

The L2 Acquisition of Inchoative Structures by L1 Spanish Speakers

MONICA CABRERA CAMASCA

Loyola Marymount University

Monica.Cabrera@lmu.edu

Abstract: The present study provides evidence in favor of transfer as a developmentally constrained process in the L2 acquisition of inchoative forms of the causative alternation by L1 Spanish/L2 English learners at different levels of proficiency. Different types of L1 grammatical properties (akin to Full Transfer) seem to be transferred in later rather than in early L2 acquisition. 60 college students in Lima, Peru, were tested using a picture-based acceptability judgment task to elicit learners' responses, and corrections of the sentences that they found unacceptable. The sentence correction analysis revealed that morphological and lexico-syntactic transfer interacted at higher proficiency. It is concluded that L1 transfer is conditioned by development of L2 competency.

1. Introduction

Transfer, i.e. the influence of the first language (L1) in the interlanguage (IL), is a characteristic phenomenon of the process of second language (L2) acquisition. In the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), different theories have been proposed to predict how and in which stages the grammatical properties for the L1 are manifested in the IL. According to the theory of Full Transfer / Full Access (Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1996), the grammar of the L1 in its entirety is the initial state of the IL. Afterwards, depending on the properties of the L1 and L2, the linguistic input to which the learner is exposed acts as triggering factor in the reconstruction of the IL grammar. Universal Grammar (UG) conditions this restructuring process; for the most part, the IL complies with the restrictions imposed by UG during this whole process.

Nevertheless, other approaches to transfer have explored the relationship between L1 influence and L2 development. The seminal work by Wode (1978) and Zobl (1980), among many others, on the L2 acquisition of negation, questions, and relative clauses, hypothesized and provided evidence in favor of the view that learners have to have attained a certain level of L2 development for L1 transfer to be observed. More recently, in the context of Processability Theory (Pienemann 1998, 2003; Håkansson et al. 2002), it has been proposed that the L2 learner does not completely transfer the L1 grammar at the beginning of L2 acquisition. According to this theory, transfer is developmentally moderated; the learner can only transfer L1 structures that can be analyzed by the incipient interlanguage processor. Along the same lines, in the Autonomous Induction Theory (Carroll 2002), L1 sentence parsing procedures automatically transfer at the onset of L2 acquisition in order to deal with L2 stimuli, but the L1 grammar does not transfer at that point. The transfer of L1 parsing procedures would lead to parsing failure, which in turn leads to language acquisition. In the Input-Processing Model (VanPatten 1996), L1 transfer does not take place directly during input processing, but during intake evaluation. In other words, the L1 is one of the hypothesis testing mechanisms that interacts with intake representation to shape IL. The L2 learner would selectively use some L1 properties and not others.

The goal of the present study is to contribute to this debate investigating the role that different types of grammatical transfer play in the acquisition of inchoative structures with *se* in L2 Spanish by English-speaking learners at different competence levels. In my previous research

(Cabrera & Zubizarreta 2003, 2006; Cabrera 2008), a series of bidirectional studies on the acquisition of lexical and periphrastic English and Spanish causative structures; evidence of developmentally constrained grammatical transfer was found. In the case of lexical causatives, constructional properties were transferred before lexical specific features. In periphrastic causatives, a more salient surface property, such as word order was transferred before interpretive properties of this construction. Starting from the analysis of the syntactic and morphological properties of English and Spanish inchoative structures (*The window broke / La ventana se rompió*), the present study sets out to test the hypotheses of Full versus developmentally constrained transfer.

2. Inchoative sentences in Spanish and English

One of the most common verbal alternations in the languages of the world is the causative-inchoative alternation, exemplified in (1). In this alternation, the transitive form (1a) encodes a causative situation with an argument that acts as a cause (*Juan / John*) and a change of state that the patient argument undergoes (*la ventana / the window*), while the intransitive or inchoative form focuses on the result.

- (1) a. Juan rompió la ventana. / John broke the window.
b. La ventana se rompió. / The window broke.

