (52.6 of 55 correct). Ten of twenty tutored L2 participants performed native-like on this task, that is, within the range of NS intra-group variation (at least 53 of 55 correct).

As can be seen in Table 3 and Figure 4 below, each of the naturalistic L2 learners performed within the range of individual NS intra-group variation, resulting in a group divergence rate of 0.98% (an average of 54.6 of 55 correct).

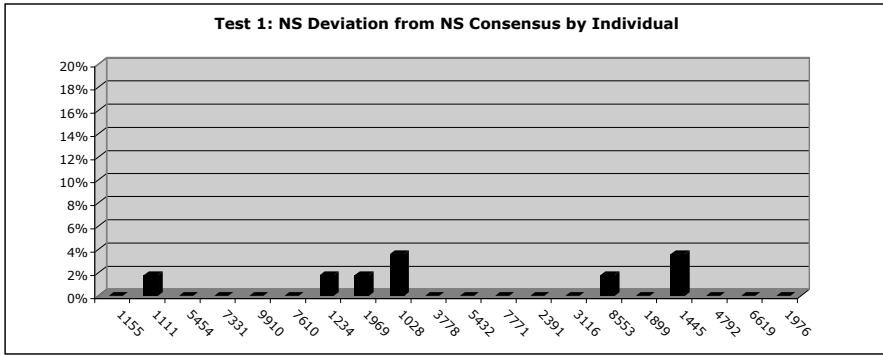


Figure 2. NS Intra-group Deviation from Consensus by Individual

Table 2. Group 2: tutored NNS group average deviation = 4.6%

ID No.	No. correct of 55	% divergence	ID No.	No. correct of 55	% divergence
2104	51	7.2%	1719	54	1.8%
2105	52	5.5%	6045	47	14.5%
1806	53	3.6%	8021	55	0%
6304	52	5.5%	1517	53	3.6%
4585	54	1.8%	0609	54	1.8%
1092	48	12.7%	2183	50	9.1%
1028	52	6%	3729	52	5.5%
4609	55	0%	8954	54	1.8%
0317	52	6%	7976	54	1.8%
1226	51	7%	2791	53	3.6%

Table 3. Group 3: untutored NNS group average deviation = 0.98%

ID No.	No. correct of 55	% divergence	ID No.	No. correct of 55	% divergence
4543	55	0%	1875	55	0%
1248	54 (#55)	1.8%	7223	53	3.6% (10&11)
3131	55	0%	8865	55	0%
2512	54 (#23)	1.8%	5426	53	3.6% (10&11)
9007	55	0%	7389	55	0%
1967	55	0%			

While discord with NS consensus selection of the preterit and the imperfect was low all around, it is patently clear that there was greater variation for the tutored L2 learner group. Of the 55 verbs, the tutored L2 learners chose the preterit or imperfect wrongly for 18 verbs. Of those 18 verbs, only 11 were missed by more than one

