L2 end state grammars and incomplete acquisition of Spanish CLLD constructions*

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Sorace (1993, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2003) contends that optionality in the L2 end state is at the level of interpretation since its source is the interface between the lexicon and the interlanguage syntax. The chapter examines the status of topic constructions in the near-native end state L2 Spanish of English native speakers. Romance topic structures use clitic left dislocation (CLLD) (Cinque 1990) while English topicalization takes contrastive left dislocation (CLD). Anagnostopoulou (1997) proposes a unified analysis of CLLD and CLD whereby the two constructions are structurally similar in that both involve an adjoined left dislocated phrase associated with an operator-variable chain and the asymmetries between the two constructions follow from the properties associated with the resumptive element in the given structure and from the different adjunction sites of the left dislocated constituent. Romance-type structures take a clitic (CLLD) whereas English topic constructions take a null operator construction (CLD). However, topicalized elements in Spanish which are non-specific take the CLD construction. The interpretation of the topicalized element as either [± specific] depends on the clitic. This sensitivity to specificity is not available in English. Results from three tasks probing the end-state grammar show that optionality occurs at the interpretive level but not at the syntactic level thereby providing evidence in favour of Sorace’s claim.

1. Introduction

A growing issue in the study of post-childhood L2 acquisition is that of near-nativeness and how to account for the fact that some adult learners appear to have reached a native-like or almost native-like level of proficiency in their L2. That is, near-native grammar research is now focusing on the theoretical question: “what do near-native grammars really look like”? Researchers and indeed their findings are divided into two groups: research supporting the claim that the L2 end state can be native-like due to convergence on native grammar representations, on the one hand, and, on the other, research supporting the claim that L2 end state underlying representations
diverge from the target grammar despite native-like performance. There is further de-
bate as to the source of divergence in the L2 steady state. Although both claims argue
that performance can be native-like, the crucial difference is the assumption about
the state of the mental representations. A non-native representation will presumably
lead to non native-like competence. Although many if not most adult L2 grammars
display fossilization in the steady state, what about the cases where the speaker is ap-
parently native-like? In what ways does a so-called near-native grammar diverge from
a native grammar?

In L2 acquisition, ultimate attainment is far from predictable and outcomes can
vary considerably from learner to learner. There may be fossilization in one or several
aspects of the grammar, resulting in an end-state that is different, not only from that
of a native speaker of the target language, but also from other L2 learners with the
same L1. In other words, an end state L2 grammar is one that has reached the final
stage in development regardless of the level of proficiency and is not necessarily a near
native grammar. Research in L2 ultimate attainment has centered mainly on the issue
of critical periods and/or on the investigation of near native grammars (including fail-
ure to achieve them). While both issues are interrelated, it is the study of near-native
grammars which has recently come to the forefront (Coppieters 1987; Birdsong 1992;
Sorace 1993; White & Genesee 1996; Bruhn de Garavito 1999; Lozano 2003; Montrul
& Slabakova 2003; White 2003a). Specifically, debate centers on whether or not mental
representations in the L2 can be native-like.

Some researchers contend that those so-called near-native speakers do not in fact
have native-like mental representations but rather arrive at that performance by other
Liceras 1997; Coppieters 1987). Liceras (1997) argues that parametric properties are
learned on a case by case basis and that L2 learners process the input using “secondary
level domain-specific procedures” such as metalinguistic knowledge. Thus, in her view,
although adult L2 speakers may arrive at native-like intuitions, it is not the result of
having reset a parameter or having acquired a new parameter. Sorace (1993) explains
that even the term ‘near-native’ suggests a shortcoming or lack of convergence on the
target grammar. Indeed, Sorace makes a distinction between incomplete and diver-
gent L2 grammars as being two possible outcomes usually expressed under the term
‘near-native’. An incomplete grammar is one that somehow lacks a particular property
of the L2 whereas a divergent grammar is one that represents some L2 property dif-
ferently from the native speaker grammar. By contrast, other researchers contend that
native-like steady state competence is possible (Birdsong 1992; White & Genesee 1996;
Bruhn de Garavito 1999; Montrul & Slabakova 2003). This is not to say that near-native
grammars are inevitable; in fact, it is clear that near-nativeness is a state achieved by
a minority rather than a majority of L2 learners. However, these researchers agree that
native-like representations in the L2 steady state are possible, in principle.

The main aim of the research is to contribute to the growing literature on L2 near
native grammars which owes so much to the work of Lydia White. The present paper
examines the status of topic constructions, a discourse level operator, in the near native
L2 Spanish of L1 English speakers and shows that fossilization occurs at the interpretive level. Topic constructions are an intriguing diagnostic for the study of both near-native and end state grammars for several reasons. First, they are a subtle property of the grammar which are neither taught in the classroom nor obvious in the input. That is, L2 learners do not receive explicit instruction as to what is ungrammatical with respect to topic constructions. Second, topic constructions in English and Spanish are used in spoken speech and require a high level of proficiency. Third, although topic constructions have been gaining increasing attention in theoretical studies, there have been very few studies examining the L2 acquisition of clitic left dislocation (CLLD) and contrastive left dislocation (CLD) within the generative framework and remain an underexplored area of the grammar.