Inchoative structures in Spanish and English can be characterized according to their lexico-syntactic and morphological properties. These structures show similarities in the former, but are different in the latter.

2.1 Lexico-syntactic properties

Not all verb classes participate in the causative-inchoative alternation. In English as in Spanish, only a subset of unaccusative verbs, called “alternating unaccusatives”, alternate in transitivity. These are verbs that encode a change of state or location, like *romper / break* and *cerrar / open*. According to Levin & Rappaport-Hovav (1995), this verb class is characterized by allowing a wide selection of arguments as subjects because the event cause is unspecified. As illustrated in (2), this could be an agent (*Juan / John*), an instrument (*la pelota / the ball*) or a natural force (*el viento / the wind*). Moreover, the cause can be left unexpressed, such as the inchoative forms in (3), or it can be internal to the patient, as shown in (4).

- (2) a. Juan / la pelota / el viento rompió la ventana.
b. John / the ball / the wind broke the window.
- (3) a. La ventana se rompió.
b. The window broke.
- (4) a. La ventana se rompió sola.
b. The window broke by itself.

Verbs that alternate in transitivity are those that can instantiate an unaccusative I-syntax structure (Hale & Keyser 2002; Zubizarreta & Oh 2007) by virtue of encoding directed change or change

of location. The Aspect (Asp) node in the unaccusative structure in (5) below encodes inner aspect.

- (5) Unaccusative structure (or directed change construction):
 [D₁ [T [Asp [D₂ [V XP_{dir}]]]]]

On the other hand, not all the verbs that have a transitive form can participate in the causative-inchoative alternation. Verbs of external specified causation, which I will denominate “non-alternating transitives”, cannot appear in the inchoative form. According to Levin & Rappaport-Hovav (1995), the argument that expresses the cause of the event is specifically an agent (*Patricia*), or an instrument manipulated by an agent (*el cuchillo / the knife*), which is illustrated in (6). Due to the fact that the cause should be specified, this cannot be left without expressing and, therefore, the inchoative form becomes unacceptable, as shown in (7).

- (6) a. Patricia / el cuchillo cortó la carne.
 b. Patricia / the knife cut the meat.
- (7) a. *La carne se cortó.¹
 b. *The meat cut.

2.2. Morphological properties

Although from the lexico-syntactic point of view the verb classes that alternate in transitivity in English and Spanish are the same, these languages are different in the morphological marking of the intransitive member of the causative-inchoative alternation. As shown in (8), in Spanish, the intransitive form is marked with the pronoun *se*, while in English there is no morphological marker that indicates the change in argument structure.

- (8) a. La ventana se rompió.
 b. The window broke.

Following the analysis of Kempchinsky (2004) and Bruhn de Garavito (1999), in Spanish, the reflexive marker *se* acts as the head of Aspect Phrase (AspP) where it introduces the information of change of state. In English, an empty morpheme would head AspP.

The I-syntactic and morphological analysis assumed in this section is at the base of the hypotheses built for the present study. Taking into account the absence in phonetic form of the head of AspP in English L2 input versus the morphological marking with *se* in L1 Spanish, it is predicted that the lack of this feature will have an effect that we could probably trace since early acquisition. On the other hand, the commonality of the I-syntax structure of the verbs that alternate in transitivity in Spanish and English, may also have an effect since early on, as it was the case with lexical causatives (cf. 1a). The fact that these lexico-syntactic and morphological properties of the native and target languages have been separated allows for tracing what it is that L2 learners transfer at which stage of development. Do they transfer all these properties at once? Do they transfer some of them but not others?

¹ The intended interpretation of this sentence is not the *se*-passive or *se*-middle readings.

3. Previous studies

Research on the L2 acquisition of argument structure is relatively recent in the field of SLA. Some studies have investigated the acquisition of inchoative *se* by L1 English-speaking learners in different proficiency levels of L2 Spanish, but only one study has focused on the L2 acquisition of English inchoative structures by L1 Spanish speakers: Montrul (2001). In what follows, I summarize the characteristics of this study and its findings.