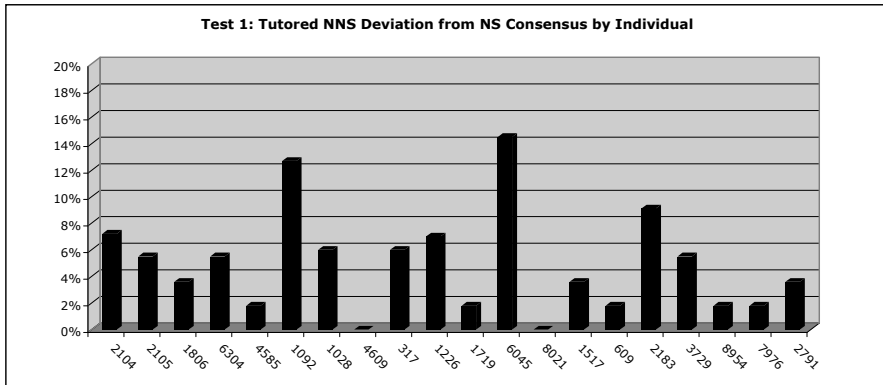


Figure 3. Tutored NNS Deviation from NS Consensus by Individual

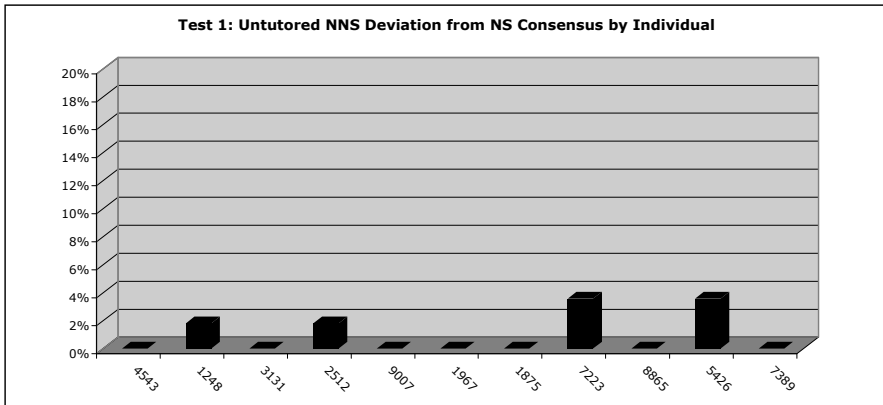


Figure 4. Untutored NNS Deviation from NS Consensus by Individual

person. All but one of the items that the tutored L2 learners missed involved one of the following verbs: *ser*, *estar*, *poder*, *querer*, *haber*, *tener*, *saber*. All of these verbs were either copula verbs or among the verbs taught lexically in terms of English/Spanish translation equivalencies. Furthermore, every appearance of the stative verb *ser* except one had varying results among tutored NNSs. We would also like to bring attention to verbs (10) and (11) from the story, reproduced in (19) below.

- (19) *Entonces Bebé Oso y Mamá Osa (10) (quisieron, querían) comer la sopa pero no (11) (pudieron, podían) porque...*

“Then Baby Bear and Mama Bear (attempted, wanted) to eat the soup, but they (could not, were unable) because...”

For verb (10), sixteen of the twenty (80%) tutored L2 learners used the target-deviant imperfect form of *querer* in sharp contrast with both the NS and naturalistic L2

Table 4. Target-deviancy by Item for Test

Verb Item #	Context	NS Pret.	NS Imp.	Tut. L2 Pret.	Tut. L2 Imp.	Nat. L2 Pret.	Nat. L2 Imp.
3	Un día Mamá Osa (hizo, hacía) una sopa...	95%	5%	100%	0%	100%	0%
5	Como ya (fue, era) mediodía.....	0%	100%	10%	90%	0%	100%
6	Los osos (se sentaron, se sentaban)	100%	0%	95%	5%	100%	0%
7	porque (tuvieron, tenían) muchísima hambre	0%	100%	5%	95%	0%	95%
10	Entonces Mamá Osa y Bebé oso (quisieron, querían) comer la sopa	90%	10%	20%	80%	82%	18%
11	pero no (pudieron, podían) porque..	90%	10%	90%	10%	82%	18%
12	(estuvo, estaba) tan caliente como la sopa...	0%	100%	5%	95%	0%	100%
15	(Fue, Era) un día bonito del verano....	0%	100%	10%	90%	0%	100%
21	Ella siempre (jugó, jugaba) cerca de	5%	95%	0%	100%	0%	100%
23	Ricitos de Oro (se acercó, se acercaba) a la casa	100%	0%	100%	0%	9%	91%
25	pero no (hubo, había) nadie en el interior	0%	100%	10%	90%	0%	100%
31	toda la sopa del plato pequeño porque (estuvo, estaba) perfecta...	0%	100%	5%	95%	0%	100%
34	Le (gustó, gustaba) más la silla cómoda	100%	0%	80%	20%	100%	0%
35	pero la silla (fue, era) muy pequeña para ella.	0%	100%	5%	95%	0%	100%
39	y (tuvo, tenía) ganas de dormir.	0%	100%	10%	90%	0%	100%
41	(fue, era) tan cómoda que ...	0%	100%	15%	85%	0%	100%
43	los tres osos (volvieron, volvían) del bosque	95%	5%	100%	0%	100%	0%
44	Cuando vieron la puerta abierta...los osos (supieron, sabían) que alguien	100%	0%	85%	15%	100%	0%
45	(estuvo, estaba) en su casa en ese momento.	0%	100%	5%	95%	0%	100%
48	Qué sorpresa (tuvieron, tenían) allí	100%	0%	65%	35%	100%	0%
49	(Hubo, había) una chica en la cama de Bebé Oso	0%	100%	5%	95%	0%	100%
55	siguió una senda que le (fue, era) conocida	5%	95%	20%	80%	9%	91%

learner groups, which used the preterit. We note that two NSs and two naturalistic L2 learners also chose the imperfect for exemplar (10); however, they, unlike the majority of the tutored L2 learners, chose the imperfect in (11) as well, rendering their choice viable.