2. Topic constructions in Spanish and English

Theoretical studies dealing with discourse level operators, such as topic and focus, have been receiving increasing attention in recent years (Cinque 1990; Anagnostopoulou 1997; Rizzi 1997; Zubizarreta 1998, 2000; Grohman 2000; Arregi 2003; Sánchez 2004 among others). However, the area of topic and focus remains fraught with disagreement, confusion in nomenclature, and ambiguous judgments. Indeed setting up proper contexts for such constructions is crucial for interpretation but difficult to achieve.

Contrastive Left Dislocation/Topicalization (CLD) is a form of topicalization typically found in Germanic languages and is shown in (1) while Clitic Left Dislocation (CLLD), typical of languages with clitics (Spanish, Italian, Greek, etc) is shown in (2):²

(1) Water, I drink everyday. CLD
(2) A Juan, lo vi ayer. CLLD
   to Juan cl saw.1sg yesterday
   ‘Juan, I saw yesterday’

In both cases, the left peripheral element is the ‘topic’, or what the sentence is about, and is linked to the IP by way of a resumptive element. In CLLD the resumptive element is a clitic while in CLD it is a null operator.

Similarities between CLD and CLLD are the following: (i) the left-dislocated phrase is the ‘topic’ where topic is associated with old information and is what the sentence is about and (ii) in both constructions, the left-dislocated phrase is linked to an open position in the lower IP. The dislocated XP and the clitic or null operator form an operator-variable chain.

There are a number of differences between CLLD and CLD but we will concentrate on those which will be examined in the present study. The first difference is that the resumptive element in CLD is a null anaphoric operator (Op) whereas in CLLD it is a clitic, as in (3) and (4) respectively:
(3) These shoes, I bought in Madrid

(4) Estos zapatos, los compré en Madrid
    these shoes cl I-bought in Madrid
    'These shoes, I bought in Madrid'

In Spanish, the notion of specificity is crucial for topicalization. When a topicalized element is specific, it takes a clitic, thus the CLLD structure, however, when a topicalized element is non-specific or generic, it does not take a clitic (Contreras 1976; Liceras et al. 1992; Arregi 2003):

(5) El libro, lo leí.
    the book cl I-read
    'The book, I read'

(6) Un libro, leí.
    a book cl I-read
    'A book, I read'

(7) *Un libro, lo leí.
    a book cl I-read
    'A book, I read'

(8) Libros, leí.
    books cl I-read
    'Books, I read'

However, in example (8), the topic construction is grammatical with or without a clitic but there is a subtle change in interpretation. Without a clitic the sentence takes a non-specific reading while the sentence with the clitic takes on a specific interpretation. That is, with the clitic the topic is referring to specific (or concrete) 'books' while the same sentence without a clitic renders the topic more general or abstract, 'books in general'.

We will assume that Spanish non-clitic left dislocation is an instance of English-type CLD as it patterns with English-type CLD (unlike CLLD). English topics do not show a difference in structures depending on the specificity of the preposed element since English does not have clitics and is restricted to the construction using the null anaphoric operator (CLD).

The second difference between CLD and CLLD involves the environment in which the left-dislocated phrase can occur. Specifically, in CLLD the left-dislocated phrase can occur in either root or embedded clauses, as in (9a–b) respectively while CLD, on the other hand, can only occur in root contexts, as in (10a–c).

(9) a. Esas flores, las he comprado en el mercado.   CLLD
    these flowers cl I-have bought at the market
    'These flowers, I bought at the market.'

    b. Me preguntó que, a María, quién le dio esas flores.   CLLD
    me cl I-ask that to María who cl gave those flowers
    'I wonder who gave those flowers to María.'
(10) a. Flores, compro todas las semanas. 
   flowers I-buy all the weeks
   ‘Flowers, I buy every week.’

b. ‘I wonder who, to María, gave those flowers. CLD

c. ‘Me pregunto que, flores, quién comprará’ 
   me I-ask that flowers who will buy
   ‘I wonder who buys flowers.’

Anagnostopoulou (1997) proposes a unified analysis of CLLD and CLD largely relying on earlier proposals by van Haaften, Smits and Vat (1983) and Demirdache (1991). Her main claim is that both constructions involve an adjoined left dislocated phrase associated with an operator-variable chain and the asymmetries between the two constructions follow from the properties associated with the resumptive element in the given structure and from the different adjunction sites of the left dislocated constituent: in CLD the phrase adjoins to CP whereas in CLLD the phrase adjoins to IP.

Building on earlier work by Demirdache (1991), Anagnostopoulou assumes the structure in (11) for both CLD and CLLD.

(11) [FP6 XP Lded7 [FP ..Op......t...]]

