

## Target variation as a contributing factor in TAML2 production

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**Abstract.** This study aims to clarify whether variation in the target language can influence its acquisition. More specifically, this study describes the acquisition of Spanish as a second language (L2) by examining the learning process based on (a) the first language (L1) of the learner and (b) which Spanish dialect is being learnt (the target). The phenomenon under scrutiny is the use of past tenses in the L2, as it has been proven to adequately measure the competence of the learner. Data from two L2 at-home-classroom student groups in the Netherlands, divided by either a European or Latin American oriented study program, has been collected. The task that they have made is a written narrative that elicits past verb forms in hodiernal and prehodiernal contexts. Our data shows a clear distinction in the preference of the past tense forms that each of the groups has, that can only be explained by looking at the Spanish variety which both program offers.

**Keywords:** language variation; second language acquisition; aspect; Spanish Present Perfect

## [es] La variación en la lengua meta como factor que contribuye a la producción de TAML2

**Resumen.** Este estudio tiene como objetivo aclarar si la variación en el idioma meta puede influir en su adquisición. Más específicamente, este estudio describe la adquisición del español como segunda lengua (L2) examinando el proceso de aprendizaje basado en (a) la primera lengua (L1) del estudiante y (b) qué dialecto del español se está aprendiendo como idioma meta. El fenómeno bajo escrutinio es el uso de tiempos de pasado en la L2, ya que se ha demostrado que es un fenómeno que mide adecuadamente la competencia del estudiante. Se han recopilado datos de dos grupos de estudiantes de clases de español como L2 en los Países Bajos, divididos según el programa de estudios que cursan: uno orientado a Europa y otro a América Latina. La tarea que han realizado los estudiantes es una narración escrita que evoca formas verbales de pasado en contextos hodiernales y prehodiernales. Nuestros datos muestran una clara distinción en la preferencia que cada uno de los grupos hace de las formas de tiempo pasado, que solo se pueden explicar teniendo en cuenta la variedad del español que ofrecen sendos programas de estudio.

**Palabras clave:** variación del lenguaje; adquisición del lenguaje; aspecto; pretérito perfecto compuesto

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### 1. Introduction

In a globalised world where we all need to speak more than one language, understanding how we acquire second languages is essential for society. More specifically, a crucial contribution from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research is the enhancement of understanding how we succeed in learning a second language. This pilot study proposes an original perspective, since in it variation in the target language is studied as a factor that influences the success of its acquisition. By approaching second language acquisition from this perspective, this study brings together sociolinguistic insights and SLA theory. In particular, the contribution of this study aims at understanding

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the learning process of students of Spanish as a second language (L2), by investigating the influence of two different Spanish varieties to which the learners are exposed in the classroom.

The linguistic phenomenon under scrutiny is the use of temporality, that is, how we verbally refer to time, in an L2, as it has been proven to adequately measure the competence of the learner. As Ayoun and Salaberry (2008, p. 556) claim, “the expression of tense and aspect [...] is a central issue in the development of the language competence of L2 learners because it constitutes an important indication of their syntactic and semantic competence”. More specifically, we look at two temporal contexts that are distinguished by the time of the event, which is shown to be a significant predictor for verbal forms in both native speakers (Schwenter, 1994) and L2 learner variation (Geeslin, Fafulas & Kanwit, 2013). Among others, Schwenter (1994) has differentiated two relevant temporal contexts: the so-called hodiernal and prehodiernal contexts. The hodiernal context describes events that happen on the same day of the moment of speech, as opposed to the prehodiernal context, which is used to describe past events that happened before the day of the utterance. The main goal of this study is to examine how two groups of Dutch learners of L2 Spanish, exposed to two different varieties of the target language (Latin American Spanish and European Spanish), produce past time references in these two contexts. Taking into consideration the variety phenomenon under scrutiny, which is the dialectal variation of the Present Perfect and the Preterit in Spanish, we will analyse the use of these forms in the interlanguage of the learners. By doing this, we will be able to assess if L2 learners (1) use non-native tokens, (2) use the same tokens as speakers of the target varieties used as input in the classroom, and/or (3) use standard L2 tokens. The variable “classroom input” is illustrated by two parallel, yet significantly different, Bachelors’ programs at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, that differ in their overall presence of either European Spanish or Latin American Spanish as the target varieties in the learner’s at-home classroom.

This article is organized as follows. Firstly, we present a brief review of several studies on the acquisition of aspect and tense in Spanish as a second language; secondly, we describe variation in Spanish in its grammatical representations of temporality. Thirdly, we introduce the role of language variation for second language learners, followed by a short overview of study abroad research. Next, we introduce our study and describe our methodology. Following it, we offer the analysis of our data and describe the results obtained. Finally, we present our discussion, conclusions and future research directions.