Again, I highlight the fact that there was relatively little group variation for this task. However, in the case tutored learners' selection of the preterit and imperfect varied from the native speaker group and the naturalistic L2 group there was a pattern, which coincided with pedagogical simplification. That is, all of the verbs in the sentences that have some degree of tutored L2 learner target-deviancy are taught lexically in terms of English translation equivalents or they are copula

verbs, which are taught as defaulting almost exclusively to the imperfect. Table 4 below shows the target-deviant responses for all three groups in context. As can be seen in Table 4, the only group that demonstrates significant target-deviant responses for these verbs is the tutored L2 learners.

5.2 Task 1: Statistical analysis

Although there is little L1/L2 deviation for this task overall, I employed a one-way ANOVA comparison of all three groups to determine if there were any statistically significant difference between the three groups' performances as they compared to each other. The ANOVA revealed that between these three groups there was significant variation ($f=14.53$, $p<0.001$). As a result, I followed up the ANOVA with a series of Tukey pairwise comparisons for each relevant group comparison (NS vs. tutored L2, NS vs. naturalistic L2 learners and tutored vs. naturalistic L2 learners). A comparison of mean scores for the naturalistic L2 learners (54.46 , $sd=.82$) and NS group (54.6 , $sd=.68$) reveals no significant differences ($p<.005$) in aspect selection between the two groups. On the other hand, the difference between the mean score of the tutored L2 learner group (52.3 , $sd= 2.13$) and the mean score for the NS control yields a statistically significant number ($p>.005$). Comparing the mean scores of the tutored L2 learner group versus the L2 naturalistic group reveals a statistically significant difference between these two groups as well ($p>.005$), which is not surprising given the fact that the naturalistic L2 learners performed like the native Spanish speakers.

5.3 Task 2: Descriptive analysis

Task 2 was a fill-in-the-blank task designed to elicit productions of the preterit or the imperfect that did not correspond to pedagogical rules/expected English translations. As can be seen in Table 5 and Figure 5 below, the NS group demonstrated virtually no variation in choosing either the preterit or the imperfect for the sentences in Task 2. As was the case in Task 1, the results are reported as number of correct responses, which was determined against the native consensus selection of the preterit or imperfect for each verb.

Task 2 showed greater deviation for the tutored L2 learner group. As can be seen in Table 6 and Figure 6, L2 learners produced the preterit and imperfect differently than the natives 25% of the time. As can be seen, this 25% is really indicative of an averaging of a wide range of individual L2 performances, which spanned 0% to 58.3% divergence. In fact, four of the twenty learners (4585, 1028, 4609, 1517) perform within the range of native speakers on this task.

Table 5. NS group average deviation = 1.66%

ID No.	No. correct of 12	% divergence	ID No.	No. correct of 12	% divergence
1155	11 (#10)	8.3%	5432	12	0%
1111	12	0%	7771	12	0%
5454	12	0%	2391	12	0%
7331	12	0%	3116	12	0%
9910	12	0%	8553	12	0%
7610	12	0%	1899	12	0%
1234	12	0%	1445	12	0%
1969	11 (#10)	8.3%	4792	12	0%
1028	12	0%	6619	11 (#8)	8.3%
3778	12	0%	1976	11 (#8)	8.3%

