The Status of Topic Constructions in L2 End State Spanish

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines end state grammars in order to explore the question of whether or not it is possible for adult L2 learners to achieve native-like mental representations. In particular, we investigate Spanish topic constructions which are associated with the functional category CP, a [recursive] property associated with the CP, and a clitic projection associated with [+specific] topic constructions. We hypothesize that functional categories, abstract features, and feature specifications are acquirable in adult L2 acquisition and that native-like representations in the L2 are possible, in principle. We examine the final state grammars of English-speaking end state speakers of L2 Spanish and address two major questions relating to the investigation of end state grammars. First, whether or not native-like performance is attainable in the L2 and, second, whether parameters can be reset in adult L2 acquisition to settings appropriate to the target language.

1. ULTIMATE ATTAINMENT IN THE L2

Research in ultimate attainment in the second language (L2) has centred mainly on the issue of critical periods or on the investigation of near native grammars. While both issues are interrelated, it is the study of near native grammars which has recently come to the forefront of the current literature (Coppieters 1987; Johnson & Newport 1991; Birdsong 1992; Sorace 1993; White & Genesee 1996; Lardiere 1998; White 2002; Bruhn de Garavito 2002; Lozano 2002; Montrul & Slabakova forthcoming 2003). Debate centres on whether or not mental representations in the L2 can be native-like.

In first language (L1) acquisition, the final outcome is, under normal circumstances, a fully developed native grammar with relatively little variation from person to person. In L2 acquisition, on the other hand, 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 that of other L2 learners with the same L1. In other words, an *end state 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*.

The issue of near-nativeness is at the centre of the debate on end state grammars. Some

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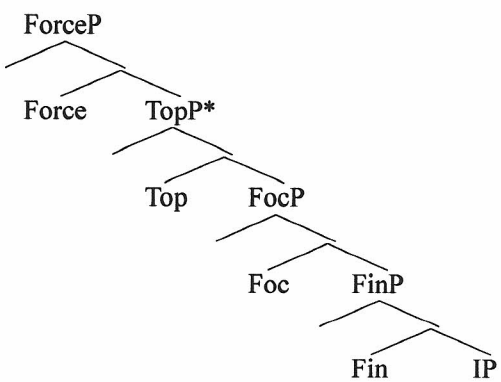
researchers contend that those L2 speakers whose performance is apparently native-like do not in fact have native-like mental representation but rather arrive at that performance by other means (Lozano 2002; Hawkins & Chan 1997; Coppieters 1987). Some researchers claim that near-native grammars are not at all possible (Johnson & Newport 1991; Sorace 1993). As Sorace explains, even the term 'near-native' suggests a shortcoming or lack of convergence on the target grammar. Indeed, Sorace makes a distinction between incomplete and divergent 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 differently 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 2002; Montrul & Slabakova submitted). 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.

2. TOPIC CONSTRUCTIONS IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH

Rizzi (1997, 2000) proposes an articulated structure for the CP, shown in (1):

(1)



In Rizzi's structure, there are two iterative Topic Phrases (TopP) positioned above and below the Focus Phrase (FocP). Rizzi's proposal for the fine structure of the left periphery comes amid recent work on the complementizer system and I to C movement which had been heading in the direction of recursive CP projections (Authier 1992, among others). Rizzi's claim is that the CP should split into projections in the manner of Pollock's (1989) proposal for the splitting of IP. We assume Rizzi's structure for CP and now turn to topic-comment constructions.

Topic is typically associated with old information and is what the sentence is about, while the *comment* is what is said about the topic. The type of topic relevant to Rizzi's analysis is the left dislocated topic, in particular the "clitic left dislocated" topic (as in Cinque 1990), which has the following properties (Zagona 2002; Zubizarreta 2001). First, it can be in the left periphery of either the matrix clause, as in (2), or the subordinate clause, as in (3):

(2) *Ese libro*, lo leí.
That book, CL I-read

(3) Rafael preguntó que, *a María*, quién la llamó
Rafael asked that, to María, who CL called
'Rafael asked who it is that called María'

Second, there is a syntactic relationship between the left dislocated topic and the open position within the IP as evidenced by the preposition which case marks the DP (as in (4)):

(4) *A María*, Pedro le regaló flores.
To María, Pedro CL gave flowers
'To María, Pedro gave flowers'

Third, the topic must have a referent in the comment (IP) which can only be a clitic (shown in (2 - 4) above) and can neither be a pronoun nor an epithet as in (5 - 6) respectively:

(5) *A Pedro, no quiero ver a él.
To Pedro, no I-want to.see to him
'Pedro, I don't want to see him'
(6) *A Pedro, no quiero ver a ese antipático.
To Pedro, no I-want to.see to that mean.guy
'Pedro, I don't want to see that jerk'

Finally, a clitic left dislocated topic cannot be extracted from a relative clause (as in (7)):

(7) *A Rafael, Nena es la mujer que le quiere.
To Rafael, Nena is the woman that CL loves
'Rafael, Nena is the woman that loves him'

Rizzi (1997, 2000) claims there is a parameter differentiating English and Romance topic-comment structures which depends on the availability or not of a null anaphoric operator in these languages. The parametric difference between the two language groups is that in English, the preposed topic connects to the comment via a null anaphoric operator (as in (8)) whereas in Spanish, the connection between the topic and the comment is made using clitic left dislocation (CLLD) (as in (2) above and repeated in (9)):

(8) That book, [Op [I read t]].
(9) Ese libro, lo leí.
That book, CL I-read
'That book, I read'

Crucially, Rizzi stipulates that null anaphoric operators and clitics are functionally equivalent since they both link the topic with the open position in the IP. According to Rizzi's parameter for topic constructions, there are English-type topics (with the null operator) and Romance-type topics (with the CLLD) and languages fall in either one category or the other. However, Spanish appears to have both the English-type and the Romance-type topic constructions.