## 2. State of the art

### 2.1. Tense, Aspect and Modality (TAM) in Second Language Acquisition

Since Andersen (1986), many studies have been written on the acquisition of temporality in a second language. More specifically, the contrast between the two simple pasts in Romance languages has received a lot of attention (Andersen, 1986; Salaberry, 2003; González & Quintana Hernández, 2018; González & Diaubalick, 2019). This particular contrast to mark past temporality is morphologically expressed in the verb in Spanish, but not in many other languages, in the form of grammatical aspect. Therefore, most of the studies on this matter focus on the use of these two simple past forms: the Preterit and the Imperfect. The fact that languages use different linguistic resources to deal with this temporal representation raises the question of how L2 learners acquire this distinction, from the beginning developmental stages in their acquisition process up to the level of productive bilinguals/multilingual users. Although the present study focuses on the uses of the Present Perfect and the Preterit, a reference to previous studies which compare the uses of the Preterit and the Imperfect is necessary in order to understand how this research area has been developing in the last decades.

As summarised in González and Diaubalick (2019), most studies on the acquisition of grammatical aspect in a second language refer to the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (LAH) by Andersen (1986). Following Vendler’s (1957) classification of verbs, based on aspectual distinctions, Andersen (1986) describes the uses of the past tenses in the interlanguage of English learners of Spanish. In this regard, many authors have agreed, later on, that the inherent aspectual information indeed influences the use of past morphology in the interlanguage of learners (Andersen & Shirai, 1996; Slabakova, 2001; Montrul, 2004). Most research papers concentrate on L1 English learners (see Coma-joan-Colomé, 2014 for an overview). Obviously, other languages need to be taken into consideration as well, if we want to have a complete picture of the interlanguage characteristics. In that context, for example, González (2003, 2013) shows, following Verkuyl (1993), that Dutch learners pay attention to phrasal aspectual information. It is, thus, predicational aspect, not lexical aspect, which biases their use of past tenses (see González, 2003 for a clarification of the different types of inherent aspect). And Salaberry (2003, 2008), for his part, has found a possible default marker of the past tense (Default Past Tense Hypothesis) in the interlanguage of learners of Spanish with L1 English, which is the Preterit.

Other studies have shown, furthermore, that some consideration should be paid to other aspectual features, such as dynamicity (Domínguez, Tracy-Ventura, Arche, Mitchell & Myles, 2013). The debate on this issue has developed to focus also on the role of L1 transfer (Izquierdo & Collins, 2008; Domínguez et al., 2013; McManus, 2015; González & Quintana Hernández, 2018; González & Diaubalick, 2019). Even learners of very closely related languages, such as English and Dutch, for instance, have differences in their L2 Spanish that can only be explained

when observing L1 properties (Domínguez et al., 2013; González & Quintana Hernández, 2018). A combination of the L1 factor and the role of inherent aspect has recently been studied by González and Quintana Hernández (2018). To read more about these studies, we refer to González (2019), who shows a current overview of these studies, and Bardovi-Harlig and Comajoan-Colomé (2020), who present a state-of-the-scholarship review of the last 20 years of research, in which the most tested hypotheses in L2 temporality research are addressed.

Alarcón (2011, p. 332) states that “L2 learners are able to fully develop an implicit grammar of the target language, particularly of L2 grammatical features that are absent in their L1”. In this context contrastive linguistics can provide acquisitional implications, as L2 learners often seem to identify linguistic forms from their L2 with linguistic uses in their L1 (‘interlingual identification’, ‘interference’, Weinreich, [1953]). L2 learners seem to make several assumptions of ‘interlingual equivalence’ that give rise to non-target-like structures in their L2 (González, Mayans & Van Den Bergh, 2019).

In this context, we can state that one particular factor of the aforementioned studies on the acquisition of aspect in second languages is expected to give us insight for our study: L1 transfer. There is a number of recent studies on this matter, but considering the fact that all our participants share the same L1, we will focus here on those who have studied Dutch, among other languages, as L1. The results of González and Quintana Hernández (2018) show that native Dutch students of Spanish prefer the Present Perfect in contexts where the Preterit would be expected. This points to a clear case of L1 transfer, as the Present Perfect in the Dutch language can refer to any past reference (Van Hout, 2005). Moreover, González and Diaubalick (2019) have found out that, as the Dutch Simple Past is comparable to the Spanish Imperfect form, the L2 use of this form in Spanish seems to function as a default marker of the past tense in the interlanguage of Dutch students.

## 2.2. Language Variation in Tense and Aspect

The standard definition of aspect highlights the effect of a broad range of contextual factors on the linguistic construal of situations in reality, thus leading to differing interpretations of aspect (Comrie, 1976; Klein, 1994; Michaelis, 1998). Michaelis (1998, p. 5), for instance, describes “aspectual categorization as a product of the manner in which people, as producers and processors of texts, *construe scenes, rather than as a reflection of the properties which situations have ‘in the world’* [emphasis added]”. As a consequence, there is room for subjective interpretation that still puzzles both researchers and learners who are looking for a precise way to determine whether the choices of aspectual forms are “right and wrong”. The fact that aspect is a strategy that speakers use to describe the world explains, moreover, why there is so much variation in aspectual representations (personal communication with Salaberry, 2019).