In Anagnostopoulou’s analysis, the discourse pronoun (d-pronoun) and the clitic head a predicate variable chain where the left dislocated XP is the subject of predication. English does not have d-pronouns as found in the Germanic languages. However, English topicalization takes the CLD structure but substitutes a null operator for the d-pronoun. The null operator, then, is licensed in the same position as the d-pronoun found in German and Dutch.

Anagnostopoulou argues that the left dislocated phrases are base-generated and that, in the case of CLD, are adjoined to CP which follows from the licensing position of the resumptive operator in CLD, namely Spec,CP. Her claim that the left dislocated phrase adjoins to IP in CLLD follows from the fact that CLLD occurs in both root and embedded clauses and, moreover, embedded CLLD can occur in any clause (adverbial, complex NP, negative, subjunctive, etc.).

Under Anagnostopoulou’s claim, the different adjunction sites of the left-dislocated XP in CLD and CLLD respectively, depend on the licensing position of the resumptive operator (Spec, CP in CLD; the clitic position in CLLD). The clitic is always IP-internal and is licensed in head position (e.g. CVacc⁰ according to Roberts 1997) as evidenced by the fact that it does not display asymmetries in root versus embedded contexts. The null operator of English-type topicalization/CLD, on the other hand, is licensed under Spec,CP since it is an operator. The d-pronoun must directly follow the left-dislocated phrase since it is licensed under Spec,CP. In this way, Anagnostopoulou argues that the internal structure of the resumptive elements (i.e. XP for CLD versus X⁰ for CLLD) dictate the different adjunction sites of the dislocated phrase in the given construction.

Based on Anagnostopoulou’s assumption that English topicalization takes the CLD construction with the null operator licensed under Spec,CP, she claims, follow-
ing Müller and Sternefeld (1993) that there can only be root CLD because Germanic languages do not have the parametric option whereby adjunction to subordinate CPs is permitted. Thus, she stipulates a CP-adjunction parameter which is not available in Germanic, thus the impossibility of embedding in CLD. In the case of CLLD in Romance, the left-dislocated phrase adjoins to IP which allows for adjunction to subordinate. Having presented the analysis for topic constructions, we will now turn to acquisition theory.

3. Sorace’s theory of optionality

Sorace (1993) argues that the term ‘near-native’ itself implies that the non-native grammar is ‘incomplete’, deficient in some property/ies which are present in the native grammar. Indeed, she classifies near-native grammars into two distinct and qualitatively different types of steady states: divergent grammars and incomplete grammars. A divergent grammar is one that represents some L2 property differently from the native speaker grammar whereas an incomplete grammar is one that somehow lacks a particular property of the L2. In both cases, native-like performance is possible despite the fact that the underlying representation is different from the native speaker representation. According to Sorace, native-like performance in the L2 is not the result of having native-like competence. In this assumption, Sorace’s view is consistent with Hawkins (2000) and Hawkins and Liszka (2003). With respect to L2 steady state grammars, Sorace argues that non target competence is due to persistent or residual optionality (at the level of representation). Sorace (1999) points out that the Full Transfer/Full Access (FT/FA) model of Schwartz and Sprouse (1994, 1997) best explains the phenomenon of optionality. Indeed, the FT/FA predicts that fossilization in the end state may occur in cases where the L2 speaker cannot ‘delearn’ an L1 property in their L2 and consequently do not restructure their grammar due to a paucity of input. Thus, both Sorace and FT/FA base persistent non-target forms on L1 influence. In Sorace’s terms, an L2 end state grammar which exhibits fossilization as predicted by the FT/FA is a divergent grammar. Moreover, the co-existence of the L1 form and the L2 form in the L2 end state is a form of residual optionality at the performance level.

Sorace (1993, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2003; Robertson & Sorace 1999; Tsimpli et al. 2003) propose an account of the type of optionality found in L2 grammars. Robertson and Sorace (1999) contend that the source of optionality is at the interface level, specifically, the interface between the lexicon and the interlanguage syntax. Optionality is when two forms (an L1 form which is ungrammatical in the target language and an L2 form) co-exist in the interlanguage grammar for one target language construction (two forms but one slot) resulting in a non-target grammar. When the L2 input data that the learner is exposed to are insufficient enough to allow the L2 speaker to restructure their grammar, the learner is unable to let go of one of the two forms of the construction resulting in permanent optionality between both variations. This ‘permanent optionality’ therefore is fossilization at the level of interpretation in the L2
end state. In fact, her claim is that a near-native speaker grammar “differs often in non-obvious ways from the monolingual native’s”.

Sorace’s optionality theory allows for predictions about the discourse/interpretive domain. Under Sorace’s theory, optionality is predicted to occur at the interpretive level. While the syntactic properties may be target-like (therefore producing CLLD and CLD appropriately in both target L2s), learners will have most trouble interpreting the specificity distinction in their L2 end state for Spanish and letting go of their [specific] feature from their L1 in their L2 English.

4. Predictions for L2

Previous studies on topicalization within the generative framework include Camacho (1999) who examined the acquisition of L2 Spanish topic and focus constructions by L1 speakers of Southern Quechua. The participants in Camacho’s study were advanced and not near-native. Camacho found that learners were not able to reset the parameter associated with correct interpretation of specific and generic preposed topics in their L2 Spanish. Moreover, the author found that there was a high degree of transfer from the L1.