In Spanish, the notion of specificity is crucial for topicalization. When a topicalized element is specific, it takes a clitic, thus the CLLD, or Romance-type, structure, (shown in (10)) however, when a topicalized element is non-specific or generic (shown in (11) – (13) respectively), it does not take the CLLD structure:

(10) El libro, lo leí.
The book, CL I-read
'The book, I read'
(11) Un libro, leí.
A book, I-read
'A book, I read'
(12) *Un libro, lo leí.
A book, CL I-read
'A book, I read it'
(13) Libros, leí.
Books, I-read.
'Books, I read'

Although the topic in (11) is an indefinite DP, this is not sufficient to render the topicalized DP non-specific since it can also co-occur with a CLLD construction where a partitive reading is rendered:

(14) Context: María is in a crowd of strangers. Suddenly, she recognizes one of them. She says to herself:

A una chica, la conozco de la escuela.[1]
To a girl, CL I-know from the school
'One girl, I know from school.'

The sentence in (14) without the clitic would be ungrammatical given the context, since the topic '*a una chica*' is referring to one of a set of known entities. Zubizarreta (2001) points out that in Spanish, and other Romance languages, the specificity of an indefinite DP can be determined using a relative clause. A specific DP will take the indicative mood in the relative while the non-specific DP will take the subjunctive mood in the relative clause. This is shown in (15a, b):

(15) a. Una chica que conozco[2] (una chica = specific)
A girl that I-know(IND)
'A girl that I know'
b. Una chica que conozca (una chica = non-specific)
A girl that I-know(SUBJ)
'A girl that I know'

Unlike indefinites, generic topics (bare nouns), never take the CLLD structure:

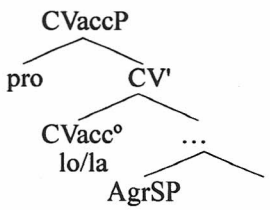
[1] Interestingly, the partitive reading is not possible when the DP is IP-internal:
(i) Conozco a una chica
I-know to a girl
'I know a girl'
(ii) *La conozco a una chica.
CL conozco to a girl
'I know a girl'
Thus, movement to TopP is what renders the partitive interpretation.
[2] These examples are taken from Zubizarreta (2001).

(16) Vitaminas, (*las) tomo todos los días.
Vitamins, (*CL) I-take every the days
'Vitamins, I take everyday'

English topics do not have the same difference in structures depending on the specificity of the preposed element since English does not have clitics and it is restricted to the construction using the null anaphoric operator, that is, the English-type structure.

We have seen that Spanish topic constructions vary depending on the specificity of the preposed element. A specific topic is constructed using the CLLD structure while the non-specific or generic topic is not. An implicit assumption which Rizzi makes is that there is a topicalized element in Romance languages if and only if there is a clitic in the IP. However, this does not account for the two structures found in Spanish. We will, therefore, propose that Spanish has both Romance-type and English-type topic structures. This has two crucial consequences. First, the Romance-type topic construction has a clitic projection in the IP. Since this clitic projection is only present in Spanish when the topicalized element is specific, then it is reasonable to assume that the clitic projection and the DP have [specific] features which need to check against each other. For example, the [specific] feature is what gives a partitive reading to the topic in (14) but when there is no clitic, and therefore no clitic projection, as in (11), the indefinite DP gets the non-specific reading. If we stipulate a [specific] feature in the clitic projection, this difference can be accounted for. Second, the presence of a clitic in Romance-type topics means that there is additional structure in this type of topic construction, namely, the functional projection, clitic voice (CV) as in Roberts (1997) an example of which is shown in (17), which must contain the [specific] feature.

(17)



3. THEORIES ON THE ACQUISITION OF FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES

In the present paper, we examine the nature of L2 end state grammars with respect to topic constructions specifically examining whether English learners, (a) can acquire the recursive property associated with TopP in Spanish, (b) can acquire the clitic projection associated with Romance-type topic constructions, and (c) can acquire the [specific] feature in the clitic head. There is, therefore, a clustering of properties associated with topic constructions, which is absent in the L1 and must be acquired if L2 acquisition is to be 'successful'. The main focus of our investigation centres on the characterization of end state grammars in general, and the status of topic constructions in L2 Spanish in particular. We examine the issue of ultimate attainment and test two theories against each other which predict differing outcomes for adult L2 end state grammars.

Among current theories on the acquisition of functional categories in post-childhood L2 acquisition, a major distinction can be made between theories that contend that access to UG is unimpaired and those that contend that access to UG is impaired. The no impairment theorists argue that functional categories, functional features, and feature specifications associated with functional categories are acquirable in adult L2 acquisition (Epstein, Flynn, & Martohardjono 1996; Grondin & White 1996; Lakshmanan & Selinker 1994; Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1996;

Vainikka & Young-Scholten 1994, 1996; White 1996; White & Bruhn de Garavito to appear; White et al. 2001) while theorists that claim that access to UG in adult L2 acquisition is somehow impaired argue that new functional projections, functional features and their specifications are not acquirable (Hawkins 1998; Hawkins & Chan 1997; Smith & Tsimpli 1995; Tsimpli & Roussou 1991). While the above theories do not directly address the issue of ultimate attainment, their claims do, however, make implicit assumptions about the end state. The theories which argue for unimpaired access imply possible convergence on a native-like end state in the L2 whereas the theories which argue for impaired access predict non-convergence on a native-like L2 end state grammar where the L1 and L2 target grammar differ with respect to parametric values.

The first theory we will examine is the No Parameter Resetting Hypothesis (NPRH) (Tsimpli & Roussou 1991; Smith & Tsimpli 1995) in which the authors argue that a sub-module of UG containing all the functional categories, where parametric variation is found, is alone subject to maturational constraints. In L2 acquisition, this functional module is not accessible resulting in a failure to reset parameters in the L2 after the critical period. The two main claims of this hypothesis are (i) that UG principles are available in L2 acquisition and (ii) parameter resetting in the L2 is not possible where the target grammar and the L1 have different parametric values.