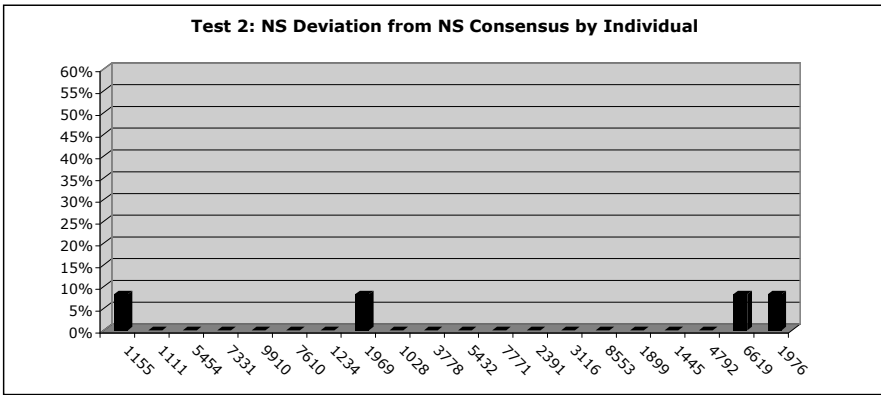


Figure 5. NS individual results

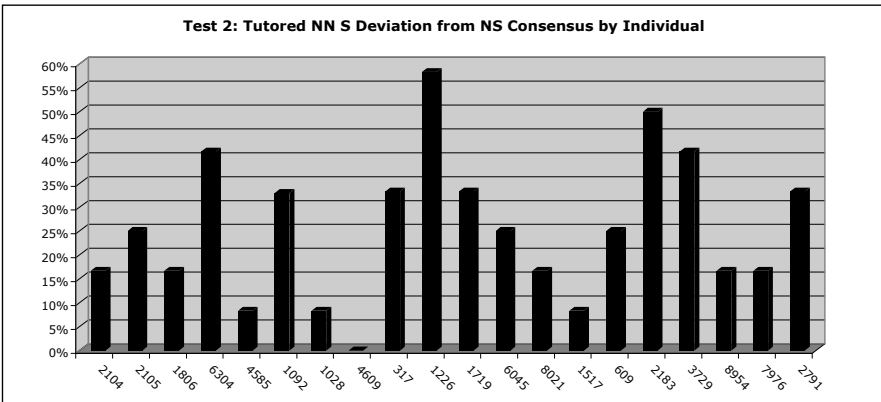


Figure 6. Tutored NNS individual results.

Table 6. Tutored NNS group average deviation = 25%

ID No.	No. correct of 12	% divergence	ID No.	No. correct of 12	% divergence
2104	10	16.7%	1719	8	33.3%
2105	9	25%	6045	9	25%
1806	10	16.7%	8021	10	16.7%
6304	7	41.7%	1517	11	8.3%
4585	11	8.3%	0609	9	25%
1092	8	33%	2183	6	50%
1028	11	8.3%	3729	7	41.7%
4609	12	0%	8954	10	16.7%
0317	8	33.3%	7976	10	16.7%
1226	5	58.3%	2791	8	33.3%

In Table 7 and Figure 7, the individual and group data for the naturalistic L2 learner group are provided. Unlike the tutored L2 learner group, there is virtually no difference in performance between the NS control and naturalistic L2 learners, individually or as a group. That is, these naturalistic L2 learners produced the preterit and imperfect with native-like accuracy.

The sentences in Test 2 were carefully designed to be inconsistent with pedagogical explanations of the preterit/imperfect contrast taught in language course to English learners of L2 Spanish. In light of this, we turn to the tutored learners' responses to individual sentences in an effort to further investigate whether or not

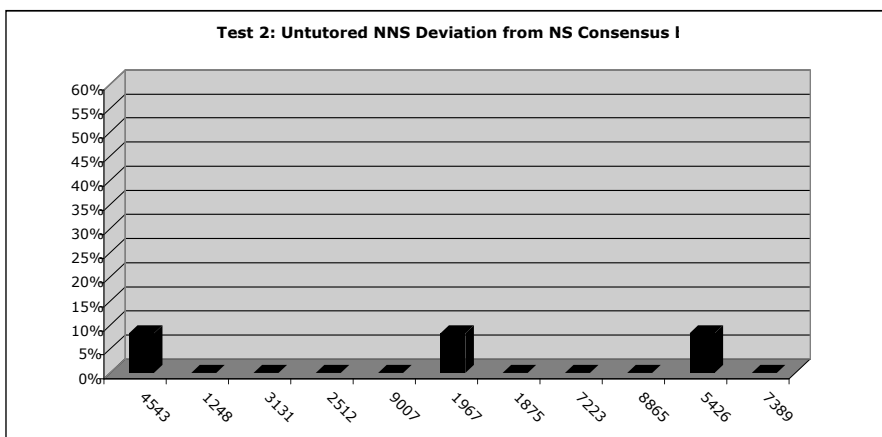


Figure 7. Untutored NNS Individual Results.

