

The use of the progressive in light of the Aspect Hypothesis in EFL-instructed Spanish learners at university level: a longitudinal learner corpus-based SLA study

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Recibido: Recibido: 8 de julio 2020 / Aceptado: 24 de mayo de 2021

Abstract. Despite recent interest in the analysis of the progressive in light of the Aspect Hypothesis (AH), little information is available on the use of the progressive by EFL Spanish learners. To gain a better understanding of the use of the progressive in EFL-instructed Spanish learner writing at advanced levels, this longitudinal learner corpus-based SLA study examines the frequency of use of the progressive, as well as two of the associations of the AH: (i) the progressive with dynamic verbs; (ii) and, no overextension of the progressive to stative verbs. The effects derived from factors or variables such as the tense employed, target- and non-target-like uses, students' academic year and expected higher proficiency level, task type and individual preferences are also discussed as a way to fine-tuning the strong version of the AH to the use of the progressive by this learner group.

Keywords: progressive; Aspect Hypothesis; Spanish learner writing; longitudinal learner corpus-based SLA study

[es] El uso del progresivo considerando la Hipótesis del Aspecto en alumnado universitario con instrucción en inglés como lengua extranjera: un estudio de adquisición de segundas lenguas basado en un corpus de aprendices longitudinal

Resumen. A pesar del reciente interés en el análisis del progresivo considerando la Hipótesis del Aspecto, hay poca información sobre su uso por parte de aprendientes de inglés L2 cuya L1 es el español. Para lograr un mayor conocimiento del uso del progresivo en la expresión escrita de este alumnado, cuando recibe instrucción formal en la L2 en niveles avanzados, este estudio, basado en un corpus de aprendices longitudinal, analiza la frecuencia de su uso y dos de las asociaciones de la Hipótesis del Aspecto: (i) la asociación del progresivo con verbos dinámicos; (ii) y la no extensión del progresivo a verbos estáticos. Para poder ajustar la versión fuerte de la Hipótesis del Aspecto al uso del progresivo en este grupo de estudiantes, se analizan también los efectos derivados de diferentes variables: entre ellas, el tiempo verbal empleado, usos (di-)similares a los de la lengua meta, el curso académico, el tipo de tarea y las preferencias individuales de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: progresivo; Hipótesis del Aspecto; expresión escrita en inglés de aprendientes cuya lengua materna es el español; estudio de adquisición de segundas lenguas basado en un corpus de aprendices longitudinal

Sumario. 1. Introduction. 2. The use of the progressive in English. 3. The Aspect Hypothesis: focus on the progressive. 4. Methodology. 4.1. The learner corpus. 4.2. Annotation. 5. Results. 5.1. Frequency of use of the progressive in Spanish learner writing at advanced levels. 5.2. The use of verb predicates with the progressive. 5.2.1. Verb predicates in the progressive: tense. 5.2.2. Verb predicates in the progressive: the task effect. 5.2.3. Verb predicates in the progressive: the academic year effect. 5.3. The overextension of the progressive to stative verbs. 6. Discussion. 7. Conclusion. References.

Cómo citar: Díez-Bedmar, M. B. (2021). The use of the progressive in light of the Aspect Hypothesis in EFL-instructed learners at university level: a longitudinal learner corpus-based SLA study. In *Tense, Aspect and Modality in L2. Recent Applied Studies*, L. Quintana Hernández and B. Rodríguez Arrizabalaga (eds.), *Círculo de Lingüística Aplicada a la Comunicación*, 32(3), 53-69, <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/clac.76712>

1. Introduction

One of the most fruitful lines of research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is the acquisition of tense, aspect and modality (TAM) in a second language (L2). Most research to date has focused on the analysis of past time reference, whereas little attention has been paid to the progressive (Ayoun & Salaberry, 2008; Bardovi-Harlig, 2012;

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Howard & Leclercq, 2017), which has traditionally been included in publications on the perfective aspect. However, ‘corpus-based SLA studies’ (Gablasova, Brezina & McEnery, 2017, p. 130) are now being conducted to analyse the progressive in light of the Aspect Hypothesis (AH) (Andersen & Shirai, 1994, 1996; Shirai & Andersen, 1995) in learner production (Leńko-Szymańska, 2007; Dose-Heidelmayer & Götz, 2016; Fuchs & Werner, 2018b).

Studies which consider Spanish ESL learners’ production do not focus on the progressive (Robison, 1990, 1995; Salaberry, 2000), nor do they fully explore it, providing little information per L1 learner group (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Bardovi-Harlig, 1998, 2012). Only two cross-sectional studies have so far addressed the use of the progressive by Spanish EFL students at different proficiency levels in light of the AH. The first is Fuchs and Werner’s (2018b) article on stative progressives in the written production by beginner and low-intermediate students at primary and secondary school levels across different L1 backgrounds, Spanish included. The second is Muñoz and Gilabert’s (2011) analysis of the verb predicates used with the progressive in two oral tasks produced by elementary, intermediate and high-intermediate Catalan–Spanish bilingual learners at secondary and university levels. Consequently, there is no information on the use of the progressive in written tasks by Spanish advanced learners of English throughout their university studies in light of the AH. The role played by crucial factors or variables, such as increased command of the FL, target-like and non-target-like uses of the progressive, task type and individual preferences, has not been analysed either, which poses limitations to the understanding of their effect on the acquisition and use of the progressive by this learner group.

The limited number of publications on the use of the progressive by Spanish ESL or EFL learners may stem from the Spanish students’ overall command of the progressive. Similarities are found in English and Spanish regarding the form and function of the progressive aspect. In Spanish, it is formed using the auxiliary verb *estar* and the so-called ‘gerundio’ of the main verb (the verb root plus the morpheme *-ando* or *-iendo*), similar to the *be + verb-ing* form in English. Its main function is to characterise events as in progress or ongoing (Yllera, 1999), as shown in examples (1) and (2) below in English and Spanish, respectively:

- (1) Luis Joaquín is furnishing the new flat.
- (2) Luis Joaquín está amueblando el piso nuevo

2. The use of the progressive in English

Different meanings have been described in the use of the progressive in L1 English (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1985; Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad & Finegan, 1999; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). The prototypical aspectual function underlying the progressive is to convey a situation in progress at a particular time (Quirk et al., 1985; Biber et al., 1999). The other functions of the progressive are placed on a prototypicality continuum towards the most marginal functions. Figure 1 and examples 3-6 show Andersen and Shirai’s (1996) continuum, in which three out of the four verb predicate types in Vendler (1957) are explicitly considered. Activity and accomplishment predicates in the progressive convey the ‘process’ meaning (see examples (3) and (4)). Achievement verb predicates, which are not explicitly included in the continuum, express iterative, habitual or futurate meanings when used in the progressive –see example 5–, the progressive to express the futurate being less frequent than the other meanings in British English (Bardovi-Harlig, 2004a, 2004b, 2012; Römer, 2005). Finally, the use of the progressive with stative verb predicates is placed at the end of the continuum since its use is ‘marginal’ in L1 English (Levin, 2013, p. 201) and restricted to a number of verbs such as *think* or *love* (Martínez Vázquez, 2018a, 2018b) –see example (6):²

Process (activity>accomplishment) > iterative > habitual or futurate > stative progressive
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Figure 1. The progressive continuum (Andersen & Shirai, 1996, p. 558).