Assuming Anagnostopoulou’s structure for CLD and CLLD, an L1 English learner of L2 Spanish will have to acquire the new adjunction site for CLLD and the consequent syntactic constraints. They will also have to acquire the interpretive differences resulting from the presence or absence of a clitic. An L1 English learner of L2 Spanish will have to acquire the fact that not all topic constructions adjoin to CP in Spanish. They will have to acquire the specificity distinction associated with the interpretation of specific versus non-specific topics. Under Sorace’s theory, difficulties in acquisition are predicted to occur precisely at the interpretive domain. Thus, specificity and the correct interpretation of CLLD and CLD are predicted to fossilize resulting in possible optionality.

5. Experiment

5.1 Participants

Participants for this study consisted of 15 L1 English speakers of L2 Spanish who had had their first exposure to Spanish after puberty (mean age = 33). Participants were from England, Canada, and United States and were living in Spain at the time of testing. In all cases, their work was conducted in Spanish and in most cases both work and home life were conducted in Spanish. The L2 participants were end state, near-native speakers of L2 Spanish. In addition to the L2 Spanish/L1 English experimental group, 25 monolingual L1 Spanish participants were tested in Spain as a control group. The monolingual group consisted primarily of university students from the Universidad de
Table 1. Individual Profile of English learners of L2 Spanish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>L1</th>
<th>L2</th>
<th>Age of first exposure to Spanish</th>
<th># years living in Spanish environment</th>
<th>Mean overall score on near-nativeness interview</th>
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<td>SPA</td>
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<td>SPA</td>
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Valladolid and five of the monolinguals were university professors of linguistics (from the Universidad de Valladolid and the Universidad de Barcelona).

Inclusion in the experiment was based on the learner being both a near-native and an end state speaker of L2 Spanish. Following a similar procedure to that implemented in White and Genesee (1996) and Montrul and Slabakova (2003), speech samples from all participants (controls and L2) were extracted from short oral interviews. The interview in this experiment consisted of the participant describing their ideal home. The tapes were given to two impartial native Spanish speakers who were asked to listen to the speech sample several times each time evaluating the ‘nativeness’ of the individual speaker for syntax, morphology, pronunciation, vocabulary, and overall fluency. Average scores for the speech samples of the L1 Spanish speakers ranged from 8.5–10. Based on the native speakers’ score margin, L2 speakers whose average scores were between 8.5–10 were deemed near-native. Scores on the near-nativeness interview together with the age of first exposure (all had to be post-childhood learners) and number of years living in a Spanish environment were the criteria for inclusion in the study. Details of the linguistic profile of each of the L2 participants is shown in Table 1.

5.2 Experimental tasks

In addition to the ‘near-nativeness’ interview, both the near-native and the control group were given three tests (two oral and one written) which tested knowledge of CLLD and CLD constructions and associated syntactic constraints as well as the associated interpretive constraints. In order to avoid potential priming effects, the order in which the tasks were administered varied from person to person. Participants were
asked to complete the tasks as quickly as possible, giving their first intuition about the sentences. They were also told that the study dealt with spoken, informal speech.

5.2.1 Oral grammaticality judgment task
The first task was an oral grammaticality judgment (GJ) task which tested specific versus non-specific topics in root and embedded contexts. The task had to be oral in order to control for the pause between the topic and the lower IP; a long pause would make the structure a hanging topic left dislocation (HTLD) construction which has a different structure (and associated syntactic properties) from CLLD/CLD. Since the length of the pause is crucial for interpretation, the task was a pre-recorded oral task. Participants listened to a series of sentences and were asked to judge their acceptability on a preference scale where 1 = totally unacceptable and 5 = totally acceptable, they were also given the option of choosing ‘I don’t know’. The sentences aimed at testing learners’ knowledge of the syntactic constraints of CLD and CLLD as well as their understanding of the specific interpretive differences between the types of constructions in Spanish. In most cases, the grammatical and ungrammatical counterparts were minimal pairs. The distribution of test items was the following:

5 grammatical root specific topic constructions:
A Pedro, no le saludo nunca.
‘Pedro, I never greet.’

5 ungrammatical root specific topic constructions:
*A Pedro, no cl saludo nunca.
‘Pedro, I never greet.’

5 grammatical root non-specific topic constructions:
Agua, tomo todos los días.
‘Water, I drink everyday.’

5 ungrammatical root non-specific topic constructions:
*Agua, la cl tomo todos los días.
‘Water, I drink everyday.’

5 grammatical embedded specific topic constructions:
Estoy segura que, la cartera, la cl he dejado en el metro.
‘I am certain that the wallet cl have left on the subway’
5 ungrammatical embedded specific topic constructions:
*Estoy segura que, la cartera, he dejado en el metro.
I am certain that the wallet have left on the subway.
'I am certain that I left my wallet on the subway.'