Montrul (2001) studied the L2 acquisition of English inchoative structures by L1 Spanish learners at the intermediate level as part of a larger study which included lexical, and periphrastic causatives as well, and an L1 Turkish experimental group. An acceptability judgment test was used, where the interpretation of sentences was presented in pictures. Sentences containing different verb classes, including alternating unaccusatives (*romper*) and non-alternating transitives (*cortar*), were used. These sentences were presented in pairs, where the zero-derived inchoative and a *get*-periphrastic inchoative were manipulated (*The door opened* / *The door got opened*) in order to test learner's sensitivity to morphological marking in the L2 input. The grammatical acceptability of each of these sentences was rated individually using a scale with values from -3 to +3. It also predicted that, if learners were sensitive to the lexico-syntactic properties of alternating verbs, versus those that do not alternate in transitivity, they should have rated alternating verbs (*The door opened*) higher than transitive non-alternating ones in the inchoative/transitive configuration (**The picture painted*).

It found that, at the intermediate level, L1 Spanish learners preferred *get*-periphrastic sentences with alternating verbs (mean = 1.59) to zero-derived ones (-.28). The English control group showed the opposite behavior: they preferred the latter form (2.78) to the former (.22). Montrul observed that learners' responses showed a preference for morphological marking in these structures, as it is the case in Spanish, their L1. It proposed that the preference of the *get*-periphrastic form to the zero-based inchoative is most likely the result of L1 transfer. Transfer is proposed as a modular phenomenon, i.e. morphology, but not argument structure, is more likely to transfer in early acquisition. The proposal of modular transfer of morphology is further supported by the fact that L2 learners in this study tended to incorrectly accept overgeneralized lexical causatives with non-alternating verbs (**The magician disappeared the rabbit* / **The dentist cried the boy*). Since these lexical causatives are unacceptable in the L1, Montrul claims that transfer of L1 argument structure is not at play. Moreover, since overgeneralized causatives have been attested in child language acquisition of both English and Spanish, following a proposal by Braine et al. (1990), the author argues in favor of the existence of a default transitive template, available in both the L1 and L2 acquisition processes. However, it should be noticed that overgeneralized causatives in child and adult language acquisition tend to show different properties. Whereas children overgeneralize causatives with most verb classes, adult L2 learners tend to do so with unaccusative verbs thus showing sensitivity to specific verb classes, which can be traced back to L1 properties (cf. Cabrera & Zubizarreta 2003, 2006; Cabrera 2008). However, regarding sensitivity to lexico-syntactic properties of verb classes, it should be noted that the L1 Spanish learners tended to marginally prefer inchoatives with alternating verbs (*The door opened*; mean = -.28) to those with non-alternating transitives (**The picture painted*; mean = -1.75). The latter, which are unacceptable structures in their L1, were clearly rejected, but the former, which are also acceptable in Spanish, were marginally rejected. Therefore, the effects of transfer of lexico-syntactic properties are not clear-cut.

Two aspects of the experimental design of Montrul's study can be problematic. First, it only included intermediate level learners, and therefore based on this data a correlation between

transfer and L2 development cannot be established. Another aspect is the instrument design. Presenting the sentences in the test items in pairs could have encouraged a direct comparison between the acceptable zero-based inchoative form and the *get*-periphrastic form. Although participants were asked to rate each sentence individually, the fact that these structures appeared together and were illustrated by the same picture may indicate that their ratings were comparative in nature. Subjects, on the other hand, were not reporting what they found grammatically unacceptable with either sentence when rating them on the negative side of the scale. The comparative nature of the acceptability judgment task may have caused participant bias with respect to presence/absence of morphology. The present study builds on Montrul's design and findings by including other levels of proficiency and partially redesigning the instrument by adding some elements of production to it, such as sentence correction, and leaving aside the possibility of comparative acceptability judgments.