Grammatical representations of temporality show morphological variability among and within languages (Binnick, 2012; Fábregas & Gallego, 2014). As already described in section 2.1, in Spanish, as well as in other Romance languages, the grammatical representation of temporality also includes reference to aspectual distinctions (perfective versus imperfective meanings). For instance, the use of the Preterit *caminé* (‘I walked’) in (1a) and the Imperfect *caminaba* (‘I was walking/would walk’) in (1b) provides a contrast in the aspectual representation of past events in Spanish, which is a language that requires this contrast in its past tenses (González, 2003; Howe, 2006; Zagona, 2007):

(1a)	Ayer Yesterday ‘Yesterday I walked through the park with my dog.’	<i>caminé</i> walk. 1P.SG.PRET	por el parque through the park	con mi perro. with my dog
(1b)	Caminaba Walk. 1P.SG.IMPERF ‘Every Sunday I walked through the park with my dog.’	por el parque through the park	todos los domingos every Sunday	con mi perro. with my dog
(1c)	Esta mañana This morning ‘This morning I have walked through the park.’	<i>he caminado</i> walk. 1P.SG.PRES.PERF	por el parque. through the park	

However, there is another inflected verb form in Spanish that can also be used to refer to past actions: the Present Perfect, as illustrated in (1c), with the form *he caminado* (‘I have walked’). There are numerous aspectual and temporal distinctions among these three forms. These distinctions have been studied from semantic, syntactic, morphological and pragmatic theoretical perspectives.

Even though the examples in (1a-1c) seem to have a straightforward temporal interpretation, as supported by the adverbials used in them, temporality in Spanish has an incredible range of variation in its verbal paradigm; actually, it is in the use of its past tenses that Spanish shows most of its variation. Variation in Spanish TAM is a well-studied phenomenon (Howe, 2006; Schwenter & Cacoullous, 2008; Azpiazu, 2015; González, Jara Yupanqui & Kleinherenbrink, 2019). The Spanish Royal Academies (RAE & ASALE, 2009) points out that, currently, the Present Perfect is the verbal form that shows more geographical variation in its usage, as it seems to be taking over perfective meanings in particular contexts in several Spanish varieties. For example, in their corpus study, Schwenter & Cacoullous (2008) have found that the Present Perfect is the default past marker in the European Spanish variety under study, whereas

the default past marker in the Latin American variety is the Preterit form. Moreover, these scholars have demonstrated in the same study that the Present Perfect, in combination with the temporal adverbial *ayer* ('yesterday'), functions as a perfective marker, as seen in example (2):

- (2) Ayer he comprado un aire acondicionado y me da calor.  
 (Schwenter & Cacoullos, 2008: 9)  
 Yesterday buy.1P.SG. PRES.PER an air conditioner and give.3P.  
 SG.PRES me heat  
 'Yesterday I bought an air conditioner and I'm getting heat (from it)'.

In terms of language use, in hodiernal contexts, the use of the Present Perfect or Preterit varies across target norms (Howe, 2006; Schwenter & Cacoullos, 2008; Geeslin et al., 2013). Specifically, according to textbook instructions of Spanish courses, hodiernal contexts are the prototypical ones in European Spanish for the use of the Present Perfect (Soler Montes, 2018). On the other hand, the Preterit seems to be the preferred form in most Latin American dialects (Rodríguez Louro, 2009; Rodríguez Louro & Jara Yupanqui, 2011). In particular, a study by Jara Yupanqui (2012) shows that the Imperfect form is used in some dialects in the Amazonia in contexts where the Preterit would be expected. The following studies show, furthermore, an incredibly huge variation in the tense-aspect-modality systems within the Spanish language. Schwenter (1994) has found, for example, that in Spain the Present Perfect appears in hodiernal and prehodiernal temporal contexts, regardless of the presence of temporal adverbials. De Jonge (2001), for his part, has found that in Argentina the Present Perfect highlights a situation within a narration and is used to refer to remote events and, according to Howe (2006), this form is used to refer to both recent and remote events in Perú. González, Jara Yupanqui and Kleinherenbrink (2019) also shown in a study that examines three different Spanish varieties (Peninsular, Peruvian and Argentinian Spanish) that for native speakers of European Spanish and Latin American Spanish the past tense forms are preferred differently in multiple contexts illustrated in a binary contextualized questionnaire. There were, indeed, significant differences in the uses of the studied past tense forms among the three varieties, which strengthens the idea that there is no linguistic consistency within the different Spanish varieties. Definitely, one result stands out: Present Perfect forms are more often used in Spain, while in Latin America the Preterit is the default past tense per excellence (González, Jara Yupanqui and Kleinherenbrink, 2019, p. 129).

However, these language variation results are not often taken into account when we study the acquisition of TAM in Spanish as L2. To be able to understand what happens in the interlanguage of learners of Spanish, concerning TAM representations, we need to take into account what language variation studies are telling us about the uses of the past tense forms in the target language.

The studies presented in section 2.1. have largely defined the target language as one fixed and idealized variety of Spanish, without considering the existence of sociolinguistic variation, primarily of regional sources. Specifically, the Spanish language has a wide range of dialectal variation in its verbal paradigm, which is greatly reflected in the temporal information conveyed at the morphological, but also at the semantic level. For example, in (3a)-(3b), we see how the same temporal context is expressed by means of two different tenses. Example (3a) is more likely to be used in European Spanish, whereas example (3b) in Latin American Spanish. This is very simplified, as there is also variation within European Spanish and Latin American Spanish. However, as has been earlier shown both theoretically and empirically, since this is definitely the trend, this particular use has to be considered the standard one that each of these two tenses has in the two aforementioned Spanish varieties:

- (3a) ¿Te ha gustado el café de esta mañana?  
 PRO.2<sup>nd</sup>P. SG.ACC like.3P. SG.PRES-PERF the coffee from this morning-QUESTION  
 'Did you like the coffee this morning?'
- (3b) ¿Te gustó el café de esta mañana?  
 PRO.2<sup>nd</sup>P. SG.ACC like.3P. SG,PRET the coffee from this morning-QUESTION  
 'Did you like the coffee this morning?'