5 grammatical embedded non-specific topic constructions:
*Carmen cree que, agua, todo el mundo debe tomar.
Carmen believes that water every the world cl. should take
‘Carmen believes that everyone should drink water.’

5 ungrammatical embedded non-specific topic constructions without a clitic:
*Carmen cree que, agua, todo el mundo la debe tomar.
Carmen believes that water every the world should take
‘Carmen believes that everyone should drink water.’

In this task, specific versus non-specific topicalized items were contrasted in both root and embedded contexts. Grammatical and ungrammatical tokens were minimal pairs (either with or without a clitic).

5.2.2 Oral sentence selection task
A second task was an oral sentence selection (SS) task. Participants heard a short context story in Spanish where the discourse antecedents are introduced. They then heard two concluding sentences in Spanish and were asked to select the most appropriate one. A sample test item is given below:

Ayer por la mañana, Eva se fue a la universidad y vio a su amigo Pedro y a su amiga Inés, pero como tenía muchas cosas que hacer...

‘Yesterday morning, Eva went to the university and saw her friend Pedro and her friend Inés, but since she had many things to do...’

a. A Pedro, no lo saludó.
To Pedro, not cl. greeted

b. A Pedro, no saludó.
To Pedro, not greeted

c. Ni a ni b
Neither a nor b

d. Ambas a y b
Both a y b

The oral sentence selection task aimed at testing the following properties associated with Spanish topic constructions:

a. Specific topics in root contexts (5)
b. Non-specific topics in root contexts (5)
c. Specific topics in embedded contexts (5)
d. Non-specific topics in embedded contexts (5)
e. Distractors (10)

In this task, we tested for the specificity distinction in root and embedded contexts. The context (which was heard and read by the participants) forced either a specific or a non-specific interpretation of the topicalized item. The rationale for including the minimal pairs of specific versus non-specific tokens was to determine whether learners treated the two differently.

5.2.3 Sentence completion task/elicited written production
The third task was a sentence completion (SC) task. In this task participants were given a context story in which the discourse antecedents was introduced and participants were then asked to complete the concluding sentence in which a left-dislocated topic re-introducing one of the antecedents was given:

Eric sale con sus amigos los fines de semana. Van a ver películas y van a restaurantes. Su amigo le pregunta qué actividad prefiere. Eric contesta: ‘Eric goes out with his friends on weekends. They go to movies and they also go to restaurants. His friend asks him which activity he prefers. Eric answers: ’

“Películas, _______ prefiero porque me canso de restaurantes.”

‘Movies, ____________ because I get tired of going to restaurants.’

The above sample was an actual token taken from the test. Participants would have to complete the sentence that begins with ‘películas’ (movies) either with or without a clitic. In this particular case, the context forces a non-specific reading of the topicalized NP thus the sentence should be completed without a clitic. The types of sentences targeted in the SC task were:

i. Specific topics in root contexts (5)
ii. Non-specific topics in root contexts (5)
iii. Specific topics in embedded contexts (5)
iv. Non-specific topics in embedded contexts (5)
v. Distractors (10)

The three tasks included in this study aimed at testing the same syntactic and interpretive properties of Spanish topic constructions. However, multiple measures were necessary in order to generalize the results since it is so difficult to set up proper contexts for topic constructions.

5.3 Results

5.3.1 Results for oral grammaticality judgment task
Figure 1 below shows the group mean distribution of responses for the GJ task tokens which targeted topics in root environments. The acceptability scale was such that 5
5.0
4.0
3.0
2.0
1.0

Distribution of Responses

ROOT<sub>s</sub> Near Native
ROOT<sub>ns</sub> Control

4.3 3.1 2.9 2.4
4.5 3.3 3.6

ROOTs = root context CLLD with specific topic; ROOT<sub>ns</sub> = root context CLLD with non-specific topic without clitic; *ROOTs = root context CLLD with specific topic without clitic/ungrammatical; *ROOT<sub>ns</sub> = root context CLLD with non-specific topic with clitic/ungrammatical.

Figure 1. GJ task: Group mean distribution of responses for CLLD in root contexts

meant totally acceptable and 1 meant totally unacceptable. Scores of acceptable were predicted for the specific topics in root environments with a clitic (ROOT<sub>s</sub>) and the non-specific topics in root environments without a clitic (ROOT<sub>ns</sub>). Ratings of unacceptable were predicted for their ungrammatical counterparts which were specific topics in root environments without a clitic (*ROOT<sub>s</sub>) and non-specific topics in root environments with a clitic (*ROOT<sub>ns</sub>).