4. Theories of transfer: predictions

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the effects of transfer in the L2 acquisition of English inchoative structures by L1 Spanish speakers. Two approaches to L1 transfer are evaluated, Full Transfer as the initial state of L2 acquisition (Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1996) and Developmentally Moderated Transfer (Pienemann 1998, 2003; Håkansson et al. 2002). More specifically, as proposed in Cabrera & Zubizarreta (2003), and Cabrera (2008), based on the data of L2 acquisition of Spanish and English lexical causatives with different verb classes, lexico-syntactic properties are transferred in early acquisition. The contribution of the present study is that it allows for the exploration of the interaction between transfer of morphological versus lexico-syntactic properties. Since the absence of a morphological marker may be a salient property of the English L2 input, given its presence in the L1, it is possible that transfer of morphology will take precedence over transfer of the lexico-syntactic properties. For example, faced with sentences such as *The door opened* and **The picture painted*, the L2 learner may either make use of her L1 l-syntax properties and, therefore, prefer the former to the latter, or make use of morphological properties, thus rejecting *The door opened* due to the absence of a morphological marker analogous to Spanish *se*.

Starting off from the central hypothesis that the grammatical properties of the L1 will determine the characteristics of inchoative structures in the IL, I will discuss the predictions of both approaches to transfer in more detail. According to the Developmentally Moderated Transfer approach, not all the grammatical properties are transferred at the same time. If only the lexico-syntactic properties of English verbs are transferred, learners will accept alternating verbs *La ventana se rompió* 'The window broke') and reject non-alternating transitives (**La carne se cortó* 'The meat was cut'). On the other hand, if learners transfer only the morphological properties of English, they will clearly reject alternating verbs in the inchoative configuration and will tend to correct these sentences using a morphological marker that translates *se* (for example, the reflexive marker *self*). It is unclear how learners would treat intransitive sentences with non-alternating transitives as their unacceptability is not due to lack morphological marking but to their lexico-syntactic structure. However, if learners were to incorrectly interpret these sentences as *se*-passives, the absence of morphological marking may play a role in rejecting them.

Full Transfer predicts that the L1 in its entirety is transferred in the earliest stage of L2 acquisition. If learners transfer the lexico-syntactic properties as much as the morphological ones, they will reject both types of verbs but for different reasons. Alternating verbs will be

rejected due to the absence of *se* and not due to the intransitive/inchoative form, while non-alternating verbs will be rejected in the intransitive structure. With alternating verbs, learners will suggest that the absence of morphology is the problem (perhaps providing a correction such as **The window broke self*), but with non-alternating ones, they would correct the inchoative structure transforming them into a different structure (for example, a transitive sentence like *Someone broke the window*).

Differently from Montrul (2001), the instrument design of the present study, in which L2 learners are required to provide a correction for each sentence that they rate as unacceptable, as we will see in the next section, allows for an exploration as to the reasons why subjects rejected inchoative structures, without directing their attention to a specific grammatical feature. On the other hand, the selection of verb per class tested in the present study is larger compared to that of previous research, while testing across different levels of proficiency. Although there is a previous study on this topic, the instruments, number of tested verbs, and levels of proficiency in them justify the need for a new study on the L2 acquisition of English inchoative structures in which these aspects are modified and improved in order to more carefully investigate the role of L1 transfer.

5. Methods

The experimental group was composed of 60 Spanish-speaking students of English in a post-secondary language academy in Lima, Perú (average age = 21.4). The control group was formed by 18 native speakers of English tested in Los Angeles, California (average age = 18.94). The levels of proficiency in the L2 were determined using a cloze test. The experimental group was divided into three levels: beginners (n = 19), intermediates (n = 21), and advanced (n = 20). Unlike Montrul (2001), different levels of proficiency were tested to investigate the unfolding of L1 transfer effects at different stages of L2 acquisition.

Following Montrul (2001), learners were evaluated with a translation test of verbs to determine if they knew the idiosyncratic meaning of verbs before judging them in sentences. In this test, the subjects had to translate the verbs from English to Spanish using only one word. The verbs used in this test, and in the acceptability judgment task are presented in Table 1.