By uniting the research carried out in SLA and Language Variation studies, a whole new research dimension is unlocked towards a better understanding of the language production of L2 learners, which is what this study aims to achieve.

### 2.3. Variation in interlanguage

Language variation studies that focus on the second language context highlight that L2 acquisition is evenly constrained by social and linguistic factors, as in the first language context. Consequently, scholars can examine the acquisition of a second language at the linguistic level and at the social level, because the variation in the language use that can be observed in learners' production is not exclusively based on the development of their interlanguage, but also on the diversity of inputs they receive. Since this variability concerns the linguistic structures employed by native speakers, it demonstrates variation in the input received in the various classroom settings. To differentiate

between the learner's linguistic competence and their sociolinguistic competence, scholars have referred to vertical variation and horizontal variation (Adamson & Regan, 1991; Rehner, 2002; Kanwit, 2018). Vertical variation, also known as developmental or type I variation (Rehner, 2002), regards how learners, at the beginning stages of their acquisition process, vary their use between one native-like form and one or more non-native-like forms. The use of non-native-like forms is part of the developmental process, and is examined in the interlanguage system of a learner (Corder, 1967). In contrast, horizontal variation, or type II (Kanwit, Geeslin & Fafulas, 2015), involves the variation of two or multiple native-like forms in the uses of more advanced learners. This occurs when learners are exposed to a specific geographical variety of the target language, as they are likely to additionally acquire its particular intrinsic phenomena. More specifically to this study, this means that the use of the Present Perfect and the Preterit in learners' interlanguage is influenced by the variability in the input that they receive, and it plays an important role in assessing the sociolinguistic competence of the learner.

Studies have collected data from learners of various types of classrooms, such as the study abroad classroom (Geeslin et al., 2013), the immersion school in the learner's home country (Mougeon, Nadasdi & Rehner, 2010), or the traditional at-home classroom also in their home country (González & Diaubalick, 2019). These different types of learning contexts have been extensively discussed in Geeslin and Long (2014). Most of these studies have conducted their research with a mainly variationist approach, and have included data of multiple study abroad programs, collected at two points in time to analyse and compare L2 students' language use before and after the study abroad (Collentine, 2009; Mougeon et al., 2010).

As previously outlined, the Spanish language shows a great amount of geographic variation in the use of past time references in various contexts (Schwenter & Caucoullous, 2008; González, Jara Yupanqui & Kleinherenbrink, 2019). The Spanish spoken in Spain (Peninsular Spanish) is traditionally and prescriptively seen as the target norm of educational input. The study of Geeslin, García-Amaya, Hasler, Henriksen & Killam (2012) was among the first ones that have examined the impact of the input that learners receive on the acquisition of variable target norms of L2 Spanish. The term variable target norm refers to the grammatical structures that exhibit native speaker variation, thus also showing variation in the natural and instructed input directed to learners.

In the study of Geeslin et al. (2012) the researchers have investigated the preferences that learners of Spanish have for the Present Perfect and the Preterit in a written contextualized task. The study included native speakers of León, Spain, and American English-speaking learners of Spanish who participated in one study abroad program located in the same region. The authors hypothesised that the learners would increase their use of the Present Perfect over time, as they would interact with this particular regional variant of the European Spanish variety. The findings have indicated that the learners' preference rates for the Present Perfect were surprisingly higher than those of native speakers, but also that both native speakers and learners selected the Preterit more often than the Present Perfect, regardless of the temporal context. These outcomes have resulted in an overall decrease in the use of the Present Perfect of the learner group over time, and have shown that exposure to a particular Spanish dialect influences the language use of study abroad students.

In the study of Geeslin et al. (2013), the researchers included data from learners and native speakers of two study abroad contexts, one in Spain and the other in Latin America, and looked at their preferences for the Preterit and Present Perfect forms in a written contextualized questionnaire. The data was collected in Valencia, Spain, and in San Luis de Potosí, Mexico, and the learners were all native speakers of English. The findings revealed that learners increased their overall use of the Present Perfect in both study abroad settings and they also found that, in time, learners modified their grammars in the direction of the target variety of the study abroad context, in terms of frequency and the predictors of selection. As regards the hodiernal context, Geeslin et al. (2013) showed that, over time, the learners in Mexico decreased their preference for the Present Perfect, while its use significantly increased in the production of the learners in Spain. The authors, therefore, highlighted that the variation between both learner groups and the individual changes in learners' grammars can not be explained exclusively on the basis of the development of the interlanguage of the learners, as they also showed modification of the local norms of the target variety to which they were exposed in the study abroad.