The NPRH bases its claim on two main assumptions. First, parameters are not associated with UG principles but rather with functional categories, the latter being the source of parametric variation. Second, the values associated with functional categories exclusively determine parametric variation. Crucially, the NPRH stipulates that functional categories form a different component (a submodule) of UG, the UG lexicon, and that this submodule of UG containing functional categories alone is subject to maturational constraints in that it is inaccessible to the adult L2 learner. Consequently, parameter resetting in adult L2 acquisition is impossible. Thus, parameter settings not set before the critical period will die out, thereby becoming inaccessible in post-childhood acquisition. In consequence, only those parameter settings instantiated in the L1 are exemplified in interlanguage (IL) grammars. Since an L2 grammar is limited to the features which are present in the L1, under this hypothesis, ultimate attainment cannot be native-like.

Tsimpli & Roussou predict that where the L1 and L2 differ with respect to parameter values, parameter resetting is impossible and the L2 grammar at the early stages will be L1-constrained. According the NPRH, at later stages of acquisition the L2 learner may appear to have reset the parameter to a value appropriate to that of a native speaker of the target language which the authors claim is the result of "general learning mechanisms correctly analyzing the input data". An updated version of the NPRH, namely the Failed Functional Features Hypothesis (FFFH) of Hawkins & Chan (1997) attributes native-like performance in the L2 to some 'other learning mechanism' at play whereby the learner maps an L2 item onto some feature other than the L2 feature.

We will contrast the NPRH with the No Impairment Hypothesis (NIH) (Duffield et al. in press) which makes different claims about the end state of the L2. According to the NIH, functional categories and functional features not selected in the L1 are in principle acquirable in the L2. Under this view, parameters in the L2 grammar are not restricted to L1 instantiations even though these L1 representations may be present at an early stage in interlanguage development. Crucially, native-like performance in the L2 end state is the result of having acquired new functional categories or features and/or having reset feature values to the correct L2 setting. The implication for ultimate attainment is that convergence on a native-like grammar is possible and, consequently, ultimate attainment can be native-like. This is not to say that native-like competence in the L2 end state is inevitable but rather that it is possible.

In summary, the NIH and the NPRH differ in claims for post-childhood L2 ultimate attainment. The former claims that L2 properties not instantiated in the L1 will be permanently absent from interlanguage grammars whereas the NIH predicts that L2 properties will be

represented eventually. Moreover, native-like representations in the L2 end state are, for the NPRH, impossible, whereas, for the NIH, they are a result of having successfully reset parameters. The aim of the present paper is to examine end state grammars and ask the following questions: Can English speakers acquire the syntactic properties associated with Spanish topic constructions (i.e. properties not present in their L1)? More generally, is it possible to achieve native-like competence in the L2 end state? We will adopt the NIH of Duffield et al. (in press) which argues for unimpaired access to L2 functional categories. In the next section we make specific predictions with respect to both theories and topic constructions in Spanish and English.

4. PREDICTIONS FOR L2 END STATE SPANISH TOPIC CONSTRUCTIONS

The first theory is the *No Parameter Resetting Hypothesis* (NPRH) (Smith & Tsimpli 1995; Tsimpli & Roussou 1991) which, as discussed in the previous section, argues that functional properties not instantiated in the L1 are not acquirable in adult L2 acquisition (i.e. post-childhood) and, consequently, learners are restricted to their L1 properties. Under this view, therefore, parameter resetting is not possible. With respect to the parametric differences between Spanish and English topic constructions, specific predictions under the NPRH are the following. First, in the L2 Spanish end state grammar of L1 English speakers, the [recursive] property of topic constructions will not be present since this property is absent in English. This predicts that English learners of Spanish will neither accept recursive topics nor produce them. Second, in the L2 Spanish end state grammar of L1 English speakers, the clitic projection necessary for the CLLD structure present in Romance-type topic structures will not be present since clitic projections are found in Spanish but not in English. Third, in the L2 Spanish end state grammar of L1 English speakers, the null anaphoric operator will be present in topic constructions since it is also a property of their L1 English. Thus, according to the parameter differentiating topic constructions in Spanish and English, learners should only have the English-type topic structure available to them and should not distinguish topic structures on the basis of specificity.

By contrast, the second theory, the No Impairment Hypothesis NIH (Duffield et al. in press) argues that, in principle, features and functional projections not instantiated in the L1 are acquirable. Parameters can be reset; therefore learners are not restricted to L1 properties. This means that native-like ultimate attainment is possible (but not inevitable). With respect to the parametric differences between Spanish and English topic constructions, specific predictions under the NIH are the following. First, in the L2 Spanish end state grammar of L1 English speakers, the [recursive] property of topic constructions will be present even though this property is not present in English. Thus English learners of Spanish will both accept and produce recursive topic constructions. Second, in the L2 Spanish end state grammar of L1 English speakers, the clitic projection necessary for the CLLD structure will be found, since new functional properties are acquirable. Thus, L1 English speakers' end state Spanish should have Romance-type topic structures. Third, in the L2 Spanish end state grammar of L1 English speakers, the null anaphoric operator will be present in topic constructions. Moreover, given that specificity is a feature present in both English and Spanish, then their grammar will distinguish between specific and non-specific topics by displaying the corresponding Romance-type or English-type topic structure respectively.

In summary, under the NPRH, convergence on a native-like end state is impossible while, under the NIH, a native-like representation is possible.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. PARTICIPANTS

There were two subject groups: Ten adult near-native speakers of Spanish whose L1 is English participated in the study. All subjects had begun studying Spanish at the university, college, or high school level and later moved to a Spanish speaking country or environment. Two of the L2 subjects were living in Spain at the time of testing while six of the seven other L2 subjects were university level Spanish teachers whose work environment was Spanish (three of the seven listed Spanish as the primary language spoken in their home).[3] Although the majority of the L2 group were language instructors, the constructions tested are not the topic of explicit instruction in the Spanish L2 classroom nor are they obvious from the input. Proficiency level was determined by an independent placement test[4] and by the amount of time the subject had lived in a Spanish-speaking environment.[5] In addition, 10 native Spanish speakers (of several varieties of Spanish) were tested as control subjects.