The main task of the study was the acceptability judgment test designed based on that of Montrul (2001), but substantial changes were made to prevent eliciting comparative judgment of sentences. The purpose of this test was to determine if L2 learners accepted (or rejected) the verbs presented before in an intransitive/inchoative configuration. In total, 24 test items and 15 fillers were included. Each sentence appeared accompanied by a picture to indicate the intended interpretation. Participants were asked to evaluate the sentences focusing on its acceptability in the L2 and its appropriateness to express the situation represented in the picture, using a Likert scale from -3 to +3, and to provide a corrected version of the item if they rated it with a negative value. Table 2 shows examples of the sentences included in this test.

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Table 1: Verbs tested in the Translation and Acceptability Judgment tests (AJT)

Non-Alternating Unaccusatives	Unergatives	Alternating Unaccusatives	Non-Alternating Transitives
appear	bark	break	build
arrive	camp	burn	cut
come	cry	close	design
enter	fight	cook	paint
go	laugh	open	sell
happen	smoke	stop	write

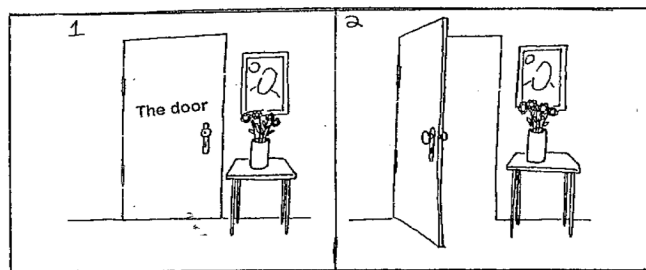
Table 2: Examples of inchoative sentences used in the Acceptability Judgment Test

Non-Alternating Unaccusatives	The girl arrived at school late.
Unergatives	Juan smoked.
Alternating Unaccusatives	The door opened.
Non-Alternating Transitives	*The letter wrote.

As displayed in Figures 1 and 2, labels were included to identify the patient argument to ensure that the participants had the necessary vocabulary to complete the test. All the sentences were intransitive; therefore, an agent argument was not included in any of the pictures. Differently from Montrul (2001), each picture was accompanied by only one sentence; no pair of sentences was used. All verbs were tested in the inchoative/intransitive form; the periphrastic-*get* form was not used. Participants were asked to provide a correction to the original sentence if they had rated it with a negative value. In these corrections, I expected to find additions of morphological markers or other type of transformation to the original sentences.

In Figure 1, an example is presented with an alternating unaccusative verb, and in Figure 2 one is included with a non-alternating transitive, with a correction provided by the learner.

Figure 1: Test item with alternating unaccusative verb in the AJT

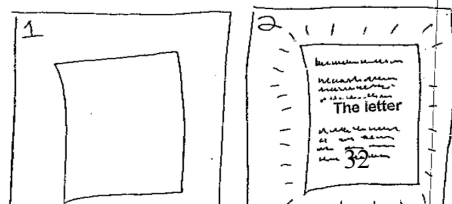


The door opened.