Table 7. Untutored NNS Group Average Deviation = 2.27%

ID No.	No. correct of 12	% divergence	ID No.	No. correct of 12	% divergence
4543	11 (#8)	8.3%	1875	12	0%
1248	12	0%	7223	12	0%
3131	12	0%	8865	12	0%
2512	12	0%	5426	11	8.3% (#8)
9007	12	0%	7389	12	0%
1967	11 (#10)	8.3%			

a pattern of L2 target-deviancy can be explained in terms of pedagogical oversimplification, as can be seen in Figure 8 and Table 8 below.

The most problematic item on this test, number 3, repeated as (20) below, with a tutored L2 learner group divergence rate of 80% involved the use of the preterit following the word *siempre*, perhaps the most common word taught as a trigger associated strictly with the use of the imperfect. L2 tutored learners overwhelmingly answered with the imperfect (16 of 20 L2 learners) while both the NS group and naturalistic L2 learners completed this sentence with the preterit 100% of the time.

Table 8. Target-deviancy by Item for Test 2.

Item #	Context	NS	NS	Tut.	Tut.	UnT.	UnT.
		Pret.	Imp.	NNS	NNS	NNS	NNS
				Pret.	Imp.	Pret.	Imp.
1	...no cabe el odio entre dos amigos que un día fueron (ser) novios.	100%	0%	60%	40%	100%	0%
2	Era obvio que escuchaba (escuchar) la radio	0%	100%	10%	90%	0%	100%
3	Tus padres siempre me cayeron (caer) bien hasta aquel día...	100%	0%	20%	80%	100%	0%
4	Hubo (haber) varias manifestaciones durante los años 60s...	100%	0%	70%	30%	100%	0%
5	Yo nunca pensé (pensar) que fueras a dejarme.	100%	0%	65%	35%	100%	0%
6	Miguel se quedó (quedarse) mudo.....	100%	0%	95%	5%	100%	0%
7	...[mudo] en cuanto escuchó (escuchar) los acontecimientos del incidente.	100%	0%	85%	15%	100%	0%
8	Era (ser) un error decirle mi contraseña, por eso no se la dije.	10%*	90%*	40%	60%	18%*	82%*
9	Hacia años que no comía tacos.	0%	100%	20%	80%	0%	100%
10	...¿Por qué dijiste que.....	10%	90%	70%	30%	9%	91%
11	..[que] me amabas cuando estabas abrazándome y besándome....	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%
12	...pero al final me obligaste a irme.	0%	100%	5%	95%	0%	100%

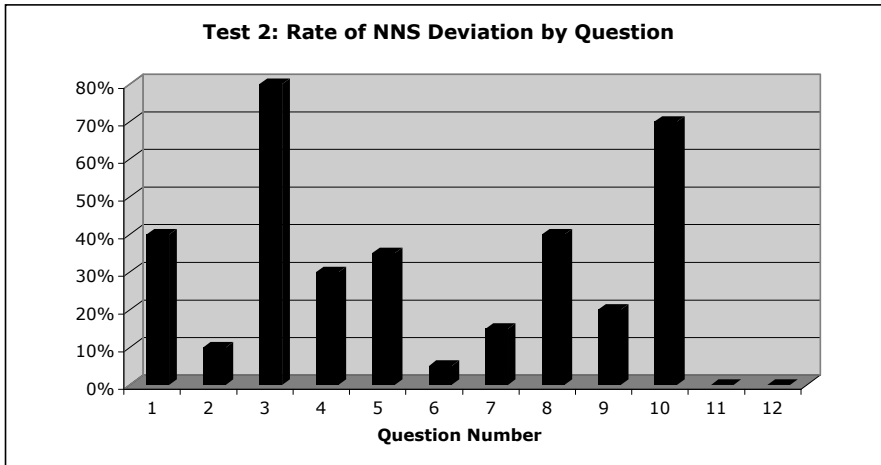


Figure 8. Tutored NNS Deviation by Item

- (20) *Tus padres siempre me _____ cayeron [+perfective] (caer) bien hasta aquel día inesperado en que todo sucedió.*
 “I always liked your parents until that unexpected day when everything occurred.”