In Figure 1 we see that both the controls and the near-native group correctly preferred the specific topics with the CLLD construction and dispreferred specific topics without a clitic (CLD construction). A repeated measures, two-factor ANOVA between grammaticality and specificity revealed a significant main effect for the control group on both specificity (control \( F(1, 96) = 8.298, p < 0.01 \)) and grammaticality (control \( F(1, 96) = 46.294, p < 0.01 \)). There was no main effect for the near native group on either grammaticality (near-native \( F(1, 56) = 2.476, p = 0.0121 \)) or specificity (near-native \( F(1, 56) = 0.530, p = 0.047 \)) but there was a significant two-way interaction (near-native \( F(1, 56) = 12.536, p < 0.01 \)). This means that the control group is behaving as predicted with respect to specificity and grammaticality in that they treated the specific topics and non-specific topics differently as well as distinguishing on grounds of grammaticality. The near-native group, on the other hand, is not performing as predicted in that they did not show a statistically significant difference in their treatment of specific and non-specific topics nor did they distinguish the grammatical and ungrammatical tokens. In fact, the near-natives preferred the un-
The results for topic constructions in embedded clauses are given below in Figure 2. These sentences targeted specific (EMBs) and non-specific (EMBns) topic constructions in embedded contexts, where EMBs and EMBns take the CLLD construction while the ungrammatical counterparts were *EMBs and *EMBns without a clitic since CLD is not possible in embedded clauses. Recall that the GJ task did not provide the sentences with contexts therefore interpretation of the topicalized items could only be manipulated by way of the presence or absence of a clitic (CLLD vs. CLD). Here the aim was to test whether the syntactic constraints of CLLD were acquired and whether learners displayed knowledge of the specificity contrast.

A within group factorial ANOVA shows a significant main effect for the control group for specificity (control \( F(1, 96) = 40.247, p < 0.01 \)) and grammaticality (control \( F(1, 96) = 17.414, p < 0.01 \)) as well as a significant two-way interaction (control \( F(1,96) = 22.155, p < 0.01 \)). A significant main effect was found for the near-native group for specificity (near-native \( F(1,56) = 19.490, p < 0.01 \)) and grammaticality (near-native \( F(1, 56) = 16.033, p < 0.01 \)) but no significant two-way interaction was found (near-native \( F(1,56) = 4.649, p = 0.035 \)). It should be pointed out that both the control group and the near-native group preferred the grammatical embedded specific topic constructions (control 4.5; near-native 4.6) over the grammatical embedded non-specific topic constructions (control 2.4; near-native 3.0). An additional single-factor ANOVA shows no significant difference between the control and near-native groups...
with respect to the grammatical embedded specific sentences \( F(1,38) = 0.123, p = 0.727 \) or the ungrammatical embedded specific sentences \( F(1,38) = 0.685, p = 0.413 \). This means that both groups prefer embedded sentences with CLLD constructions.

Overall results for the GJ task on all three sentence types (root and embedded) indicate that the near-natives have a tendency to consistently prefer sentences with a clitic regardless of specificity. The control speakers, on the other hand, prefer the specific topics with CLLD constructions and disprefer the non-specific topics with a clitic in all three sentence types. It should be pointed out, however, that results for the GJ task are perhaps misleading because the test consisted of a series of sentences which were heard orally and in isolation. Since topic is a discourse operator which is heavily dependent on context, in the absence of a context these sentences sound unnatural and awkward. Indeed, it may account for the low acceptance of many of the grammatical sentences.

5.3.2 Results for oral sentence selection task

In this task, participants heard a short context story that forced either a specific or non-specific interpretation of a topicalized item in a concluding sentence. In Figure 3, the percent group responses for the oral sentence selection (SS) task are presented.

![Figure 3](image-url)

ROOT SPECIFIC = contexts that forced a CLLD construction with a specific topic/root clause; ROOT non-SPECIFIC = contexts that forced a non-CLLD construction with a non-specific topic/root clause; clitic = % times choose CLLD construction as concluding sentence; no clitic = % times choose non-CLLD construction as concluding sentence; both = % times chose option ‘both ‘a’ and ‘b’; neither = % times choose option neither ‘a’ nor ‘b’

Figure 3. Results for sentence selection task: Distribution of group responses for CLLD in root clauses
Participants could either choose a concluding topic construction with a clitic, without a clitic, neither or both.

In Figure 3, we see that for the contexts which forced a specific interpretation of the topicalized element in the root clause (ROOT SPECIFIC), both participant groups correctly always selected the CLLD construction as the concluding sentence. With respect to the contexts targeting non-specific interpretations of the topic in root clauses, the control group chose the non-specific topic without a clitic (CLD) 53\% of the time. While the near-native group also chose the non-specific topic without a clitic (40\% of the time) in root clauses, they also chose the non-specific topic with a clitic 37\% of the time. A two-way ANOVA shows that there is a within group significant difference in both the control’s and near-native’s treatment of specific versus non-specific topics with respect to preference for the ‘clitic’ responses (control $F(1, 88) = 435.044 , p < 0.01$; near-native $F(1, 56) = 66.936, p < 0.01$). The results for the SC task contexts that forced either a specific or non-specific interpretation of topics in embedded clauses are given in Figure 4 below.

In Figure 4, we see that, once again, both subject groups clearly preferred the CLLD construction with specific topics in embedded contexts. For the non-specific topics in embedded contexts, however, the near-native group preferred the clitic. There was a
strong tendency by the control group, on the other hand, to select the option ‘neither’ (that is, of dispreferring the sentence with or without a clitic) 75% of the time.