-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3

Oración correcta: _____

Figure 2: Test item with transitive non-alternating verb in the AJT

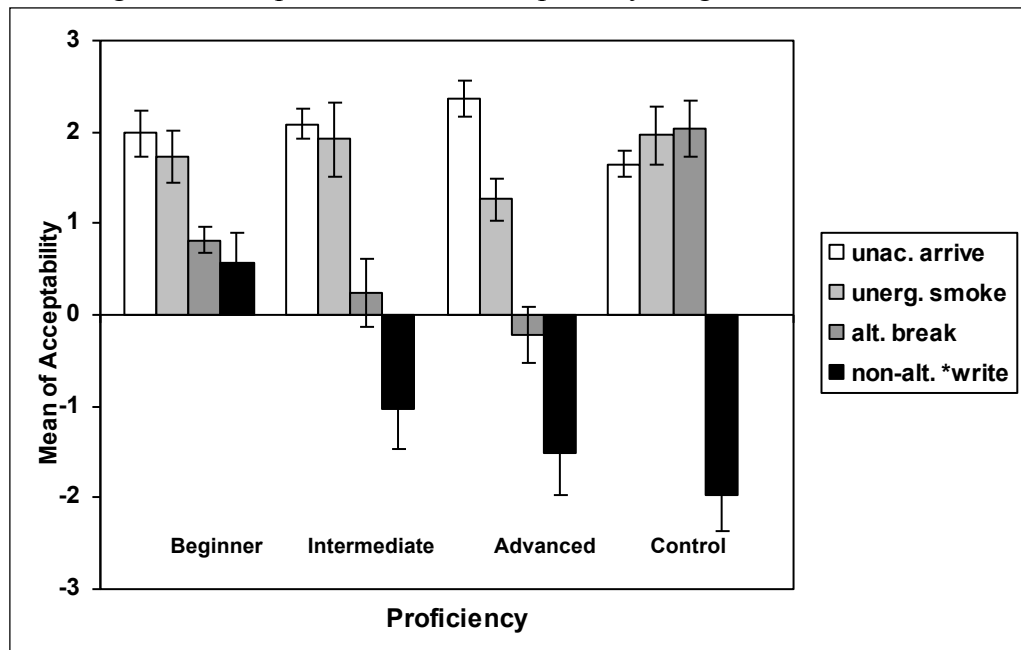


6. Group Results

Means of acceptability were calculated for each verb class tested (cf. tables 1 and 2). In Figure 3, the means of acceptability by verb class for each level of proficiency and the control group with their corresponding standard error bars are presented. As can be appreciated, the averages for non-alternating unaccusative (unac) and unergative verbs (unerg) were higher than those obtained for alternating unaccusative (alt) and non-alternating transitive verbs (non-alt). One-Way ANOVAS per verb class resulted statistically significant for alternating unaccusatives ($F(3,72) = 10.09, p < .0001$) and non-alternating transitives ($F(3,72) = 8.54, p < .0001$), and did not reach significant levels for the remaining verb classes. Post-hoc Dunnett T3 tests indicated that, for alternating unaccusatives, the mean of the control group was significantly higher to the learner's means at all levels of competence. For non-alternating transitives, the means of the control group, and the intermediates and advanced learners were significantly higher to the beginners'. In what follows, I focus on the results for the verb classes that can appear in transitive configuration: alternating unaccusatives (*romper*), and non-alternating transitives (*cut*).

Paired-sample t-tests were used to statistically compare the averages for alternating and non-alternating verbs within each level of competence. Although alternating verbs have a higher average than non-alternating at all the levels of proficiency, the difference between these only resulted statistically significant for the intermediate ($p < .005$) and the advanced ($p < .005$). The difference among these verb classes also resulted significant for the control group ($p < .005$), which supports the description of English inchoative structures presented in section 2.

Figure 3: Group results of the Acceptability Judgment Test



The group analyses indicated that intransitive forms with alternating unaccusatives and non-alternating transitive verbs were marginally accepted at the beginner level. At the intermediate level, the first are still marginally accepted while the second is rejected. At the advanced level, alternating verbs are marginally rejected in this configuration, while non-alternating are more clearly rejected. In other words, in the early levels of acquisition, learners do not seem to make a

distinction between these lexico-syntactic verb classes, while they do at the intermediate and advanced levels.

Nevertheless, means may hide details of individual variation, a common phenomenon in L2 acquisition; moreover, since presence / absence of morphology was not manipulated in the stimuli, these means do not tell us much about the role of morphology in learners' acceptability judgments. For these reasons, I performed a qualitative analysis of sentence correction patterns.