- (3) My knee feels all right when I am running (BNC Corpus)
- (4) I am writing this obituary of my father, Tony Foster... (NOW Corpus)
- (5) What I am noticing from clients who have to stay and work from home... (Coronavirus corpus)
- (6) [...] as I am thinking of going to St. Louis for a few days... (Corpus of US Supreme Court Opinions)

Because adverb use makes activities with repeated meanings become accomplishments via a process of aspectual coercion (the Discourse Representation Theory, Kamp, 1981), suggestions have been made to group iterative and habitual meanings under the repeated interpretation for L1 and L2 (Huang, 1999; Römer, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig, 2012). As a result, a revised proposal for the prototypicality of the progressive is the following one:

Process (activity> accomplishment) > repeated (iterative/habitual) > futurate > stative progressive

Figure 2. Bardovi-Harlig’s (2012, p. 148) proposal for the prototypicality of the progressive (2012: 148)

² Apart from the aspectual meanings which it may express, the progressive may convey non-aspectual meanings such as tentativeness, politeness, emotion, intensity and interpretation (Kranich 2010).

The progressive is more frequent in spoken language (Biber et al., 1999; Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith, 2009) and is genre sensitive (Mair & Hundt 1995; Biber et al., 1999). Its use is determined by its function in the backgrounding of events, both in native (Bardovi-Harlig, 1995) and ESL varieties (Bardovi-Harlig, 1995, 2000), as claimed in the Discourse Hypothesis (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000). An increase in the frequency of use of the progressive has been reported in native varieties, including the British (Leech et al., 2009; Aarts, Close & Wallis, 2010; Kranich, 2010; Hundt, Rautionaho & Strobl, 2020), New Zealand and Australian ones (Hundt, 1998; Collins, 2008; Hundt & Vogel, 2011), as well as in ESL varieties (Van Rooy, 2006; Hundt & Vogel, 2011; Gut & Fuchs, 2013; Rautionaho 2014).³

Studies comparing the use of the progressive in native, ESL and learner varieties have offered interesting insights into the frequency of use and functions of progressives across such varieties. For example, the Irish and British varieties produce fewer progressives than the New Zealand variety (Hundt & Vogel, 2011). In the case of stative progressives using *love* and *think*, a rise in their frequency and functions has been reported in British English (Martínez Vázquez, 2018a, 2018b). ESL varieties, except for the Singaporean one, are characterised by a higher, normalised frequency of progressive use compared with Irish and British varieties (Hundt & Vogel, 2011). As for the functions of the progressive in ESL varieties, the frequent extension of the progressive to stative verbs in the Indian and African varieties is shortlisted as a defining characteristic of use (Van Rooy, 2006; Edwards, 2014) when they refer to permanent states (Meriläinen, Paulasto & Rautionaho, 2017; Hundt et al., 2020).

The analysis of learners' frequency of use of the progressive has shown that the L1 may favour the acquisition and use of the progressive in the L2 when the Contrastive Analysis of both languages reveals the existence of a similar progressive marker (Lado, 1957; Fries, 1945). However, this is not the case when this condition is not met (Fuchs & Werner, 2018b). A higher frequency of use of the progressive when compared to L1 English varieties is found in some learner groups, for example, Polish, German, Swedish, Finnish-Swedish and Finnish learners (Römer, 2005; Leńko-Szymańska, 2007; Wulff & Römer, 2009; Rogatcheva, 2012; Dose-Heidelmayer & Götz, 2016), owing to a teaching bias that ensures the learners' use of the progressive (Römer, 2005; Leńko-Szymańska, 2007). The task type has also been found to affect the frequency of use of the progressive (Blomberg, 2001; Comajoan, 2005; Ayoun & Salaberry, 2008; Muñoz & Gilabert, 2011; Dose-Heidelmayer & Götz, 2016; Bardovi-Harlig, 2017; Rautionaho & Deshors, 2018). In oral tasks, picture descriptions and spoken narratives trigger a higher frequency of use of the progressive than free discussions and interviews, respectively (Muñoz & Gilabert, 2011; Dose-Heidelmayer & Götz, 2016). In written learner language, literature essays show a higher frequency of use of the progressive than in argumentative writing (Blomberg, 2001), likely due to the description of characters and settings in literature essays. Therefore, learners' descriptive and narrative texts, whether in oral or written mode, are characterised by a more frequent use of the progressive.

3. The Aspect Hypothesis: focus on the progressive

Aspect can be conveyed in a language by means of grammatical and lexical aspect. Following Comrie (1976), Quirk *et al.* (1985) and Biber *et al.* (1999), there are two major tense constructions (present and past) and two aspect constructions (the progressive and the perfect).

Grammatical aspect, which is language specific, shows a twofold distinction between perfective, (7), and imperfective aspect, (8), which allows the speaker to view the event as a whole or incomplete, respectively. The imperfective aspect, in turn, is divided into habitual, (9), and continuous aspect, (10). It is within the continuous aspect that a distinction between progressive and non-progressive is found (Comrie, 1976):

- (7) Johns (1985), for example, has examined the impact of logging in part of west Malaysia. (BNC Corpus)
- (8) She has agreed to chair the partnership and is working very hard to pull all the different groups together. (Hansard corpus)
- (9) ...veteran boxer Laurie Degnan is training eight-year-old boys as future champion fighters. (BNC Corpus)
- (10) The President is reading a statement. (Coronavirus corpus)

Lexical aspect is the "inherent aspectual (i.e., semantic aspectual) properties of various classes of lexical items" (Comrie, 1976, p. 41). The most commonly used classification is Vendler's (1957), which considers three variables (durativity, dynamicity and telicity) to distinguish between four verb types, namely states, activities, accomplishments and achievements (see Table 1 and examples 3 to 6 above):

³ Although the main input that learners receive in formal instruction comes from British and American varieties, other native and ESL varieties are referred to in this paper, given learners' access to them either inside or outside of class (*YouTube* videos, lectures and tutorials via the Internet), as well as the difficulty of acknowledging learners' 'reference variety'.