These studies present very insightful and relevant results for our study. However, all these studies have considered the learning context of the study abroad, either in Spain or Latin America, as a main factor of variation in the use of the Present Perfect. The current study focuses on the production of temporal references of two study at-home groups. These at-home groups differ in the main target variety selected as the educational input of their study programs. Our goal is to ascertain whether language variation in the target language, presented as the at-home classroom input, plays a role in the production of L2 learners, and, therefore, acts as a factor that explains learner variation.

### 3. The study

The main goal of this study is to examine how two groups of Dutch learners of L2 Spanish, divided by the education context where they are immersed, produce past time references elicited by the hodiernal/prehodiernal distinction. We have seen in previous studies (see section 2.2.) that it is in hodiernal contexts where in Spanish most variation has been attested: whereas European Spanish uses the Present Perfect, Latin American Spanish prefers the Preterit. Our study examines two groups of learners of Spanish at the University of Leiden, in The Netherlands. One group is

formed by students of the Bachelor Latin American Studies and the other one by students of the Bachelor International Studies, which, following the official abbreviations used at the University of Leiden, are referred to, respectively, as LAS and BAIS. The chosen task is a narrative picture description task. With this methodology, we are able to assess if L2 learners (1) use non-native forms, (2) use the same forms as speakers of the target varieties of the classroom input or (3) use standard forms.

This pilot study researches the impact of the learning context on the acquisition of aspectual structures, which vary by region, in L2 Spanish. As Geeslin et al. (2013) pointed out, the prescriptive rules for aspectual structures taught in the learning context do not exclude the acquisition of regional norms to which learners are exposed in the overall input. Our study hypothesises that the regional variation of Preterit and Present Perfect forms is reflected in the learning context, and therefore in the interlanguage of learners. However, we also believe that the L1 of the participants (Dutch) may also play a role.

Based on previous research, our hypotheses are, in sum, the following ones:

- (1) All students reflect the uses of the target variety of the classroom.
  - (a) All participants produce the Preterit more in the preodiurnal context.
  - (b) LAS participants produce the Preterit in the hodiurnal context.
  - (c) BAIS participants produce the Present Perfect in the hodiurnal context.
- (2) The L1 of the participants is reflected in the use of the Present Perfect, since all students use the Present Perfect also in preodiurnal contexts.

### 3.1. Methodology

This pilot study gives us an insight into how Dutch students use the Spanish Present Perfect and the Preterit after they have received instruction in either European or Latin American Spanish, as the target language variety. The main factor, therefore, is the language variety they receive as input. The data was elicited through a written narrative picture description task in which two temporal adverbials were used to distinguish the hodiurnal from the preodiurnal context. The temporal adverbials were *esta mañana* ('this morning') and *ayer* ('yesterday'). This elicitation method provides a tool to observe the multiple forms that the two groups of learners use to describe past time references. This narrative description task elicited multiple forms in order to describe sequence past actions, in comparison to a written contextualized questionnaire that only examines the preference of a token. Hereby, a more detailed analysis, in which we could include all the variants that were produced, would be possible. However, for this pilot study, we mainly focus on the aspectual differences and the variation in the use of the Preterit and the Present Perfect with the regional target variant as the predictive factor.

#### 3.1.1. Participants

The data reported in this article will be part of a larger study comparing the production of L2 learners with different first languages and native speakers of different Spanish varieties in the grammatical area of past time reference. The design includes two different study at-home environments in the Netherlands. The data has been collected from 41 Spanish L2 learners, who were between the ages of 18 and 37 (mean = 20.58, std.dev = 2.94). They were all native speakers of Dutch, living in the Netherlands. All students were enrolled at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands. Two learner groups have been created, considering the language focus of the courses they were following: International Studies (BAIS) or Latin American Studies (LAS). To reassure that the learner groups were homogenous, except for the learning context, see factor 6 in Table 1, we have deleted the participants that did not have the characteristics of the following independent variables taken from Mougeon et al. (2010: 6):

Table 1. Independent variables of the pilot study

	BAIS-students	LAS-students
1) Proficiency level	B2	B2
2) Length of exposure to the target variety	No stay abroad	No stay abroad
3) Opportunity to interact with native speakers of the target variety	None	None
4) First language	Dutch	Dutch
5) Age	Between 19-23 (mean 22.72)	Between 18-37 (mean 19.97)
6) Educational input	European Spanish	Latin American Spanish

In Table 1 we see the independent variables we have taken into account when collecting our data. It shows that all the characteristics were equal, except for variable 6, and a small difference in the age range given in variable 5:

- (1) The first variable is the proficiency level of the learners. The students of both groups (International Studies and Latin American Studies) were following a third semester Spanish course, which means that they were at the same proficiency level, aiming at level B2.
- (2) The second variable is the length of exposure to the target variety, so here the concept of staying abroad becomes crucial. It should, thus, be noticed that the stay abroad setting is assumed to be significant when its purpose includes language training, work and/or service, and accommodation in the country for longer than 2 weeks (Geeslin & Long, 2014).
- (3) The third variable regards whether there is interaction between the learners and speakers of the target variety. This was not the case for any of our participants, since they have only had contact with the language in their learning context.
- (4) The fourth variable is the first language of the participants. They were all Dutch native speakers.
- (5) The fifth variable is age. Table 1 shows that both groups are in the same age range. The range is broader in the LAS-group because one participant was 37; the rest were all between 18 and 24.