7. Qualitative analysis: Correction patterns

In the present qualitative analysis done, the reasons for which the learners rejected the intransitive forms with alternating unaccusative and non-alternating transitive verbs were explored by analyzing L2 learner's corrections to the original sentences. A percentage for each type of correction was calculated. Only a consistent correction pattern per subject (at or above 50%) was included. The types of corrections that were found were the following: the learner added *self*, changed the sentence from the intransitive to a different configuration (transitive, passive or *be* + stative adjective) or changed word order (subject / verb inversion).

As shown in Table 3, beginners and intermediates that rejected the intransitive forms of alternating unaccusative verbs tended to correct them by transforming the sentences into passives or statives. The latter is a type of correction whose frequency decreased with higher proficiency, whereas the frequency of the former showed the opposite pattern. In the advanced group, the most common correction was changing the intransitive to the passive form. On the other hand, as can be seen in Table 4, the most common and consistent correction for the intransitive form of non-alternating transitive verbs was the change to the transitive form. These data show that learners that reject the intransitive forms have different reasons to reject them. With transitive alternating verbs, lexico-syntactic and morphological properties seem to be at play, whereas with non-alternating verbs mostly lexico-syntactic considerations seem to matter, especially at higher proficiency.

Table 3: Percentage of corrections with alternating unaccusative verbs

Correction	Beginner (n=36)	Intermediate (n=47)	Advanced (n=60)
Added <i>self</i> <i>The door opened itself.</i>	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Transitive <i>Someone opened the door.</i>	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	6 (10%)
Passive <i>The door was opened (by someone).</i>	22 (61%)	37 (79%)	49 (82%)
Stative <i>The door is open.</i>	11 (30%)	9 (19%)	5 (8%)
Changed word order <i>Opened the door.</i>	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Table 4: Percentage of corrections with non-alternating transitive verbs

Correction	Beginner (n=45)	Intermediate (n=76)	Advanced (n=93)
Added <i>self</i> <i>The letter wrote itself.</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Transitive <i>Someone wrote the letter.</i>	3 (7%)	0 (0%)	7 (8%)
Passive <i>The letter was written (by someone).</i>	37 (82%)	69 (91%)	84 (90%)
Stative <i>The letter is written.</i>	3 (7%)	7 (9%)	2 (2%)
Changed word order <i>Wrote the letter.</i>	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

8. Discussion of the results

The present study evaluates the role of the L1 in the development of the IL, with respect to the inchoative (or intransitive) member of the causative / inchoative alternation in English as L2. Two theories are evaluated, Developmentally Moderated Transfer and Full Transfer. Based on the analysis of the lexico-syntactic and morphological properties of the structure studied, specific predictions were formulated.

According to Developmentally Constrained Transfer, not all of the properties of the L1 are transferred in the same stage of acquisition; in other words, transfer requires a certain level of competence in the L2. If the learner transfers only the lexico-syntactic properties, s/he would prefer alternating unaccusative (*The window broke*) to non-alternating transitives (**The meat cut*) in the intransitive form. The group results show that this prediction more suitably describes the behavior of the intermediate and advanced groups than that of the beginners. The qualitative analyses also show that the differentiation among these verb classes, i.e. the preference of the former to the latter, is clearer when the competence in the L2 is higher.

On the other hand, if the learner only transfers morphological properties, she will reject alternating unaccusatives in the inchoative configuration due to the absence of a marker equivalent to *se*. The group results show that beginners and intermediates marginally accept these intransitive sentences, and the advanced marginally rejected them. Through the qualitative analysis of sentence corrections, it is possible to observe that adding a reflexive morphological marker, such as *self* or *itself*, which would be the equivalent to a surface literal translation of the L2 stimulus into the learner's L1, was clearly not the preferred correction with only one learner using it. The most frequent correction for alternating unaccusatives and non-alternating transitives was the transformation of the intransitive sentence into the passive form. This type of correction may give us evidence in favor of transfer of morphology if the passive structure is used by the learner to translate the *se*-inchoative with alternating unaccusatives and the *se*-passive with non-alternating transitives. Although the passive was not the intended interpretation with non-alternating transitive verbs, it is possible that learners reinterpret these sentences in order to find a correction that could turn them into acceptability.