Table 1. Aspectual categories according to Vendler (1957) (adapted from Comajoan, 2006, p. 203).

Lexical aspect	Semantic features	Example
States	[+Static] [+Durative] [-Telic]	[be in Copenhagen]
Activities	[-Static] [+Durative] [-Telic]	[stroll in the park]
Accomplishments	[-Static] [+Durative] [+Telic]	[build a bridge]
Achievements	[-Static] [-Durative] [+Telic]	[leave the house]

During the acquisition of tense-aspect by L1 and L2 learners, lexical aspect plays an important role. As stated in the AH, as formulated in Andersen & Shirai (1994, p. 133): “First and second language learners will initially be influenced by the inherent semantic aspect of verb or predicates in the acquisition of tense and aspect markers associated with or affixed to these verbs”.

The AH also postulates that the simple past inflection first appears in achievements and accomplishments (i.e., telic verbs), to then spread onto activities and states (i.e., n.on-telic verbs). However, the progressive inflection is first used with activities, to then extend its use to accomplishments and achievement predicates (Andersen & Shirai, 1994, p. 1996). Therefore, the AH predicts, as postulated in Bardovi-Harlig (2012, p. 484) the following associations:

- (i) past marking with telic verbs;
- (ii) the perfective with the past (in languages that have a perfective/imperfective distinction);
- (iii) the progressive with dynamic verbs;
- (iv) no overextension of the progressive to stative verbs;

Fruitful research has been carried out on the AH, which may have been confirmed for uninstructed L2 speakers (Bardovi-Harlig, 1995; Robison, 1995; Bardovi-Harlig & Bergström, 1996) in naturalistic conversational settings (Andersen, 2002). However, the so-called ‘strong’ version of the AH (Fuchs & Werner, 2018a) has been criticised for overlooking a number of variables or factors that affect the expression of aspect, such as the students’ L1, mode (spoken vs. written language), learners’ proficiency level, learning contexts and the role of perceptual salience, and the tasks in which learners engage when producing language (Fuchs & Werner, 2018a). As stated by Housen (2000, pp. 257-258), the AH in its ‘strong’ form “is not an absolute acquisitional universal”. Therefore, studies that address how variables and factors in different contexts affect the associations predicted by the AH are necessary to fine-tune the ‘strong’ version of the AH into a ‘weak’ one which pays attention to the factors or variables in the context in which language is produced (Fuchs & Werner, 2018a). The third and fourth associations of the AH are analysed in this paper.

Research into the third association predicted by the AH has shown that the progressive correlates with dynamic verbs, in particular activity predicates, in the L1 and L2 (Robison, 1990; Giacalone Ramat, 1997; Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Robison, 1995; Shirai, 1995; Bardovi-Harlig & Bergström, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 1998, 2012; Huang, 1999; Edwards, 2014). However, writers’ proficiency level and degree of expertise, task type, and individual preferences are factors which play an important role in this correlation.

Speakers of English L1 varieties adopt a wider use of all four predicate types in the progressive, whereas learners progress towards native-like progressive forms with a similar frequency and function range as their input to the target language and proficiency level increase (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Axelsson & Hahn, 2001; Hundt & Vogel, 2011; Vraicu, 2013; Meriläinen, 2018). This is because of the Distributional Bias Hypothesis (Andersen & Shirai, 1994; Shirai & Andersen, 1995), which shows how the language employed by L1 speakers and L2 users in naturalistic settings exhibit a similar distributional pattern to the input that they receive, with achievements and accomplishments being more frequently used with perfective forms and activities with progressives, plus a broader use of the different functional meanings of the progressive. Consequently, students tend to use activity predicates in the progressive (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Robison, 1995; Bardovi-Harlig & Bergström, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 1998, 2000; Vraicu, 2013), and also employ achievement (Robison, 1995; Leńko-Szymańka, 2007; Muñoz & Gilabert, 2011) and accomplishment predicates (Leńko-Szymańka, 2007; Muñoz & Gilabert, 2011). The writer’s expertise is another factor to consider when analysing the progressive, given that English L1 expert writers use fewer progressives than their English L1 counterparts in general terms, except in the case of New Zealand writers (Wulff & Römer, 2009; Hundt & Vogel, 2011). Expertise represents such a significant factor that it affects the frequency of use of the progressive and lexico-grammatical selection in different genres (Wulff & Römer, 2009; Hundt & Vogel, 2011).

The task type also has an effect on the selection of verb predicates with the progressive. As reported by Muñoz and Gilabert (2011), accomplishment predicates are more frequently used by learners in the narrative task, whereas activity predicates are more commonly used in the interview task. In academic texts, the task type is shown to affect the selection of verb predicates in the present progressive, with verbs of physical action found to be characteristic in narrative and personal texts, whereas verb predicates to convey modal meaning are found in objective texts (Wulff & Römer 2009). The task is such an important variable that it determines the progressive used, to the detriment of other variables including lexical aspect, tense/modality, voice, semantic domain and variety (Rautioaho & Deshors, 2018).

Individual preference, as shown in intra-corpus variation, is another factor to consider (Vraicu, 2013; Dose-Heidmayer & Götz, 2016; Deshors, 2017; Meriläinen, 2018). As reported by Vraicu (2013), some learners use the progressive with activity predicates in a large number of cases, whereas others only show a limited number of uses. In the case of accomplishment predicates with the progressive, the number of learners who use them is lower than that of English L1 speakers. However, students who decide to use them do so far more frequently than L1 speakers do.

The extension of the progressive to stative predicates, that is, the fourth association of the AH, has also been previously analysed. Some publications do not report any use of the extension of the progressive to stative verbs (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Bardovi-Harlig & Bergström, 1996; Housen, 2002; Muñoz & Gilabert, 2011). However, others highlight a more frequent use by upper intermediate and early advanced learners (Römer, 2005; Ranta, 2006; Meriläinen, 2018), before another drop in usage with increased proficiency (Housen, 2002; Vraicu, 2013). Its use, therefore, may be determined by learners' proficiency level and their amount of exposure to the target input (see Section 2).