The results for the embedded topics are consistent with those targeting topics in root clauses in that the near-native group tends to prefer the CLLD constructions (i.e. with a clitic) whereas the control group is distinguishing between the clitic with specific topics and no clitic with non-specific topics. A two-way ANOVA shows that there is a within group significant difference in both the control’s and near-native’s treatment of specific versus non-specific topics with respect to preference for the ‘clitic’ responses (control ($F(1, 88) = 435.044, p < 0.01$); near-native ($F(1, 56) = 66.936, p < 0.01$)).

5.3.3 Results for sentence completion task

Results for the sentence completion (SC) task are given in Figures 5 and 6 below. In this written data elicitation task, participants read a context which forced either a specific or non-specific interpretation of the topic. The results were calculated based on whether or not the participant provided a clitic when they completed the sentence. Again, in contexts where a specific topic is given in a root clause, the CLLD (with clitic) is the correct way to complete the sentence while the non-specific topic in root clause should take the CLD (no clitic) construction. With respect to the topics in embedded clauses, only the CLLD construction is grammatical.

In Figure 5, we see that both groups correctly provided clitics with specific left-dislocated topics in root environments. A single-factor ANOVA showed no significant difference between groups for specific topics in root environments (ROOTs: $F(1,38) = 6.441, p = 0.015$). With respect to the contexts forcing a non-specific interpretation, while the control group mostly completed the sentences in root clauses without a clitic,
The near-natives completed them with a clitic over 50% of the time in both cases. A single-factor ANOVA showed a significant difference between the groups on ROOTns sentences ($F(1,38) = 19.113, p < 0.01$).

The results for the embedded non-specific topics shown in Figure 6 indicate that the control group tended to produce sentences without clitics where a clearly non-specific topic in an embedded clause was provided. The near-native group produced sentences with clitics 73% of the time where a clearly non-specific topic in an embedded clause was provided. A single-factor ANOVA showed a highly significant difference between groups for the EMBns sentences ($F(1,38) = 42.124, p < 0.01$) but no significant difference between groups for the specific embedded topics (EMBs: $F(1,38) = 1.701, p = 0.200$). What is clear is that the near-native group prefers, consistent across contexts (embedded/root), the CLLD construction (with clitic). A single-factor ANOVA was run to examine whether a difference could be found within the near-native group across specificity. The ANOVA showed a significant different within the near-native group in their treatment of ROOTs and ROOTns ($F(1,28) = 16.568, p < 0.01$) but no significant difference in their treatment of EMBs versus EMBns ($F(1,28) = 6.712, p = 0.015$).

6. Discussion

In the present study, we assumed Anagnostopoulou’s structure for CLD and CLLD whereby an L1 English learner of L2 Spanish had to acquire the new adjunction site
for CLLD and the consequent syntactic constraints as well as the specificity distinction associated with the interpretation of specific versus non-specific topics (presence or absence of a clitic). Under Sorace’s theory, difficulties in acquisition were predicted to occur precisely at the interpretive domain. Thus, specificity and the correct interpretation of CLLD and CLD were predicted to fossilize resulting in possible optionality. The three main research questions were, first, whether L1 English end state speakers of L2 Spanish could acquire the syntactic properties associated with Spanish CLLD and CLD, second, whether L1 English end state speakers of L2 Spanish could acquire the interpretive properties associated with Spanish CLLD and CLD, and, more generally, what do near-native grammars really look like? We will first discuss the results in terms of the first two research questions. We will then discuss the results in terms of the nature of near-native grammars.

Results indicate that the Spanish near-native group does appear to have acquired the CLLD structure. That is, they are sensitive to the syntactic constraints of the CLLD structure (root and embedded contexts) and are both producing and accepting clitics. The first research question – can syntactic properties of Spanish topic constructions be acquired? – is answered in the affirmative. However, the second research question – can the associated interpretive properties of Spanish topic constructions be acquired? – is less clear-cut. Results from the three tasks indicate that the near-native speakers are not distinguishing between specific and non-specific topic constructions to the same extent as the monolingual Spanish group. In what respect, then, do the near-natives differ from native Spanish speakers? While the syntactic properties appear to have been acquired, the associated interpretive properties do not appear to have been acquired.

Returning to the general theoretical research question, “what do near-native grammars really look like?” Results from the three tasks presented here appear to indicate that the near-native grammar only differs from the target grammar with respect to specificity. Thus, based on the present results, near-native grammars look very much like native grammars in terms of syntax but are ‘incomplete’ at the interface level, a finding which is consistent with Sorace (2000a, 2000b), Montrul (2002), and Tsimpli et al. (2003). Previous research on discourse level properties (such as topic and focus) also found this area of the grammar particularly vulnerable to fossilization (Hertel 2003; Pérez-Leroux & Glass 1999). More specifically, the results in the present study are consistent with earlier findings in Camacho (1999) whose advanced speakers of L2 Spanish (L1 Quechua) did not distinguish between specific and non-specific preposed topics.