Finally, Full Transfer predicts that the L1 in its entirety is transferred in the earliest stage of L2 acquisition. If learners transfer the lexico-syntactic and morphological properties, they will reject both types of verbs for different reasons. Alternating verbs will be rejected due to the

absence of *se*-inchoative and non-alternating ones will be rejected for occurring in the intransitive form (or, if these structures were reinterpreted by the learners as passives, they would be rejected due to absence of *se*-passive). The group results show that the intermediate and advanced groups clearly preferred alternating verbs to non-alternating ones in intransitive configuration. The qualitative analysis of corrections gave evidence in favor of the differentiation between verb classes being clearer at the intermediate and advanced levels. However, the most frequent type of correction used, the passive structure, was common between both verb classes, which as mentioned before could be indicative of transfer of L1 morphological properties, more specifically, of different types of *se* (inchoative and passive). In other words, the post-beginner groups tend to show a behavior more consistent, although not totally accounted by, with Full Transfer instead of the beginners.

Despite the high level of individual variation at all levels of proficiency found in the L2 acquisition of English inchoatives, the data of the present study supports the theory of Developmentally Constrained Transfer, and not Full Transfer, especially in early acquisition. Different properties of the L1 are transferred at different levels of proficiency. The theory of Full Transfer is partially supported, contrary to the predictions, by the advanced level and not by the beginning one, which seems to suggest that higher L2 proficiency is a precondition of L1 transfer. Based on the data, the learners in the present study do not seem to transfer lexico-syntactic properties of verb classes at the beginning level, since they accept alternating unaccusatives and non-alternating transitives to the same extent in intransitive configuration. At that stage, overgeneralizations of non-alternating transitives in intransitive sentences take place. Following Montrul (2001), these overgeneralizations may be due to the learner's underspecified lexico-syntactic representation in their IL, which would not allow for distinctions between verb classes. Another possible motivation for these errors could be the absence of morphology in the L2 input. If L1 Spanish speakers, based on their L1, expect to find a morphological marking equivalent to *se* in the L2 input, its absence may motivate some to over or under accept these structures. Given the individual analysis of corrections, it is not possible to tease apart whether the correction with a passive structure is motivated by transfer of lexico-syntactic or morphological properties. The following broad developmental stages emerge:

- (9) a. Stage 1: focus on morphological properties of L1/L2:
Overgeneralization or undergeneralization with alternating and transitive non-alternating verbs
- b. Stage 2: lexico-syntactic transfer:
Preference for alternating to non-alternating verbs regardless of absence of morphology

Dealing with how the morphological properties of L2 input fit to those of the L1 takes precedence over lexico-syntactic transfer differently from what I found for lexical causatives in my previous research on the L2 acquisition of English and Spanish. Given that morphological marking is not at play in lexical causatives in these languages, but mostly similarities in constructional properties, and differences related to specific verb classes, the present results are not in contradiction with the developmental sequence for lexical causatives.

As discussed in section 3, Montrul (2001) proposed the model of Modular Transfer, according to which morphology is more likely to transfer than argument structure. This approach was coherent with the data reported in that study. However, the present study, by taking into

consideration different levels of proficiency, and making explicit predictions according to different types of L1 properties, provides a different view of transfer. L1 transfer does not seem to be modular, i.e. there is not incompatibility between morphological and lexico-syntactic transfer. What is different is the developmental stage at which certain type of transfer is more readily available. Lexico-syntactic transfer, or sensitivity to different verb classes, is more noticeable later on.

9. Conclusion

In this work, it has been proposed that the acquisition of inchoative / intransitive structures in L2 English can be explained by transfer of different aspects of the L1 at different levels of proficiency. The data presented suggests that transfer is moderated by the development of L2 competence, while clear support for Full Transfer, at least for the beginning level, was not found. Strong support for modular transfer of morphology was not found either. The individual variation reported here shows that it is a patterned feature of L2 populations. More research on individual variation is necessary to uncover the patterns that underlie means and other group statistical measures.

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