The L1 effect on the use of stative progressives has also been examined in beginner and intermediate learners (Fuchs & Werner, 2018b). Those learners whose L1 does not utilise the progressive, as reported in Contrastive Analyses (Lado, 1957; Fries, 1945), exhibit a relatively higher, yet not statistically significant, proportion of use of stative progressives, whether grammatical or not. However, non-grammatical stative progressives are produced significantly higher in the production of students whose L1 does have a progressive. Fuchs and Werner's (2018b) study is the only one thus far which also considers the accuracy of use of stative progressives. Their results show that the verbs *have*, *see* and *want* are used in target-like and non-target-like uses of stative progressives, whereas the verbs *hear* and *think* are only used in target-like uses.

As can be seen in the literature review, recent studies on the progressive which consider the AH focus on the variables or factors which may have an effect on its use so that a more fine-tuned version of the AH can be obtained. However, little information is available on the use of the progressive in light of the AH in written tasks by EFL-instructed Spanish learners at an advanced level. The effects that different factors or variables may have on progressive use are also to be analysed to ascertain whether the AH needs to be fine-tuned for this learner group.

To do so, this learner corpus-based SLA study analyses a four-year longitudinal learner corpus with two written tasks to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1. Does the ratio of use of the progressive per thousand words by Spanish EFL advanced learners resemble the ratios in English L1 native varieties, ESL varieties or other learner varieties?
- RQ2. Does advanced EFL Spanish learner writing show an association of the progressive with dynamic verbs, as postulated by the AH?
- RQ3. Does advanced Spanish learner writing overextend the progressive to stative verbs?

Several variables or factors, namely tense, task type, students' academic year, learners' target-like or non-target-like use of the progressive and individual preferences are explored for two reasons: a) to analyse the effect that they may have on the use of the progressive by this learner group; and b) to fine-tune the strong version of the AH (considering the third and fourth associations of the AH) for this learner group.

4. Methodology

4.1. The learner corpus

The learner corpus analysed is a subsection of the 'Jaen Longitudinal UCLEE error-tagged written learner corpus' (hereinafter Xauen corpus). This longitudinal learner corpus comprises the written exams for Linguistics, Literature and Use of English courses by a cohort of 16 students spanning Year 1 through Year 4 of the BA in English Studies at the University of Jaén (Spain). These students took all the courses in the degree in the corresponding academic year. As such, there are two components in this learner corpus. The first one includes Academic English texts (exams on Linguistics and Literature), whereas the second comprises non-academic English texts or General English texts (included in their Use of English course exams). The two task types demanded two text types: argumentative texts for the Academic English exams (with exam questions such as 'Demystification, materialism and essentialism in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*' or 'The Oedipus complex and its applicability to *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Hamlet*' and descriptive texts for the General English texts (with prompts such as 'My worst nightmare'

or ‘The most beautiful place in the world’). Students were able to sit one or various exams for each course, which explains the differences in the number of texts per component and academic year (see Table 2). All writing tasks were timed, the allotted time varied depending on the type of exam and the academic year (exams ranged from 45 minutes for the production of the General English texts to 3 hours for the Linguistics or Literature exams). The student’s level was not measured by means of any standardised test, but ranged from CEFR B1 level in Year 1 to C1-C2 in Year 4. Students at different levels, however, were likely to conflate in the same academic year.

For this study, the Literature exams (61 texts amounting to 105,415 words) and the texts corresponding to the Use of English exams (113 texts; 50,188 words) were considered. A total of 174 texts and 155,603 words were analysed:

Table 2. Breakdown of the learner corpus in this study

	General English	Academic English	Total
Year 1	34 texts; 14,166 words	11 texts; 6,816 words	45 texts; 20,982 words
Year 2	31 texts; 12,634 words	14 texts; 29,714 words	45 texts; 42,348 words
Year 3	26 texts; 13,809 words	18 texts; 33,577 words	44 texts; 47,386 words
Year 4	22 texts; 9,579 words	18 texts; 35,308 words	40 texts; 44,887 words
Total	113 texts; 50,188 words	61 texts; 105,415 words	174 texts; 155,603 words

4.2. Annotation

All uses of the progressive were manually located in the learner corpus and then manually annotated following the taxonomy in Table 3 to identify: (a) instances of present or past progressive; (b) target– or non-target-like uses of the progressive; and (c) the verb predicate in the progressive, using Vendler’s (1957) classification into states, activities, accomplishments and achievements. Predicates after modal verbs, catenative verbs, verbs in the imperative or in a non-finite form were not considered for this study. Examples (11)-(14) in this section represent annotated examples:

Table 3. Taxonomy used to annotate the progressive in the learner corpus

		State (ST)	Activity (ACT)	Accomplishment (ACC)	Achievement (ACH)
Present (PPr)	Target-like (C)	(PPr_C_ST)	(PPr_C_ACT)	(PPr_C_ACC)	(PPr_C_ACH)
	Non-target like (I)	(PPr_I_ST)	(PPr_I_ACT)	(PPr_I_ACC)	(PPr_I_ACH)
Past (PASTPr)	Target-like (C)	(PASTPr_C_ST)	(PASTPr_C_ACT)	(PASTPr_C_ACC)	(PASTPr_C_ACH)
	Non-target like (I)	(PASTPr_I_ST)	(PASTPr_I_ACT)	(PASTPr_I_ACC)	(PASTPr_I_ACH)

- (11) The two (PASTPr_I_ST) were agreeing with way of life after a long discussion. (2-LiII-C-13.txt)⁴
 (12) Ribadesella, where people (PASTPr_C_ACT) were training for a competition. (1-IIIn-A-08)
 (13) I really like how Rania (PPr_I_ACH) is discovering the truth about her love with Sergious. (4_Txts_C_04)
 (14) She (PPr_C_ACC) is writing a poem. (3_Nort_C_19)

To annotate the lexical class in the predicates, the lexical verb, its arguments and the temporal markers which appeared in the sentence were considered due to the aspectual coercion process. Muñoz and Gilabert’s (2001) adaptation of the tests employed to classify verbs into categories from Shirai and Andersen (1995) was also used. Target-like and non-target-like uses of stative progressives were identified by conceiving target-like uses as bounded in time and ‘temporary states’ (Fuchs & Werner, 2018b). Annotation reliability was ensured by a second annotator’s annotation of 70% of the predicates identified in the corpus. Inter-annotator agreement was calculated and, when discrepancies were found, both annotators reached an agreement after fruitful debate.