The next most disparate responses, numbers 1, 4, 5, and 8 also involved the use of preterit with trigger words such as *siempre* and/or verbs like *ser* and *haber*.

Interestingly, items 11 and 12, which served as fillers utilizing verbs that are not introduced lexically for the imperfect/preterit distinction (*amar* and *obligar*), were the only sentences for which there was no tutored L2 learner divergence from NS consensus responses.

We note that there is slight intra-group variation in the NS control and naturalistic L2 learner group response for sentence 8 reproduced here in (21). However, this variation is different as compared to the tutored L2 learners.

- (21) _____ (ser) un error decirle mi contraseña, por eso no se la dije.
 “_____ (be) an error to tell him/her my password, so I did not tell him/her it.”

Tutored L2 learners diverged from the NS consensus by producing the preterit as opposed to the imperfect (*fue* versus *era*), which actually results in a truth-value semantic violation. Conversely, whenever a native or untutored L2 learner provided an answer that was different than the NS consensus of the imperfect it was either the conditional (*sería*) or the conditional perfect (*habría sido*). While both

alternative forms are possible using either form represented an instance of in-compliance with the directions of the task and is thus counted as divergent.

5.4 Task 2: Statistical analysis.

In the previous section, we reported a 25% tutored L2 difference and a 2.27% naturalistic L2 difference in preterit vs. imperfect production as compared to native speakers' consensus. To check the statistical relevance of these differences I employed a one-way ANOVA comparison for all three groups. It became immediately clear that there were statistically significant differences between the three groups' performances as they compared to each other ($f = 34.07$, $p = 0.000$). In an effort to tease apart which of the possible group-to-group comparisons resulted in significant differences, I followed up the ANOVA with a series of Tukey pairwise comparisons for each relevant group comparison (NS vs. tutored L2, NS vs. naturalistic L2 learners and tutored vs. Naturalistic L2 learners). A comparison of the mean score of the naturalistic L2 learner (11.73, $sd = .47$) and the mean score of the NS group (11.8, $sd = .41$) revealed no significant differences ($p < .005$) in aspect production between these two groups. On the other hand, the mean score divergence between the tutored L2 learner group (8.95, $sd = 1.82$) and the NS control (11.8, $sd = .41$) yielded a statistically significant difference ($p > .005$). Equally, comparing the mean score of the tutored L2 learner group (8.95, $sd = 1.82$) versus the L2 naturalistic group (11.73, $sd = .47$) revealed a statistically significant difference between these two groups ($p > .005$), on par with the tutored L2 vs. native control difference.

5.5 Discussion of Results

Bringing together the results of both tasks, a pattern to tutored L2 learner target-deviancy was revealed. In line with the predictions of the Competing Systems Hypothesis, tutored L2 learners demonstrated variation in selecting between the preterit and imperfect in three contexts only: (a) with commonly used stative verbs (e.g. *ser*, *haber*), (b) verbs whose preterit and imperfect contrast is taught lexically by means of English translation equivalents (e.g., *sabía* vs. *supe*; *quería* vs. *quise*) and (c) after adverbials that are taught as default triggers to either the preterit or the imperfect form (e.g., *siempre*, *cuando*). Conversely, the naturalistic learners of L2 Spanish performed like the NSs on both tasks. It is reasonable to suppose that formal instruction is the variable between the two L2 learner groups that accounts for the difference in their performance. If instruction is the critical variable, it is logical to believe that oversimplified pedagogical rules taught to L2 learners form a system of linguistic knowledge that they use to monitor their

output and, thus, affects their performance. The fact that not even one naturalistic learner demonstrated the observed pattern of target-deviancy that the vast majority of tutored learners did is explained by the fact that they, not having received pedagogical instruction, have no such system of learned linguistic rules of explicit comparisons to their L1, English. It should be noted that four of twenty tutored L2 learners performed completely native-like on both tasks, which suggests that the encroachment of pedagogical explanations on linguistic performance is not an inevitability for all L2 learners. Comparing variables such as time lived in a Spanish speaking environment, sex, age and years since Spanish was first studied revealed that there is no means by which these four learner could be reliably differentiated from their peers.