With respect to specific theories of acquisition, two contending theories are the Full Transfer Full Access hypothesis (FT/FA) (Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1997) and the Failed Functional Features Hypothesis (FFH) / Representational Deficit (RD) (Hawkins & Liszka 2003; Hawkins 2000; Hawkins & Chan 1997; Tsimpli & Roussou 1991; Smith & Tsimpli 1995). On the one hand, the FT/FA predicts the end state of L2 can be native-like due to native-like representations. On the other hand, the FFH/RD predicts end state L2 grammars can have native-like performance but the underlying representation is crucially not native-like due to the impossibility of accessing features not instantiated in the L1. If both theories predict native-like performance, then how
does one know which theory wins out? How does one tease the two theories apart when examining near-native grammars?

The data can be addressed adopting Sorace’s (Sorace 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2003; Robertson & Sorace 1999) claim that syntactic properties of the L2 are acquirable but that interpretive constraints are vulnerable to permanent impairment in the L2 end state grammar. Sorace claims that the L2 end state grammar will display divergence from the target grammar in the interpretive domain. The input data for CLLD and CLD to which the participants in the present study have been exposed appears to be insufficient enough to allow them to acquire the interpretive difference between CLLD (with a clitic) and CLD (without a clitic). Under Sorace’s hypothesis, there is a lack of convergence on the target grammar. The so-called near-native speakers discussed in the present study have incomplete grammars. Since they are also end state speakers, the specificity distinction will presumably not be acquired at a later stage in development thereby resulting in a permanent state of fossilization or incomplete acquisition. Assuming the theory that UG constrains L2 grammars, optionality does not seem to fall within such a theory and appears to be contradictory. However, the type of fossilization found in the grammars of our participants (at the interpretive level) is L1-based since the L1 form co-exists with the L2 form. Moreover, our participants did correctly treat grammatical and ungrammatical sentences differently. As White (2003b:29) points out, a grammar that is unconstrained by UG would not be able to distinguish between grammatical and ungrammatical sentences, but rather, it would simply treat them alike.

In conclusion, we have demonstrated that L2 end state speakers of Spanish were able to approximate the target grammar. That is, the L2 syntactic structure was acquired as well as the corresponding syntactic constraints. Nevertheless, near-native speakers displayed optionality at the interpretive domain consistent with Sorace’s claim. The data from the present study provide evidence that the end state grammar of adult L1 English learners of L2 Spanish displays fossilization at the interpretive level resulting in an incomplete grammar.

Notes

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1. As of the first draft of this paper, only two other authors, Hertel (2000) and Lozano (2003), are currently conducting Spanish L2 acquisition research within the generative framework on
discourse level operators such as topic and focus. Hertel and Lozano examine focus and word order. There are two earlier studies on L2 Spanish topic constructions, namely, Camacho (1999) and Liceras et al. (1992).

2. Another form of left dislocation found in both English-type and Spanish-type languages is Hanging Topic Left Dislocation (HTLD):

(i) Juan, no sé por qué María vive con ese idiota.
   'John, I don’t know why María lives with that idiot.'

In HTLD the resumptive element can be a resumptive clitic, a resumptive pronoun, or an epithet as in (i). While all three forms of left dislocation involve topics, some properties associated with CLD and CLLD differ from those of HTLD supporting an analysis whereby CLD and CLLD have a different structure from HTLD. For this reason, we will not treat HTLD in the present paper but rather will concentrate on CLD and CLLD.

3. Contrastive focus in Spanish involves a left dislocated definite element and does not require a clitic (Liceras et al. 1992). Focus has traditionally been associated with new information. An emphatically stressed element bearing focal intonation introduces new information into the discourse while the lower clause bears information which is presupposed. Contrastive focus is used for the purpose of setting the emphatically stressed element apart from other members of a set of elements mutually understood to be relevant in the discourse. A comprehensive discussion on the differences between topic and focus are beyond the scope of the present work. We will only be dealing with contrastive topic. Please see Rizzi (1997) for a detailed analysis of the differences between the two.

4. For a more comprehensive discussion on the arguments in favour of assuming a CLD structure for non-specific topicalization in Spanish see Valenzuela (2005).

5. The sentence in (10c) is rendered grammatical as a CLLD but the dislocated phrases, ‘flores’ flowers, is interpreted as specific.

6. FP = functional projection.

7. Lded = left-dislocated phrase.

8. While Sorace (2000a) and Tsimpli et al. (2003) treat attrition of the L1 by near-native speakers of an L2, the theory can be extended to include L2 end state optionality.

9. Liceras et al. (1992)’s important study is included among the previous work on L2 topic constructions.

10. The 15 participants were those retained for the study after screening. The remaining participants which did not pass the screening process will not be reported on in the present research.

11. The topic is set apart from the sentence using a comma for two reasons. First, that is the convention in the majority of the literature on topicalization. Second, in a pilot test version of this task, the topic was not followed by a comma in order to avoid a long pause after the dislocated item. However, without the comma most of the participants interpreted the topic as the subject and the items had to be discarded.
References