5.2 EXPERIMENTAL TASKS

Our experiment consisted of two tasks, both of which were taken by the two participant groups. The Oral Grammaticality Judgement Task was given after the Sentence Completion Task in order to avoid priming effects. Each of the two tasks tested knowledge of three sentence types: recursive embedded topics, specific topics (CLLD structure), and non-specific topics (with the null anaphoric operator). The recursive embedded topics were included to test both knowledge of possible positions and their ordering within Rizzi's CP template, as well as whether the recursive property found in Romance could be acquired. The specific topic constructions tested whether subjects had acquired the clitic projection associated with Romance-type topic structures. Finally, the non-specific topic constructions were included in order to determine whether subjects had the contrast between the English-type and Romance-type structures, including the specificity contrast.

5.2.1 SENTENCE COMPLETION TASK

The Sentence Completion task involved an illustrated story (shown in appendix A) consisting of a dialogue in which topic constructions, both specific and non-specific, as well as recursive embedded topics were used. The sentences were begun, that is, they were given the topic, and the subject was asked to complete the statement. Since the subjects were given the topics, the issue is whether they complete the sentence with a clitic or not. All stimulus sentences were responses to a given context question which was part of a greater story. There were 8 items testing specific topic constructions, 8 items testing non-specific, 8 items testing embedded recursive topic constructions, and 8 distractors.

Answers were scored depending on the presence or absence of a clitic. That is, for the specific topics, a sentence was marked 'correct' if the participant completed the sentence using a CLLD structure and was rated 'incorrect' if the sentence was completed without a clitic (e.g. with a null anaphoric operator / English-type structure). The non-specific topics were rated 'correct' when the sentence was completed without a clitic. The recursive topic constructions were rated on the presence or absence of a clitic. All irrelevant or blank responses were discounted.

5.2.2 ORAL GRAMMATICALITY JUDGEMENT TASK

The Oral Grammaticality Judgement task (shown in Appendix B) was an oral dialogue

[3] Montrul & Slabakova (forthcoming) also included in their near-native group North American university Spanish instructors whose work environment was Spanish.

[4] Subjects with scores lower than 47/50 were excluded.

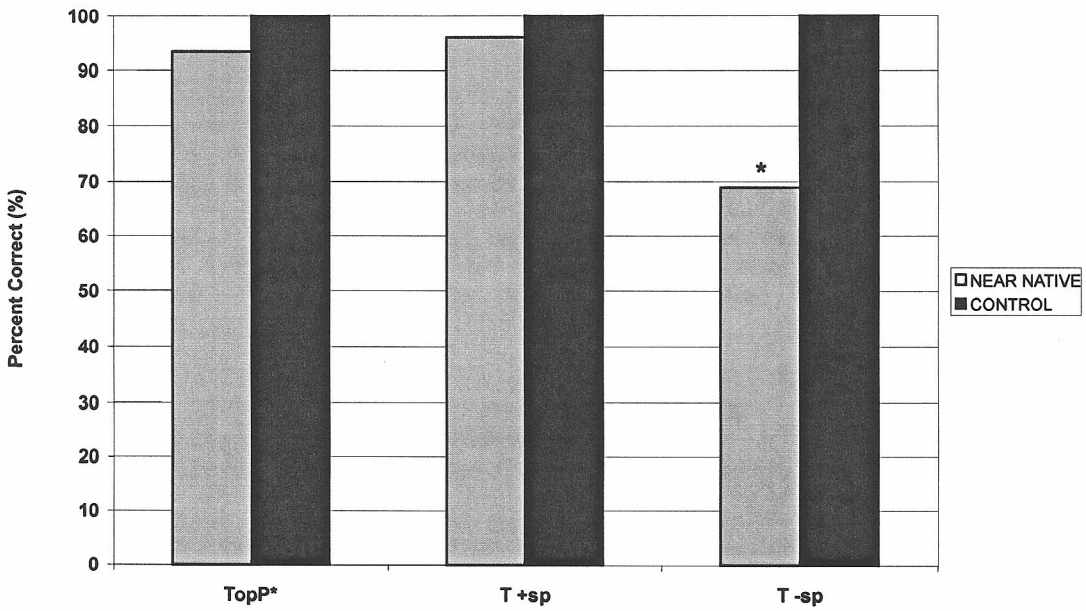
[5] Subjects had lived a minimum of 5 years in a Spanish-speaking environment.

involving topic constructions, both specific and non-specific, as well as recursive embedded topics. Subjects were asked to rate the sentence uttered by the male voice in the dialogue on a preference scale (1–5, where 1 was ungrammatical, with an 'I don't know' option). In each case, the male character was responding to a context question which was part of the greater story which made up the whole task. There were 10 items testing specific topic constructions (5 grammatical and 5 ungrammatical), 10 items testing non-specific topic constructions (5 grammatical and 5 ungrammatical), 10 items testing recursive embedded topic constructions (5 grammatical and 5 ungrammatical) as well as 10 distracters (5 grammatical and 5 ungrammatical).