⁴ The information in brackets at the end of each example includes information regarding the academic year (Years 1 to 4), course (the names of the courses are abbreviated here), compilation stage (A, B and C, corresponding to the beginning, middle and end of each academic year) and the student who wrote it.

Because of the varying number of words and predicates per learner text, data were normalised to 1000 by considering the total number of predicates per text and learner. This allowed comparisons to be made. Non-parametric tests, i.e., Kruskal-Wallis tests, were run given the non-normal distribution of the data obtained, as shown by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p < .001$ in all cases).

5. Results

5.1. Frequency of use of the progressive in Spanish learner writing at advanced level

The annotation yields 661 uses of the progressive, 343 in the present and 318 in the past. The normalisation of data to obtain the number of progressives per thousand words (ptw) to answer RQ1 reveals 4.25 progressives ptw. If the two task types are considered, the data show 7.9 progressives ptw in the General English texts and 2.43 progressives ptw in the academic texts (see Figure 3):

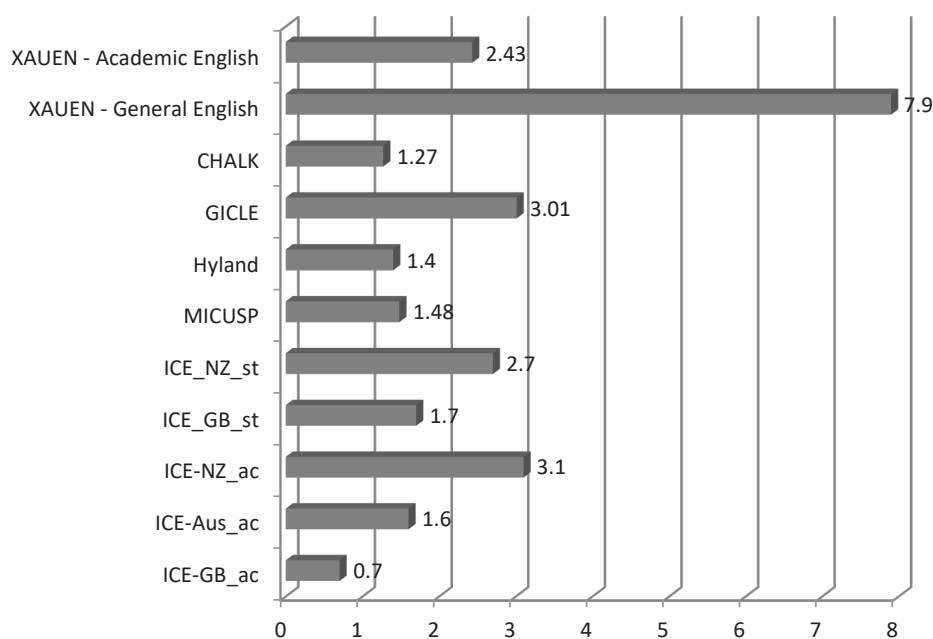


Figure 3. Progressives (ptw) across different corpora

A comparison of these results with those from previous studies which provide information on the use of the progressive ptw (Collins, 2009; Wulff & Römer, 2009; Hundt & Vogel, 2011; Dose-Heidelmayer & Götz 2016) reveals that academic texts by Spanish learners at advanced level include a higher ratio of progressives ptw than academic texts in the British (ICE_GB_ac), American (Hyland corpus) and Australian (ICE_Aus_ac) native varieties (see Figure 3). The ratio is, however, lower than that of the New Zealand English academic texts (ICE_NZ_ac), which yield a higher ratio given the spread of the progressive in this variety. A comparison of academic writing by Spanish learners of English at advanced levels with that by novice L1 English peers (MICUSP corpus) also reveals the Spanish learners' higher use of the progressive. Figure 3 shows a higher ratio of progressives ptw in General English by the Spanish learner group compared with novice writing in two native varieties, namely the British and New Zealand ones (ICE-GB_st and ICE-NZ-st, respectively), and peer German university learners of English in the CHALK and GICLE corpora. All in all, the frequency of use of the progressive across both tasks in XAUEN is higher than in similar texts by novice L1 English writers, expert L1 English writers and peer German EFL learners of English, thus pointing to the Spanish learners' overall lesser degree of expertise and/or proficiency, given that increased use of the progressive is characteristic of less expert and/or proficient learner writing (Wulff & Römer, 2009; Hundt & Vogel, 2011; Muñoz & Gilabert, 2011). However, the Spanish learners in the XAUEN corpus report a lower ratio in Academic English texts than in General English texts despite the overall high frequency of use of the progressive (see Figure 3).

The role played by the Spanish learners' academic year in their use of the progressive was also analysed to answer RQ1. The results of the longitudinal analysis show opposite patterns in the ratio of progressives ptw for both task types (see Figure 4). Learners' use of the progressive in General English texts is the highest in Year 1. This ratio patently decreases from the first to the second year, then continues to fall at a slower rate. Although the ratios remain high in Year 4, when compared to those in student writing in the ICE native varieties or the production by their German counterparts (see Figure 3), the decrease in Spanish learners' use of the progressive may suggest overall

increased proficiency and/or expertise in General English writing, in line with findings from Muñoz and Gilabert (2011), Wulff and Römer (2009) and Hundt and Vogel (2011). The opposite pattern is however observed in Academic English writing. A decrease is seen from Year 1 to Year 2, and the ratio increases from there onwards, thus differentiating their ratio even more from that of L1 English speakers in academic writing. Remarkably, the second-year ratio is similar to the one in academic writing by novice L1 English writers (in MICUSP) and expert L1 English ones (in the Hyland corpus) (see Figure 3). The reason behind this increase in progressive use in Spanish speakers' academic texts does not stem from the exam questions, as they demand the same text type (mainly argumentative). This increase in the use of the progressive may instead be attributable to the learners' improved writing skills, which allows them to write longer texts that utilise the progressive to describe characters and plot in more detail, as reported in Blomberg (2001) –see examples (15) and (16):

- (15) This idea of strict schedule and timetable is reinforced by the Rabbit, which is always saying ‘I’m late!’ (2_LiII_C_19)⁵
 (16) In this part of the poem, the lady [...] is trying to seduce the Red Cross Knight (4_LiIV_C_06)