However, there is one main difference between both groups: the language variety of the instructor and the focus of the language program (sixth variable). In Latin American Studies the students had mostly received instruction from Latin American teachers, and the main language course was taught by a Peruvian lecturer, while in International Studies the teachers were mostly from Spain, and the language course was taught by a lecturer from Alicante, Spain. Though both programs focus on the Latin American region, the one concerning Latin American Studies reflects this attention to the language use in both language and curriculum courses (history, culture, linguistics); however, the program in International Studies teaches everything in English so the only contact the students have with the target language takes place in language classes.

A demographic questionnaire has been included in order to ascertain if the participants have had some experience abroad in Spain and/or Latin America. Two participants of the International Studies program and four participants from Latin American Studies have not been included in our analysis, as they had travelled to a Latin American Spanish-speaking country. However, their visit did not include the aforementioned purposes (see Table 1). The countries where the participants had travelled were Nicaragua, Bolivia, Mexico and Peru. In any case, these participants who have had some experience abroad have been removed from the data set of this study.

### 3.1.2. Materials and data collection

During a Spanish language class, the participants were instructed to describe on a piece of paper what they could see in two sketches. The sketches were specifically designed to elicit past tense forms from the participants. Two past contexts were illustrated on the hand of four chronologically ordered scenes, as seen here in Figure 1. Each sketch contains four scenes, and each scene elicited at least one past tense form. The order of the sketches was unchanged for all participants. As explained in section 2, the specific contexts for our study are located in a hodiernal and a prehodiernal context. To maximise the elicitation of past tense uses, the participants were instructed to start their descriptions with *ayer* ('yesterday') (first line in Figure 1) and *esta mañana* ('this morning') (second line in Figure 1), and to use the third person singular. According to the differences in language use between native varieties of Spanish, as described in section 2.2., in European Spanish the first line triggers the Preterit, the second line the Present Perfect and in Latin American Spanish both stories trigger the Preterit.





Figure 1. Sketches.

For both participant groups, the expected use of verb forms in the first story is the Preterit, as it is located in a prehodernal context, and the two Spanish varieties examined in this study use the same form in this context. According to our hypotheses (section 3), the verb form expected in the second story depends on the Spanish variety that the students have received as input in the classroom. Therefore, the two groups will perform differently here: the BAIS group will choose the Present Perfect, and the LAS group will choose the Preterit.

#### 4. Results

The data has been elicited to examine whether the native speaker variation in the hodiernal/prehodernal distinction (Schwenter, 1994) is reflected by the learners of Spanish in two different learning programs. The results indicate that learners used four verbal forms (see Table 3 below), both in the hodiernal and prehodernal contexts. Some sentences of one participant from LAS are shown in examples (4) and (5), where the prototypical hodiernal/prehodernal distinction is demonstrated. In the data, we have also found grammatical and spelling errors, but as long as it was clear which past tense form the participants used, we have included the form as a token. In example (5), for example, the participant produced the native Present Perfect forms *ha levantado* ('has got up'), *ha desayunado* ('has had breakfast'), *ha ido* ('has gone'), and the non-native, yet useful and relevant, Present Perfect *\*ha abrido* ('has opened'):

- (4) Ayer Marcos fue a su casa durante la noche.  
 Yesterday Marcos go.3P.SG.PRET to his house during the night.  
 'Yesterday Marcos went home during the night'.
- Él cenó sólo con una copa de vino.  
 He have.3P.SG.PRET dinner alone with a glass of wine.
- Marcos cerró la ventana, viendo la luna.  
 Marcos close.3P.SG.PRET the window, looking at the moon
- Se acostó a las once y media.  
 SE go.3P.SG. PRET to bed at eleven and half.  
 'He had dinner alone and had a glass of wine. Marcos closed the window, looking at the moon. He went to bed at half past eleven'.
- (5) Esta mañana, Marcos se ha levantado a las siete.  
 This morning Marcos SE get.3P. SG.PRES-PERF up at seven.  
 \*Ha abrido la ventana.  
 Open.3P.SG.PRES-PERF the window.  
 Ha desayunado con cereales y una taza de café.  
 Have.3P.SG.PRES-PERF breakfast with cereals and a cup of coffee
- Se ha ido a las diez.  
 SE go.3P.SG.PRES-PERF at ten  
 'This morning Marcos has got up at seven. He has opened the window. He has had breakfast with cereals and a cup of coffee. He has left at ten'.