6. RESULTS

6.1 SENTENCE COMPLETION TASK: GROUP RESULTS

In Figure 1, the group results for the Sentence Completion Task are given:



TopP* = recursive topic phrase; T +sp = topic construction with a topicalized element that is [+specific];
T –sp = topic construction with a topicalized element that is [-specific]

Figure 1. Sentence Completion Task: Group Mean Accuracy (in %)

As detailed in section 5.2.1., the Sentence Completion data was evaluated based on the correct presence or absence of a clitic as required by the provided topicalized element. As we observe in Figure 1, for the recursive topic constructions (TopP*) accuracy was high. That is, the near-native group did not have trouble completing multiple topic constructions. There was no significant difference between the near-native and control groups. This accurate usage of multiple topics suggests that the recursive property of Spanish topic constructions has been

acquired (There was no significant difference found in two-tail Independent t-tests between the near-native and control group performance on recursive topic constructions (TopP*: $t_{(18)}= 2.393$, $t_{.01(18)}= \pm 2.878$, $p>0.01$).[6] For the specific topic constructions (T+sp) accuracy was also high; the near-native group accurately produced Romance-type topic constructions (i.e. using the CLLD structure) with specific topics. There was no significant difference between the near-native group and control group in *(the results of)* two-tail Independent t-tests between the near-native group and the control group (T +sp: $t_{(18)}= 1.094$, $t_{.05(18)}= \pm 2.101$, $p>0.05$). Moreover, this indicates that the clitic projection, not present in English, has been acquired. However, there was a difference in performance between the native and near-native groups on the non-specific topic constructions (T–sp) where near-native group accuracy was significantly lower than that of the control group. The difference (in performance on non-specific topic construction) between the near-native group and the control group was highly significant (T -sp: $t_{(18)}= 4.93$, $t_{.01(18)}= \pm 2.878$, $p<0.01$). That is, for the items testing non-specific topics where the English-type structure is required, the L2 group is overgeneralizing the Romance-type constructions (i.e. the CLLD structure) by extending them to non-specific topics, an example of which is shown in (18):

(18) *Sangría, no la probó Juan.
Sangría, not CL tried Juan.
'Sangría, Juan did not try.'

Thus, while near-native subjects appear to have acquired both the recursive property and the clitic projection associated with the Romance-type topic structures, they are overgeneralizing the CLLD structure. This result is somewhat unexpected under both the NIH and the NPRH since English does not have clitic projections but does have specificity in other aspects of the grammar. We will return to this point in the discussion in Section 7.

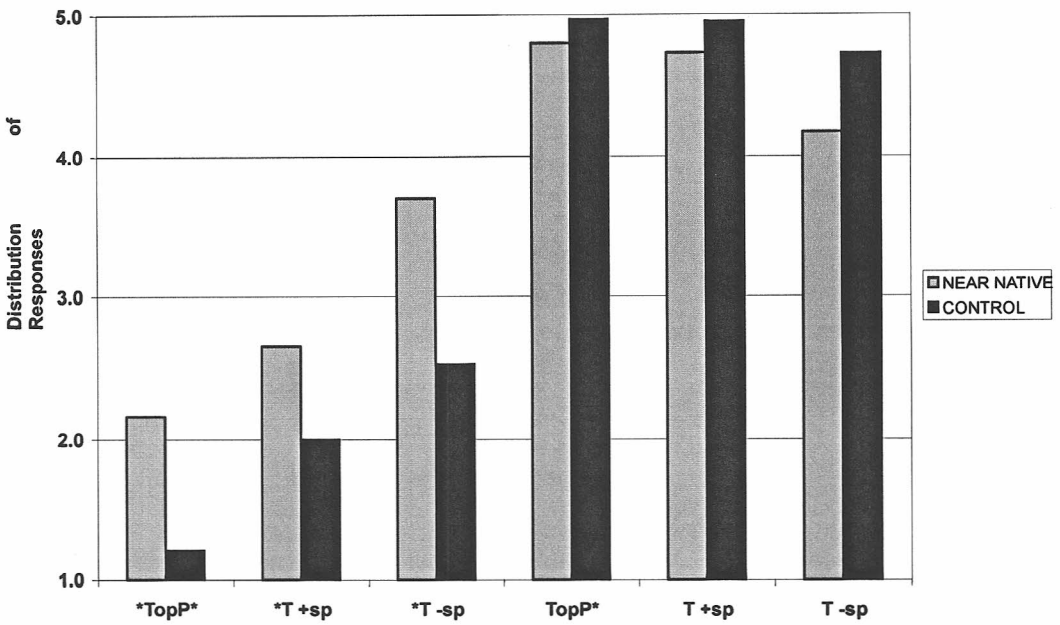
6.2 ORAL GRAMMATICALITY JUDGEMENT TASK: GROUP RESULTS

In Figure 2, the results for the oral grammaticality judgement task are shown. For the ungrammatical recursive embedded topic sentences (*TopP*), both the near-native and the control group preference was to rate them as less acceptable (a score between 1 and 2). For the sentences containing ungrammatical specific topic constructions (*T+sp), the near-native group and the control group again correctly rejected these sentences (a score between 1 and 3). For the ungrammatical non-specific sentences, the two groups differed significantly (T -sp: $t_{(18)}= -3.394$, $t_{.01(18)}= \pm 2.878$, $p<0.01$). While the control group correctly rated these sentences as less acceptable,[7] the near-native group rated the *T–sp sentences as acceptable (scores between 4 and 5). That is, they are accepting sentences such as (19) where a non-specific topic has the Romance-type (or CLLD) structure:

(19) *Merengue, no lo pusieron. NON-SPECIFIC
Merengue, not CL they-put
'Merengue, they did not play.'

[6] However, results of additional statistical analyses using a two-tail Independent t-test indicate that there was a statistically significant difference between the near-native group and the controls at a confidence level of .95 (TopP*: $t_{(18)}= 2.393$, $t_{.05(18)}= \pm 2.101$, $p<0.05$).

[7] The average rating given by the control group for the ungrammatical non-specific topic sentences was 2.5 which is not as low (recall that 1 = ungrammatical) as the 2.0 and 1.2 average scores for the specific and recursive topic sentences respectively.