Based on previous research (Goodin-Mayeda and Rothman 2007, Montrul and Slabakova 2003, Slabakova and Montrul 2003, Rothman and Iverson 2007), the present study began with the assumption that adults have full access to UG in general and that in particular English-speaking learners of L2 Spanish at the advanced level acquire the necessary morphosyntactic feature [- perfective] to attain native-like competence in the domain of [\pm perfective] aspect distinction (i.e. native-like competence for the preterit/imperfect contrast). While I also argued that performance, even when it shows systematicity, is not the most accurate tool to gauge underlying linguistic competence, I note, nonetheless, that the whole of the evidence provided for both L2 learner groups herein is consistent with the possibility of L2 native-like morphosyntactic competence. While the performance of several of the tutored L2 learners diverged from that of NSs (and the naturalistic L2 learners), there was a clear pattern to this target-deviancy, which I have argued stems from a separate system of learned linguistic knowledge. I join Schwartz (1993), Schwartz and Gubala-Ryzak (1992) among others in positing that only *natural positive evidence* leads to grammatical competence. In other words, while *explicit positive evidence* (pedagogical rules), constitute an indispensable facet of the most common situation of second language learning (the classroom), these rules do not lead to underlying linguistic competence. Rather, these rules serve the communicative component crucially, in that they provide L2 learners with both a learning strategy and a mechanism that facilitates communication throughout inter-language development. It is reasonable to believe that these pedagogical rules are consciously accessed in discourse as an output monitor by many L2 learners, resulting in surface morphological errors despite a morphosyntactic competence that is fundamentally native-like. If this is true, the observed pattern of L2 deviation is explained accordingly.

The role of instruction, therefore, is understood as a facilitator and motivator of language acquisition, especially for people that are not learning a target L2 in a native speech community. However, instruction is clearly neither a sufficient nor

a necessary variable to acquire an L2 as an adult, otherwise, naturalistic learners would be unable to acquire properties different from their L1. The data presented here suggest that pedagogical explanations would greatly benefit from understanding and keeping in mind the grammatical underpinnings to the preterit and imperfect and, to the extent that this is possible, incorporate linguistic rules into teaching. However, assuming full access to UG, the key variable, that is, the only compulsory variable is sufficient access to quality input. The benefit of teaching the preterit and imperfect in a linguistically savvy way is not because such an explicit explanation is necessary, but that pedagogical rules based on linguistic rules would not differ from what the learner's actual grammar dictates. As a result, competition between these separate systems would be rendered negligible to null.

Since the data show L2 target-deviancy primarily with stative verbs, it may be suggested that Andersen's (1986, 1991) Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (LAH) equally explains the observed target-deviancy in tutored learners' performance. Importantly, however, target-deviancy in this study is not limited exclusively to stative verbs. Furthermore, the LAH assumes that L2 learners will eventually learn that stative verbs can be used with preterit morphology. Given the proficiency level of our tutored L2 participants, as well as the time it has been since they began learning Spanish (average= 17 years), it seems reasonable to argue that they have achieved a steady-state for the L2 grammar, at which point the LAH does not predict the observed target-deviancy. Even if an argument could be made that these learners are still in the process of learning and that this explains why they perform the way they do in accord with the predictions of the LAH, one would still have to address why the naturalistic learners do not manifest the same performance pattern. That is, the LAH is purported to apply to L2 learners in general; there is no distinction made in terms of its applicability to tutored versus naturalistic L2 learners. In addition, there is no basis on which to distinguish the tutored learners from the naturalistic learners in this study (e.g., years of exposure to Spanish), nor is there a basis on which to argue a correlation between years of exposure to L2 Spanish and the attainment of an end-state grammar of Spanish. It is also important to recall that the performance of several L2 learners in the tutored group was identical to that of the NSs on both tests. As previously discussed, the linguistic background of these individual participants compared to other tutored L2 learners who performed in a variably target-deviant manner, it becomes clear that such a correlation is not tenable. This is especially telling in light of the fact that none of the untutored learners demonstrated target-deviancy even though some had been learning Spanish, albeit in a natural environment, for only seven years. Taken together, all the evidence points to instruction as the significant variable that explains the difference of the two L2 groups and supports the tenability of the Competing Systems Hypothesis.