The data set was too narrow to provide an effective statistical analysis. Therefore, we present the total numbers and percentages derived from our data in Table 2. Every inflected verb form has been considered a token. First, the overall frequency of produced tokens, a total of 369, shows the variation that the use of the Present Perfect has in the two linguistic contexts (hodiernal and prehodiernal) under study. The column we have called “non-Present Perfect” includes Preterit, Simple Present and Imperfect tokens, thus allowing us to look at the uses of the Present Perfect in perspective. A total of 25.2% of the tokens produced contain a Present Perfect form. Specifically, the Present Perfect has been used in 18.4% of the tokens concerning the hodiernal context; a fact that is somehow expected since, as mentioned in section 2.2., it is, in conjunction with the temporal adverbial *esta mañana* (‘this morning’), one of the prototypical contexts, according to Spanish courses textbooks, for the use of this particular past tense (Soler Montes, 2018):

Table 2. Overall frequency of the Present Perfect. Combined features: “Context &amp; Tense”

	Present Perfect	non-Present Perfect
Hodiernal	18.4% (N = 68)	30% (N=111)
Prehodiernal	6.8% (N=25)	44.7% (N=165)
Total (N=369)	25.2% (N=93)	74.8% (N= 276)

To be able to corroborate the hypotheses we have in mind, we have divided our data in two groups, as described in section 3.1.1. This way, we could see whether the input in the target variety of the L2 plays a role in the student’s choice of past tenses. The data is also presented in two tables, one for each of the two contexts (hodiernal and prehodiernal) examined. As previously mentioned, both contexts were evoked, first, by the pictures given and, secondly, by the use of the temporal adverbials *esta mañana* (‘this morning’) and *ayer* (‘yesterday’), intended to locate the story in time. Table 3 shows, specifically, the results derived from the students’ production associated with the hodiernal context:

Table 3. Results of the hodiernal context

	BAIS-students	LAS-students
Present Perfect	50% (N=64)	7.8% (N=4)
Preterit	26.6% (N=34)	35.3% (N=18)
Imperfect	0% (N=0)	1.9% (N=1)
Simple Present	23.4% (N=30)	54.9% (N=28)

The data indicates that in this context the participants of LAS have mostly produced the simple present form, as seen in example (6), whereas the participants of BAIS have used, for their part, the Present Perfect, as illustrated in example (7):

- (6) Esta mañana se levanta temprano.  
This morning SE wake.3P.SG.PRES up early.
- \*Abra las cortinas.  
Open.3P.SG.PRES the curtains.  
No tiene hambre.  
No have.3P.SG.PRES hunger.  
Sale de la casa sin desayuno.  
Leave.3P.SG.PRES of the house without breakfast.  
‘This morning he woke up early. He opened the curtains. He is not hungry. He leaves his house without breakfast’.
- (7)\*Esta mañana se ha despierto a las siete.  
This morning SE wake.3P.SG.PRES-PERF up at seven.
- Después se ha levantado.  
Later SE get.3P.SG.PRES-PERF up.  
Ha desayunado y después, ha salido su casa.  
Have.3P.SG.PRES-PERF breakfast and later leave.3P.SG.PRES-PERF his house.  
‘This morning he has woken up at seven. Later he has got up. He has had breakfast and he has left his house’.

As explained in section 2.2., the hodiernal context is the prototypical one for the use of the Present Perfect in the European variety of Spanish. In contrast, Latin American Spanish varieties resort to the Preterit more frequently in

this context. This fact explains the results we have obtained, which clearly show how the two student groups examined vary in their employment of the Present Perfect when combined with the temporal adverbial *esta mañana* ('this morning'). Notice here that whereas 50% of the verbal forms produced by the BAIS group in this context uses the Present Perfect, only one participant in the LAS group has produced this verbal form.

The prehodiernal context was elicited, for its part, by means of the temporal adverbial *ayer* ('yesterday'). Table 4 shows the total numbers and percentages of the inflected forms in the prehodiernal context for each learner group. As can be seen in Table 4, in this context the Preterit is the preferred verbal form for both groups. An interesting finding here is the use of the Present Perfect only on the part of the BAIS group because, as the literature has shown (see section 2.2.), the prehodiernal context in combination with a temporal adverbial is not the prototypical one for the use of the Present Perfect neither in European Spanish nor in Latin American Spanish. Since this particular linguistic context is not instructed in relation with the Present Perfect in the classroom and, as consequence, is not expected in the input both groups of students receive in class, we can conclude that the use of this specific token here points to a clear case of L1 transfer, as the Present Perfect in Dutch can refer to any past reference (see section 2.1.):

Table 4. Results of the prehodiernal context

	BAIS-students	LAS-students
Present Perfect	18.1% (N=25)	0% (N= 0)
Preterit	78.3% (N=108)	77% (N=37)
Imperfect	2.3% (N=3)	14.5% (N=7)
Simple Present	4.2% (N=6)	8.3% (N= 4)

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

This study aims at shedding light to the research area of acquisition and use of grammatical aspect by Dutch learners of L2 Spanish within a language variation perspective, which, as has been previously set forth, has a clear effect on the representation of temporality across two well-known Spanish varieties: the so-called European Spanish and Latin American Spanish. Our initial research goal was to investigate if these two different Spanish varieties, being the input in the classroom, respectively, for each of the two groups of Dutch learners of L2 Spanish involved in our study, influence their production of tense and aspect forms; specifically, their expression of past time references in the so-called hodiernal and prehodiernal contexts. It should be noticed in this regard that the Spanish variety to which these students are exposed is the only variable in our analysis that is different for each group. As has been explained, the rest of the variables are exactly the same for them both: they all are learners of Spanish of approximately the same age, with the same L1 (Dutch) and the same proficiency level of the language (B2), who have only been in contact with the target language in the classroom and for the same period of time.