TopP* = recursive topic phrase; T +sp = topic construction with a topicalized element that is [+specific];
T –sp = topic construction with a topicalized element that is [-specific]

Figure 2. Oral Grammaticality Judgement Task: Distribution of Group Responses

The fact that they are accepting sentences such as (19) is consistent with the Sentence Completion task data where they are overgeneralizing the CLLD structure to all topics regardless of specificity. For the grammatical sentences, both the near-natives and the controls behaved similarly, that is, both groups rated all topic construction types as acceptable. Within the near-native group, the results on the oral grammaticality judgement task are much neater. That is, comparing the near-native group's rating of grammatical *versus* ungrammatical sentences in the oral grammaticality judgement task shows the following. As expected, significant differences were found in two-sample t-tests between near-native responses to grammatical *versus* ungrammatical recursive topic constructions (*TopP* and TopP*: ($t_{(9)}$= 25.97, $t_{.01(9)}$= ±3.250, p<0.01). There was also a significant difference between the near-native group ratings for the grammatical versus ungrammatical specific topic constructions (*T +sp and T +sp: ($t_{(9)}$= 16.91, $t_{.01(9)}$= ±3.250, p<0.01). Moreover, a significant difference was also found for the near-native group ratings given to non-specific topic constructions (*T -sp and T –sp: ($t_{(9)}$= 5.733, $t_{.01(9)}$= ±3.250, p<0.01). These results suggest that near-native subjects appeared to correctly distinguish between grammatical *versus* ungrammatical counterparts of the token sentences.

Thus, from Figure 2 we see that near-native group performance is native-like on recursive and specific topic constructions but is not native-like on non-specific topic constructions where

results are consistent with the Sentence Completion task data in that they are incorrectly accepting Romance-type structures with non-specific topics. However, the results presented in Figures 1 and 2 are for group scores. Group results for the sentence completion task, therefore, appear to be, prima facie, evidence against the NIH since it does not appear to be the case that the parameter has been reset correctly – while subjects have acquired the clitic projection, they do not appear to have acquired the specificity distinction. However, group results also appear to offer evidence against the NPRH since subjects are overgeneralizing the CLLD structure and clitics are not available in English but are present in their Spanish interlanguage. Upon closer inspection, namely individual results, we see that it is not in fact the case that all of the subjects in the near-native group are differing from the native group with respect to these constructions. We shall now turn to individual results in order to examine whether individual subjects converge on native-like performance.

6.3 SENTENCE COMPLETION TASK: INDIVIDUAL RESULTS

Individual accuracy for the Sentence Completion task is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Sentence Completion Task: Individual Mean Accuracy (in %)

	CONSTRUCTIONS		
SUBJECT	TopP*	T+sp	T-sp
NN-1	100	100	100
NN-2	100	100	83
NN-3	100	86	100
NN-11	100	100	0
NN-12	100	100	67
NN-13	60	83	100
NN-14	100	100	0
NN-15	100	100	83
NN-16	50	67	75
NN-20	86	100	100
CTRL-4	100	100	100
CTRL-5	100	100	100
CTRL-6	100	100	100
CTRL-7	100	100	100
CTRL-8	100	100	100
CTRL-9	100	100	100
CTRL-10	100	100	100
CTRL-17	100	100	100
CTRL-18	100	100	100
CTRL-19	100	100	100

NN= near native; CTRL= control; Top*= recursive topic; T+sp= specific topic; T-sp= non-specific topic

From Table 1, we see that for the recursive topic constructions (TopP*), accuracy is high for all but two subjects (NN-13 and NN-16), who were failing to interpret recursive topic constructions. For the specific topic constructions (T+sp), all but two subjects achieved over 85% accuracy; only subject NN-12 and NN-16 incorrectly produced English-type topic constructions with specific topics. For the non-specific topic constructions (T–sp), six subjects from the near-native group (NN-2, NN-11, NN-12, NN-14, NN-15, and NN-16) performed at less than 85% accuracy. From Table 1 we observe that a subset of the near-native group (NN-1, NN-3, and NN-20) have native-like performance on the Sentence Completion task. Thus, individual results for the sentence completion task show that 30% of the L2 group appears to have reset the parametric options associated with topic constructions.

6.4 ORAL GRAMMATICALITY JUDGEMENT TASK: INDIVIDUAL RESULTS

Individual accuracy for the Oral Grammaticality Judgement task is presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Oral Grammaticality Judgement Task: Individual Results[8]

	CONSTRUCTIONS					
	Ungrammatical			*Grammatical*		
SUBJECT	*TopP*	*T+sp	*T-sp	TopP*	T+sp	T-sp
NN-1	U	U	U	G	G	G
NN-2	G	U	G	G	G	G
NN-3	U	U	U	G	G	G
NN-11	U	G	G	G	G	G
NN-12	U	U	G	G	G	G
NN-13	G	G	G	G	G	G
NN-14	U	U	G	G	G	U
NN-15	U	U	G	G	G	G
NN-16	G	G	G	G	G	G
NN-20	U	U	U	G	G	G
CTRL-4	U	U	U	G	G	G
CTRL-5	U	U	G	G	G	G
CTRL-6	U	U	U	G	G	G
CTRL-7	U	U	U	G	G	G
CTRL-8	U	U	U	G	G	G
CTRL-9	U	U	U	G	G	G
CTRL-10	U	U	U	G	G	G
CTRL-17	U	U	G	G	G	G
CTRL-18	U	U	U	G	G	G
CTRL-19	U	U	U	G	G	G

NN= near native; CTRL= control; U= ungrammatical; G= grammatical; *Top*= ungrammatical recursive topic; *T+sp= ungrammatical specific topic; *T-sp= ungrammatical non-specific topic Top*= grammatical recursive topic; T+sp= grammatical specific topic; T-sp= grammatical non-specific topic