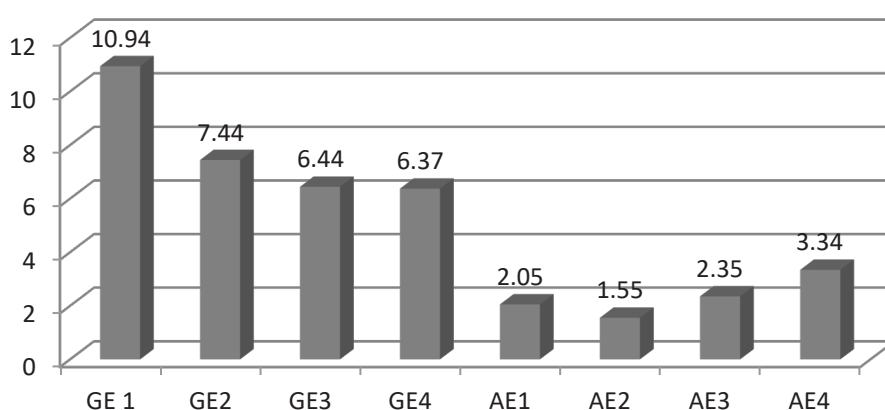


Figure 4. Use of the progressive (ptw) in both task types (GE and AE) and academic years

5.2. The use of verb predicates with the progressive

To answer RQ2, the verb predicates used in the progressive were analysed. The role played by different factors or variables was considered to better understand the use of the progressive by this advanced Spanish EFL group. The target- and non-target-like uses of the progressive were analysed in conjunction with tense (Section 5.2.1.), task type (Section 5.2.2.) and academic year (Section 5.2.3.) were analysed.

5.2.1. Verb predicates in the progressive: tense

As shown in Table 4 and Table 5, EFL-instructed Spanish learners at advanced levels employ the four verb predicates in their progressives. This indicates that these learners may be placed at an advanced level because they do not limit their use of the progressive to activity verb predicates (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Muñoz & Gilabert, 2011; Vraicu, 2013) and even extend the progressive to stative verbs, thus conveying the least prototypical meaning of the progressive.

Table 4 shows a similar distribution of verb predicates in the target-like uses of the present and past progressive for both task types. Activity predicates with the progressive are the most frequently used ones, (17), in line with previous research (Bardovi-Harlig, 1995; Leńko-Szymańska, 2007), followed by accomplishment predicates, (18). The similar distribution of verb predicates in the first two positions indicates that tense (present or past) does not affect the learners' target-like use of the progressive to express process, i.e., the most prototypical meaning of the progressive (Andersen & Shirai, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 2012). Stative predicates, (19), and achievement predicates, (20), are found at different positions (third or fourth) in General English and Academic English texts:

- (17) I am walking along the street. (4_GRAL_C_18)
 (18) First of all, she is writing a poem. (3_Nort_C_19)
 (19) I remember that I was thinking about my life in the future. (4_GRAL_C_23)
 (20) I feel that my time is finishing. (4_GRAL_C_02)

⁵ The annotation has been removed to provide a reader-friendly text.

Table 4. Normalised means (ptw) of verb predicates per task type in target-like uses of the present and past progressive

Target-like uses				
	Present progressive		Past progressive	
	General English	Academic English	General English	Academic English
Stative	<i>M</i> = 3.55	<i>M</i> = 2.76	<i>M</i> = 2.33	<i>M</i> = 9.3
Activity	<i>M</i> = 33.25	<i>M</i> = 41.34	<i>M</i> = 26.25	<i>M</i> = 95.4
Accomplishment	<i>M</i> = 9.26	<i>M</i> = 12.5	<i>M</i> = 10.08	<i>M</i> = 47.64
Achievement	<i>M</i> = 2.98	<i>M</i> = 7.57	<i>M</i> = 1.54	<i>M</i> = 15.8

The process meaning is also the most frequently conveyed in non-target-like uses of the present and past progressive (Table 5). Therefore, tense does not impact on the most frequent expression of the process meaning in target- or non-target-like uses of the progressive. However, an interplay seems to exist between the non-target like uses of the progressive, tense, verb predicates employed and task. Two conclusions drawn from tables 4 and 5 support this preliminary idea. First, activity predicates are found in the first position for the non-target-like use of the present progressive in both tasks, yet accomplishment predicates hold this position in the non-target-like uses of the past progressive across both tasks. Second, the non-target like uses of the present progressive in General English texts show that achievement predicates are the verb predicates in second position of use (replacing accomplishments), whereas in Academic English texts, stative and achievement predicates swap their frequency position in non-target-like present and past progressive uses when compared to the target-like uses of the present progressive:

Table 5. Normalised means (ptw) of verb predicates per task type in non-target-like uses of the present and past progressive

Non-target-like uses				
	Present progressive		Past progressive	
	General English	Academic English	General English	Academic English
Stative	<i>M</i> = 0.41	<i>M</i> = 0.35	<i>M</i> = 1.54	<i>M</i> = 3.95
Activity	<i>M</i> = 2.6	<i>M</i> = 4.93	<i>M</i> = 4.31	<i>M</i> = 5.62
Accomplishment	<i>M</i> = 0.14	<i>M</i> = 2.86	<i>M</i> = 8.05	<i>M</i> = 25.44
Achievement	<i>M</i> = 1.01	<i>M</i> = 0.07	<i>M</i> = 0.12	<i>M</i> = 0

5.2.2. Verb predicates in the progressive: the task effect

Task effect, and hence text effect, on the selection of verb predicates in the progressive was explored to ascertain whether verb predicates were more frequently used in one task or the other for target- or non-target-like uses of the progressive in the same academic year.

The results, summarised in Table 6 (see Table 7 for inferential and descriptive statistics), reveal no statistically significant differences in target or non-target-like uses of the present or past progressive with different verb predicates in General English texts and Academic English texts in Year 1. Although the ratio of progressive use is higher in General English texts in Year 1 (Figure 4), the use of the progressive is similar across both tasks.