6. Conclusions

The present study has provided evidence in support of the view that pedagogical rules of oversimplification can result in L2 performance variation, perhaps indefinitely. It goes without saying that teaching adult learners of a foreign language in an explicit manner is beneficial for their success. Insofar as adult L2 learners transfer and use their L1 grammar to make hypotheses about the target L2 initially and throughout inter-language development, it is logical to teach these learners in terms of explicit L1/L2 contrasts when such comparisons facilitate the acquisition of the L2 grammar. However, in the case that the contrastive explanation does not accurately depict the L1/L2 difference in all contexts, lingering effects on performance may ensue for at least some learners. In providing evidence that certain pedagogical conventions may add to target-deviant performance for many L2 learners, the goal is to highlight the long-term effects of such practices and to suggest that L2 learners will benefit from instruction on linguistic rules that seek to describe underlying linguistic competence. Moreover, the Competing Systems Hypothesis adds to other recent proposals from the generative L2 paradigm that go beyond the untenable notion of UG inaccessibility to explain particular instances and causes of L2 target-deviancy (cf. Prévost and White 2000, Slabakova 2006, Goad and White 2006 among many others). In the present situation, instructing L2 learners to fully consider the entire context as it relates to what [\pm perfective] aspect provides to the semantic value of any given sentence could nullify the negative effects that pedagogical rules and misconceived L1 translation equivalencies engender at the level of performance.

To test the verifiability of the Competing Systems Hypothesis as well as to isolate other areas of grammar in which native-like performance may be affected by a separate system of learned pedagogical rules, additional studies are warranted. The focus of this study was limited to the domain of the preterit/imperfect contrast; however, if the hypothesis is on the right track one should observe similar effects in other domains. In fact, any domain in which pedagogical rules do not coincide with underlying linguistic competence should be subject to similar effects.

Notes

* The data for the tutored L2 learner group and the design of the empirical tasks were done with Liz Goodin-Mayeda for which I owe her a debt of gratitude. The data for the tutored learners and some of the native speakers was presented with her at AATSP 2005 and PAMLA 2005. I am grateful for many comments from several colleagues; however, I am especially indebted to Judith Liskin-Gasparro for her detailed comments and close reading, as well as Roumyana

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1. It should be noted that there has been much recent discussion of variation at a macroparametric and a microparametric level, (where macro and micro are understood differently from their previous use in this section) from formal approaches to language. For example, Adger and Smith (2005) argue that the architecture of the Minimalist Program (MP) in particular is apt to account for micro-grammatical variability due to the way it views language-to-language differences. In light of the MP's manipulation of grammatical features, which essentially allows variable phonological outputs with the same semantic interpretation, variation in micro- and macro-language use can be accounted for without assuming a variationist approach. Within L2 acquisition Sorace (2000, 2003, 2004, 2005), for example, have paid much attention to isolating the source of variation in L2 language use and have argued that vulnerable interfaces (e.g., syntax/semantics and syntax/pragmatics interfaces) are the source of much difficulty and perhaps fossilization.
2. This is not to suggest that verbs that are inherently atelic, like *correr* 'to run' cannot take on a telic meaning in certain contexts, for example when preceded by DPs such as *una milla* 'a mile'.
3. The difference between Spanish and English in this respect is much more complicated linguistically than space permits us to explore here. For a more theoretical explanation of how Spanish and English aspectual encode different meanings, for example, see Kempchinsky and Slabakova (2005).
4. The Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (see Bardovi-Harlig, 2000 for a discussion of relevant literature) purposes aspectual primacy in L2 acquisition whereby verbal morphology is hypothesized to initially mark inherent aspect distinction only. Eight stages for the emergence of preterit and imperfect morphological usage associated with the type of verb (states, activities, achievements and accomplishments) are proposed. It is argued that either the preterit or imperfect morphology is used exclusively for each verbal class initially. It is hypothesized that the L2 learner will eventually learn that both preterit and imperfect morphology can be used with each class of verb.
5. In Spain, the present perfect in lieu of the preterit is often used, especially in discourse, to report past actions that have recently taken place and have [+ perfective] aspect. Therefore, some of the sentences in the study could have been answered with this tense as opposed to the preterit. However, given the binary choices of the preterit and imperfect, in such cases, the preterit is the only logically available choice. Although 4 of the 20 natives in this study were from Spain, no native speaker participants used or reported preferring the present perfect instead of the two choices available to them.

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Author's address

Jason Rothman
The University of Iowa
Department of Spanish and Portuguese
111 Phillips Hall
Iowa City, IA 52242
USA
jlrothma@uiowa.edu