For the ungrammatical recursive topic constructions (*TopP*), subjects NN-1, NN-3, NN-12, NN-15 and NN-20 pattern with the native speakers. That is, they correctly rejected the ungrammatical recursive topic constructions (recall that these ungrammatical tokens had either incorrect order of left peripheral elements or were missing a clitic in the IP) thereby displaying knowledge of the recursive property and the ordering of left peripheral elements. For the ungrammatical specific topic constructions (*T+sp), only 3/10 subjects incorrectly accepted these ungrammatical sentences. That is, three subjects from the near-native group accepted specific topics without a clitic. For the ungrammatical non-specific topic constructions (*T-sp), only 3/10 subjects correctly rejected them. Thus we observe that, consistent with the Sentence Completion Task, NN-1, NN-3, and NN-20 are performing exactly like the majority of the control group. NN-12 and NN-15 performed exactly like CTRL-5 and CTRL-17 who rated the ungrammatical *T–sp constructions as grammatical. For the grammatical constructions, all subjects patterned the same except for NN-14 who rated the grammatical non-specific topics (T-sp) as ungrammatical. Furthermore, it appears that NN-13 and NN-16 were the only two subjects that did not at all pattern like the native speakers. They accepted all sentences across the board, that is, they accepted specific topics without a clitic, non-specific topics with a clitic, and recursive constructions with wrong the order and without a clitic.

[8] The acceptability scale was converted from the 1 – 5 numerical rating to grammatical (G) or ungrammatical (U) in the following way: scores between 1- 3 became U; scores between 4 – 5 became G.

7. DISCUSSION

While the (T-sp) constructions continue to be the most problematic for the L2 subjects, they are also problematic for two of the native speakers. Table 4 shows that the native speaker group was less likely to accept those non-specific topics without a clitic and to reject those with a clitic. This may be due to the fact that certain verbs force a specific interpretation of the object when fronted, as in example (20):

(20) Vino, (lo) sirvieron en la fiesta.
Wine, (CL) they-served at the party
'Wine, they served it at the party'

In example (20), the verb *servir* (to serve) seems to allow for a specific interpretation of the topicalized element *vino* (wine) since it is a particular wine that the speaker is serving despite the use of the bare noun. Thus, it is possible that the (T-sp) items with these types of verbs presented problems for the subjects since the use of the clitic appears to be optional.[9] Clearly, these constructions are problematic as even two of the native speakers (CTRL-5 and CTRL-17) incorrectly accepted the non-specific topic constructions with a clitic.

The near-native group was highly accurate on the sentences testing recursive topics as well as the specific topics in both the sentence completion task and the oral grammaticality judgement task. Differences between the near-native group and the controls were found in the items testing the non-specific topic constructions. Individual results show that a subset of the near-native group (3/10) is truly near-native since their performance is indistinguishable from that of the native speaker control group. Thus, the term 'near-native' for the L2 group turns out to be somewhat misleading, since 60% of the subjects do not have native-like behaviour on topic constructions.

We will now return to the specific predictions laid out by the two contending hypotheses. The focus of our study was to investigate the status of topic constructions in adult L2 end state grammars and to test two contending hypotheses which predict differing outcomes for ultimate attainment. The first hypothesis was the No Parameter Resetting Hypothesis (NPRH) (Smith & Tsimpli 1995; Tsimpli & Roussou 1991) which predicts that end state grammars cannot be native-like since L2 learners are restricted to functional categories and features from their L1. The second hypothesis was the No Impairment Hypothesis NIH (Duffield et al. in press) according to which functional categories and features not instantiated in the L1 will be represented in the L2. We will first turn to the specific predictions of the NPRH.

This first prediction of the NPRH whereby the [recursive] property of topic constructions is not present since this property is not present in English was not supported by the data presented in this study. On both the Sentence Completion and the Oral Grammaticality Judgement tasks, the L2 group both produced and accepted recursive topic constructions. L2 speaker and native speaker performance on the recursive constructions was not distinguishable.

The second prediction under the NPRH which states that the clitic projection necessary for the CLLD structure present in Romance-type topic structures will not be present since clitic projections are found in Spanish but not in English was again not supported. The clitic projection, and consequently the CLLD structure associated with Romance-type topic constructions, was present in the end state grammar. In fact, several subjects from the L2 group overgeneralized the CLLD structure in that they used both specific and non-specific topics with the Romance-type structure. Clitics are a category not present in their English, therefore, this is completely unexpected under the NPRH.

The third prediction under the NPRH was not substantiated as learners were not restricted to English-type topic constructions; rather, the opposite was true for some of the L2 speakers,

[9] This explanation was suggested to the author by Joyce Bruhn de Garavito (p.c.).

namely, six subjects overgeneralized the CLLD structure to all topic constructions. Thus, contra the NPRH, all of the near-native group showed evidence of having acquired the clitic projection and used the CLLD structure accordingly. Neither task showed that only the English-type structure was present in the end state grammar. Thus, again, the data do not support the NPRH.

We will now turn to the predictions for topic constructions under the NIH. The data from both the Sentence Completion and the Oral Grammaticality Judgement tasks suggest that the recursive property of Spanish topic constructions was present in the English speakers' end state grammar thereby supporting the first NIH prediction.

With respect to the second prediction under the NIH, whereby the clitic projection present in Romance-type topic constructions will be represented in the L2 was also supported. The clitic projection was present in the near-native grammar and Romance-type or CLLD structures were both accepted and produced by the L2 group.

Finally, the third NIH prediction pertaining to the presence of the null anaphoric operator necessary for the non-specific topic constructions where the English-type structure is required in Spanish, group data seem to provide evidence against both the NIH and the NPRH. However, as we observed from individual results, a subset of the L2 group (3/10) were consistently (on both tasks) distinguishing between English-type and Romance-type topic constructions thereby showing that their grammar has the null anaphoric operator but is not restricted to it. Their performance was indistinguishable from that of the native speaker control group. The NPRH does not account for the fact that 30% of subjects are performing like native speakers.

Group results from both tasks suggest that the near-native group does not differ significantly from the control group on items testing the [recursive] property of Spanish topic constructions. This appears to provide evidence for the NIH which claims that features not present in the L1 are acquirable as well as providing evidence against the NPRH which claims that features not present in the L1 are not acquirable.