In particular, our starting point were the following three hypotheses (see section 3):

- (1) All students will reflect the uses of the target variety employed in the classroom.
  - (a) All participants will produce the Preterit more than other past verbal forms in the prehodiernal context.
  - (b) LAS participants will produce the Preterit in the hodiernal context.
  - (c) BAIS participants will produce the Present Perfect in the hodiernal context
- (2) The L1 of the participants will be reflected in their use of the Present Perfect, since all the students will use the Present Perfect also in prehodiernal contexts.

Our predictions claimed that the production of the verbal forms by both groups (either LAS or BAIS participants) would be different, on the basis of the different target variety they have received as educational input in their at-home classrooms (see the sixth variable in Table 1).

The results of this pilot study have shown that both the hodiernal and the prehodiernal contexts examined have elicited, by means of a narrative picture description task, multiple verbal tokens. The hodiernal context has, specifically, yielded an overall of 18.4% Present Perfect forms, as opposed to the prehodiernal context which, for its part, has derived in 6.8% Present Perfect forms. This means that, as a whole, the Present Perfect is the preferred verbal form in the hodiernal context for both groups of students. However, a closer look at the individual results reveals striking differences in their production:

- (1) First, the BAIS group has produced the Present Perfect form in 50% of the cases examined, whereas participants of the LAS group has hardly produced this form (7.8%) in the hodiernal context. The Preterit, on the other hand, has been produced in 26.6% of the past tenses used by the BAIS group, and in 35.3% of the verbal forms employed by the LAS participants.

- (2) On the other hand, in relation to the prehodiernal context, the LAS group has not produced any Present Perfect form at all, whereas the BAIS learners have used it in 18.1% of the past tenses employed. As for the use of the Preterit, both groups performed nearly equally (78.3% vs. 77%).

Our findings do, thus, show the same tendency as the one set forth in previous studies that analyse the effect that the target variety that serves as input for L2 learners have on their acquisition process (Geeslin et al., 2012; Geeslin et al., 2013). Therefore, we can conclude that our first hypothesis is partly confirmed since: (i) sub-hypothesis (1a) is confirmed by both groups (78.3% vs. 77%); (ii) sub-hypothesis (1b) is partly confirmed: notice, on the one hand, that the LAS group uses the Preterit more often than the BAIS group (35.3% vs. 26.6%), and on the other, that the use of the Preterit in both groups is quite limited, due, we believe, to the frequent presence in our data of the simple present tense (54.9%); (iii) and finally, sub-hypothesis (1c) is also confirmed. The BAIS group uses the Present Perfect more often than the LAS group (50% vs. 7.8%).

However, our second hypothesis is not confirmed, because, although both groups were composed by L1 Dutch learners of Spanish, there does not seem to be frequent transfer from their L1. If that had been the case, more Present Perfect forms would have appeared in our data.

In sum, the results of this pilot study allow us, first, to understand better the use of Spanish temporal representations in the interlanguage of Dutch learners from a global perspective and, second, to add useful insights into the pedagogical practices that should be used in the teaching of aspect and tense in the second language class of Spanish. This empirical study, although preliminary, points, therefore, to a very interesting direction since it has revealed that the language input used in the classroom seems to have more influence on the learners' interlanguage than their L1. This, again, is in line with other studies that highlight how learner grammars are not solely influenced by the overall development of the learner, but also by the variation of the norms used in the classroom context (Geeslin et al., 2012; Geeslin et al., 2013).

## 6. Pedagogical implications and future research directions

As Bardovi-Harlig and Gass (2002) defend, pedagogical norms, which involve research into the norms of actual language use, have several didactic implications that range from the design of textbook materials to the creation of daily classroom activities. As a consequence, from our empirical study, and following this line of thought, we could argue that we can make 'perfect learning couples'. Furthermore, we can also hypothesise that Dutch speakers would be more successful learning European Spanish than Latin American Spanish. Another pedagogical discussion that arises from this study is the fact that, when analysing the accuracy of the temporal representations in learners' interlanguage, the existing variation will be based on the target variety. In sum, the meaning of L2 accuracy needs to go hand in hand with the target use of the grammatical phenomena at stake. This application could be extended to learners with other first languages, since we believe that learners from a given L1 at the beginning stages of their acquisition process will likely be more successful when learning a particular dialect of the L2. Moreover, L2 learners will benefit from learning about variation as they are surely going to encounter variation in their educational input and in the world outside the classroom.

To be able to empirically test this hypothesis, and as food for thought for future studies, we need to carry out a large-scale study with learners with different first languages from Dutch. In order to do so, we will have to collect data from two groups of learners with the same mother language, but exposed to different Spanish varieties. The clear tendency found in our study shows that classroom input is a decisive factor to interpret the uses of the past tense forms produced by Dutch learners of L2 Spanish. The inclusion of other first languages is, furthermore, motivated by the need to assess the role that the learner's L1 plays in their acquisition of Spanish past forms. This study has, thus, to be interpreted as the first step before embarking on such a large-scale study which, as well as this one, will focus on the choice between the Present Perfect and the Preterit that L2 learners of Spanish have to make when expressing past references.

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