Apparently less clear-cut are the group results for the specific versus non-specific topic constructions. The near-native group does not differ from the native group with respect to the topic constructions involving specific topicalized items where the CLLD is required but do differ from the native speakers with respect to topic constructions involving non-specific topicalized elements where the CLLD is not required. Although the non-specific topic constructions appear to be problematic for the near-native speakers (that is, they overgeneralize the CLLD structure whereby all topic constructions use the Romance-type construction regardless of specificity), these constructions are also less straightforward for the native speakers as discussed above. As seen in the individual results for the Oral Grammaticality Judgement task, 2/10 native speakers rated the ungrammatical non-specific topic constructions (i.e. non-specific topics with a CLLD structure) as grammatical. Thus, the near-native speakers are still patterning like the native speakers. Moreover, the near-native speakers are not getting this behaviour from the L1 (therefore evidence against the NPRH).

It can be argued that the specificity contrast which Spanish has for left-dislocated topics is also present in English so called hanging topics (as in (21) a-b) where the topic can enter into a referential relationship with any syntactic position (pronoun, epithet, etc.) within a relative clause, an adverbial clause, etc., and the fact that they are using clitics may simply be a question of substituting the pronoun, which would be used in English, with a clitic.[10]

(21) a. As for her friends, Mary invited them over for dinner. SPECIFIC
b. As for friends, Mary has many. NON-SPECIFIC

If indeed this were the case, this would support the NPRH since native-like performance could

[10] This specificity issue was pointed out to the author by I. Tsimpli (p.c.).

be the result of 'other learning mechanisms' and not the result of parameter resetting. This could be an explanation of the data for the 30% of near-native subjects that are showing the contrast but does not explain the overgeneralization of the Romance-type structure by the remaining 70%. If indeed the contrast is present in their L1, then this overgeneralization should not occur. Moreover, the NPRH cannot account for the fact that the non-native group appears to have acquired the recursive TopP.

We have observed that, thus far, the data provide more evidence for the NIH than the NPRH. We will now turn to the implicit predictions which each hypothesis has for ultimate attainment and test them against our data for Spanish topic constructions. According to the NPRH, native-like ultimate attainment in adult L2 acquisition is not possible whereas, according to the NIH, it is possible. This raises two important questions. First, how does one determine whether a grammar is truly at the end state? Second, what constitutes a near-native grammar? With respect to the first question, this can only truly be determined with a longitudinal study showing no further interlanguage development. In our study, we assume that the subjects were at an end state based on the number of years spent living in a Spanish speaking environment. With respect to the second question, some researchers claim that a grammar is near-native when it falls within the range of native speaker error (Montrul & Slabakova to appear). Given this criterion, we found that 30% of our near-native group displayed truly native-like behaviour. The NPRH cannot account for this result.

In conclusion, the data indicate that both functional projections and some associated properties which are not present in the L1 are acquirable in post-childhood L2 acquisition. This evidence suggests that the L2 end state grammar can achieve native-like competence, in principle, thereby providing evidence in favour of the NIH.

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RÉSUMÉ

La présente étude examine les grammaires à leur stade de développement final de manière à explorer s'il est possible ou non aux apprenants d' une L2 adultes d'obtenir des représentations semblables à celles de locuteurs natifs. En particulier, nous examinons les constructions topiques qui sont associées à la catégorie fonctionnelle CP, une propriété [récursive] associée au CP, et une projection clitique associée aux constructions topiques [+spécifique]. Nous formulons l'hypothèse selon laquelle les catégories fonctionnelles, les traits abstraits, et les spécifications des traits peuvent être acquis dans l'acquisition d'une L2 par des adultes, et des représentations semblables à celles des locuteurs natifs de la L2 sont, en principe, possibles. Nous examinons les grammaires à leur stade final chez des locuteurs d'espagnol comme L2, et posons deux questions relatives à l'examen des grammaires à leur stade final. Premièrement celle de savpoir si une performance en L2 semblable à celle de loculeurs natifs est obtenable, et, deuxièmement, si les paramètres peuvent être réajustés selon les critères de la langue cible lors de l'acquisition d'une L2 par des adultes.

APPENDIX A: Sample Questions from the Sentence Completion Task

1. Pedro: "¿ Invitaron a Juan?"
'They-invited to Juan?'

María: "Sí, a Juan, _____."
'Yes, to Juan, …

2. Pedro: "¿Comiste pastel?"
'You-ate cake?'

María: "No, pastel, _____ porque estoy a régimen."
'No, cake, _____ because I-am on a diet'

28. Pedro: "¿Vas a decirles a Tania y a Miguel que no te divertiste en su fiesta?"
'You-are to tell-CL to Tania and Miguel that not CL enjoyed at their party?'

María: "Creo que, eso, a Tania y a Miguel, no _____."
'I-think that, that, to Tania and Miguel, not...

APPENDIX B: Sample Sentences from the Oral Grammaticality Judgement Task

Esa botella, no la llevé. That bottle, not CL I-took 'That bottle, I didn't take.'	SPECIFIC
*No, a Pepita, no saqué a bailar. No, to Pepita, not I-take to dance 'No, Pepita, I did not ask to dance.'	SPECIFIC
Clases, no quiero tomar. Classes, not I-want to take 'Classes, I do not want to take.'	NON-SPECIFIC
*Merengue, no lo pusieron. Merengue, not CL they-put 'Merengue, they did not play.'	NON-SPECIFIC
Una tarjeta, a Tania y Miguel, les mandaré. A card, to Tania and Miguel, CL I-send(FUT) 'A card, to Tania and Miguel, I will send.'	RECURSIVE
*Me dijo, él, sangria, que nunca toma. CL he-told, he, sangria, that never he-drinks	RECURSIVE
Sí, me lo pasé muy bien. Yes, CL CL I-spent very good 'Yes, I had a good time.'	DISTRACTOR
*Que me duele me digas eso. That CL I-hurt CL you-tell that 'It hurts me that you say that to me'	DISTRACTOR