The academic register triggers a higher frequency of some target- and non-target-like uses of the progressive (seven in total), whereas General English texts only show one statistically significant difference: the target-like use of the present progressive with achievement predicates in Year 4. Only two of the seven differences in academic texts are for target-like progressive uses, while the remaining five are for non-target like uses. This shows that learners struggle more with the use of the progressive in Academic English. As can be seen in Table 7, non-target-like uses of the present progressive with activity and accomplishment predicates in Year 3 and non-target-like uses of the present progressive with activity predicates and past progressive with accomplishment predicates in Year 4 are non-existent in General English texts, but do appear in Academic English texts. The non-target-like use of the past progressive with accomplishment predicates is found in both tasks. Therefore, students make more errors when writing academic texts likely due to the content demands of literature exams, which may draw students' attention away from the use of English. See, for example:

- (21) 'the attitude of artists towards the War was changing by the time the war finished. (3-LiIII-B-14)⁶
 (22) 'not all literature texts are dealing with the inner thought [...]'. (4_Txts_C_04)
 (23) 'Poetry, in the Romantic Period, is looking for perfection'. (2_LiII_C_14)

⁶ Although the verb phrase may seem target-like, it should be 'had changed' so that the sentence reads 'Artists' attitude towards the War had changed by the time it finished'.

The verb predicates found to be statistically more frequent in one task or the other show that achievement predicates in target-like uses of the present progressive are statistically significant in General English writing, whereas activity, accomplishment and stative predicates in target-like or non-target-like uses of the progressive are statistically significant in Academic English writing (Tables 6 and 7). There are no statistically significant uses of achievement predicates in the progressive in academic texts (expressing iterative, habitual or futurate meanings when used in the progressive), likely due to the content of literature exams. That said, the opposite is seen in General English texts in Year 4.

These results indicate that, despite a higher ratio of use of the progressive in General English texts (Figure 3), Academic English texts trigger more activity predicates in non-target-like uses, stative predicates in target-like uses and accomplishment predicates in target-like and non-target-like uses of the progressive. Hence, it is important to check the verb predicates in target- and non-target-like uses of the progressive across different tasks for a more accurate description of progressive use in learner writing:

Table 6. Statistically significant differences in target- and non-target-like uses of the present and past progressive with the different predicate types for both tasks

	General English	Academic English
Year 2		– Target-like use of present progressive with stative predicates
		– Non-target-like use of past progressive with accomplishment predicates
Year 3		– Non-target-like use of present progressive with activity predicates
		– Non-target-like use of present progressive with accomplishment predicates
Year 4		– Target-like use of present progressive with accomplishment predicates
	– Target-like use of present progressive with achievement predicates	
		– Non-target-like use of present progressive with activity predicates
		– Non-target-like use of past progressive with accomplishment predicates

Table 7. Inferential and descriptive statistics of the uses of the progressive which show a statistically significant difference in both tasks

	Use of the progressive	Inferential statistics	Descriptive statistics	
			General English	Academic English
Year 2	Target-like use of the present progressive with stative predicates	($U= 215,000$, $z= -2,552$, $p= .011$, $r= .34$)	$M= .30$ $SD= 1.93$	$M= 6.41$ $SD= 14.49$
	Non-target-like use of the past progressive with accomplishment predicates	($U= 154,000$, $z= -3.250$; $p= .001$, $r= .44$)	$M= 6.17$ $SD= 21.88$	$M= 31.02$ $SD= 37.70$
Year 3	Non-target-like use of the present progressive with activity predicates	($U= 217,500$, $z= -2.246$, $p= .025$, $r= .33$)	$M= .00$ $SD= .00$	$M= 6.60$ $SD= 17.36$
	Non-target-like use of the present progressive with accomplishment predicates	($U= 217,500$, $z= -2.246$, $p= .025$, $r= .33$)	$M= .00$ $SD= .00$	$M= 4.26$ $SD= 10.83$
Year 4	Target-like use of the present progressive with accomplishment predicates	($U= 182,000$, $z= -2,614$, $p= .009$, $r= .37$)	$M= 10.50$ $SD= 28.79$	$M= 26.01$ $SD= 29.34$
	Target-like use of the present progressive with achievement predicates	($U= 182,000$, $z= -2,734$, $p= .006$, $r= .39$)	$M= 4.00$ $SD= 13.84$	$M= .52$ $SD= 2.55$
	Non-target-like use of the present progressive with activity predicates	($U= 237,500$, $z= -2,380$, $p= .017$, $r= .34$)	$M= .00$ $SD= .00$	$M= 4.26$ $SD= 9.88$
	Non-target-like use of the past progressive with accomplishment predicates	($U= 206,000$, $z= -2.494$; $p= .013$, $r= .36$)	$M= .00$ $SD= .00$	$M= .89$ $SD= 3.20$

5.2.3. Verb predicates in the progressive: the academic year effect

The role of academic year was also explored to ascertain whether students' exposure to the target variety (in class, readings, online interactions outside of class, etc.) and their expected proficiency increase with academic year affected their target or non-target like uses of the progressive with different verb predicates when writing the same text type.

Table 8 provides a summary of these findings. As can be seen, only one statistically significant difference in academic writing was found, namely the target-like use of the present progressive with accomplishment predicates, with final-year BA students using them much more frequently than in the previous year (see Table 9 for inferential and descriptive statistics). Examples such as (24) below are therefore considerably more frequent in Year 4. However, two differences are observed in General English texts. The first is found in the target-like use of the past progressive with activity predicates in General English texts between Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3, reporting a lower frequency of use in Year 2 when compared with Year 1 and Year 3. Examples like (25) are less frequent in General English texts at Year 2. The second difference corresponds to the target-like use of the past progressive with accomplishment predicates between Year 2 and Year 3, which shows a higher frequency of use in Year 3, with examples such as (26):

- (24) ... when Gawain is telling his terrible adventures... (4_Txts_B_06)
- (25) ... they are supposed to know what was happening in other countries... (2_INS_B_23)
- (26) ... we was creating real songs (3_Gral_B_07)

The results show that differences are only found in the target-like uses of the progressive. Specifically, in the present progressive in Academic English texts and in the past in General English texts, which may be determined by the degree of description inherent in literary works from academic texts and the prompts in General English texts (e.g., ‘My worst nightmare’). Accomplishment predicates in both tasks yield differences at Year 3 and 4, increasing from Year 3 to Year 4 in Academic English texts and from Year 2 to Year 3 in General English texts. As seen in Section 5.2., accomplishment predicates hold second position for target-like uses of progressives in General English texts and Academic English texts in the present and past. Hence, their increased use across both tasks in the latter years of the degree may point to the learners’ decreased use of activity predicates, which may be considered a characteristic of more target-like uses of the progressive (Vraicu, 2013; Meriläinen, 2018). This finding suggests that the academic year plays an important role in the acquisitional route that Spanish advanced learners of English take towards a more target-like distribution of verb predicates which express process in the progressive:

Table 8. Statistical differences in the use of the progressive in consecutive academic years

Academic English				
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Target-like use of present progressive with accomplishment predicates				X
General English				
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Target-like use of past progressive with activity predicates	X	X	X	
Target-like use of past progressive with accomplishment predicates			X	

Table 9. Statistical differences in the use of the progressive in consecutive academic years – inferential and descriptive statistics

		Inferential statistics	Descriptive statistics
Academic English	Target-like use of the present progressive with accomplishment predicates	Year 3 vs. Year 4 ($U= 135,000, z= -2.729, p= .006, r= .42$)	Year 3 ($M= 8, SD= 27.69$) Year 4 ($M= 10.50, SD= 28.79$)
		Year 1 vs. Year 2 ($U= 675,000, z= -2.344, p= .019, r= .25$)	Year 1 ($M= 30.11, SD= 36.40$) Year 2 ($M= 15.58, SD= 32.36$)
General English	Target-like use of the past progressive with activity predicates	Year 2 vs. Year 3 ($U= 463,500, z= -2.049, p= .040, r= .24$)	Year 3 ($M= 27.93, SD= 34.39$)
		Year 2 vs. Year 3 ($U= 442,500, z= -2.729, p= .006, r= .32$)	Year 2 ($M= 4.73, SD= 17.65$) Year 3 ($M= 14.05, SD= 23.85$)

5.3. The overextension of the progressive to stative verbs

As seen in Tables 4 and 5 in Section 5.2., EFL-instructed Spanish learners at advanced levels extend the progressive to stative verbs, even though its use is scarce. Their ratio considering the tasks, the target-like and non-target-like uses, the academic year and individual preferences are analysed to answer the third research question in light of the effect that these factors or variables may play on the overextension of the progressive to stative verbs.

In the learner corpus, 34 instances of overextension of the progressive to stative verbs were found, which translates into 0.22 stative progressives ptw. The comparison of ratios in the General English component (0.48 uses ptw) and the Academic English component (0.11 uses ptw) clearly shows that learners extend the progressive to stative predicates more in their General English texts.

Only three of the thirty-four instances of stative progressives were found to be non-target uses. These were classed as unbounded, which represent a ratio of 0.02 non-target-like stative progressives (see examples (31) to (33) below). Two of these instances were found in academic texts, whereas only one was employed in a General English text. The limited use of non-target-like progressives in advanced learner writing by Spanish university students coincides with previous research indicating that the non-target like extension of the progressive to stative predicates is rare at beginner-intermediate levels (Fuchs & Werner, 2018b), more frequent at intermediate and early advanced levels (Römer, 2005; Ranta, 2006), and shows a limited number of instances with increased proficiency (Housen, 2002; Vraicu, 2013, Meriläinen et al., 2017). Non-target-like uses were found with the verbs *hear*, *love* and *agree*, as can be seen in examples (27-29). The verbs *have*, *see* and *want*, reported in non-target like stative progressives in Fuchs and Werner (2018b), were not found:

- (27) The needs in Spain are never considered, our dirigents aren't hearing the cry of the people[...] (1-Iin-B-07)
- (28) God father: the one who is loving his son. (4-Txts-B-19)
- (29) The two were agreeing with way of life after a long discussion. (2-LiII-C-13.txt)

The verbs in the target-like uses were *think* in the present progressive (see examples 30 and 31) and *think* and *hear* in the past progressive –see examples (32) and (33)–, in line with previous results by Giacalone Ramat (1997) and Fuchs and Werner (2018b). In the learner corpus, *think* in the progressive always expresses a cogitate meaning, which is the most frequent meaning of this verb in political speeches in the BNC (Martínez Vázquez, 2018a):

- (30) [when she is in bed] She is thinking about the love of Sergious. (4-Txts-C-02)
- (31) ... in the text Evelyn, while the character is thinking, he shows punctuation marks. (2-LiII-C-13).
- (32) ... this was what I was thinking while I was eating [...]. (3-GRAL-B-08)
- (33) I was very frightened because I was hearing different and strange things. (2-Ins-A-02)

The comparison of the results in this study with advanced learners and the findings in Fuchs and Werner (2018b) with beginner and intermediate students writing a similar General English task show that the ratio of progressives with stative verbs is higher in the production by University students (0.48 uses ptw) than by students at a lower level (0.14 uses ptw). This may point to an increase in the extension of the progressive to stative verbs with proficiency in L1 Spanish learner writing, which would support earlier findings that more advanced students of English employ the progressive to convey more meanings, apart from the prototypical one (Vraicu, 2013; Meriläinen, 2018).

The longitudinal nature of the learner corpus allows the analysis of the overextension of the progressive to stative verbs by this advanced level group through the four BA academic years. As seen in Table 10, the first academic year appears to be when students explore the extension of the progressive to stative predicates more often. They overextended the progressive to the stative on twelve occasions in General English texts, but this did not happen at any point in the Academic English texts. To confirm whether a common input effect on the part of a teacher or any material this learner group used in Year 1 had any effect on the students' overextension of the progressive to the stative, all twelve instances in the corpus were analysed. However, no similar uses were found, which may point to a reason other than the input received in formal instruction as a trigger for the overextension of the progressive to the stative in Year 1 in General English texts. In the second year, however, they reduced their use in General English texts, yet increased them in Academic English texts. From this point onwards, students show a similar distribution in their extension of the progressive to stative predicates, thus reflecting an adjustment in their use, if the data as a group are considered.

To better analyse the overextension of the progressive to stative verbs by this learner group, the role played by individual preferences, as shown in intra-corpus variation (Vraicu, 2013; Dose-Heidelmayer & Götz, 2016; Deshors, 2017; Meriläinen, 2018), is crucial. The data in Table 10 reveal that most students extended the progressive to the stative, with 14 out of 16 students, (87.5%) doing so. However, while some students only employed stative progressives once in one text across the whole learner corpus (learners 06, 09, 12, 18, 20 and 25), twice (learner 13), or three times (learner 4) in the same text, other learners overextended the progressive to stative predicates once in two texts (learners 07, 14 and 19) or three texts (learner 2). Other students extended the progressive to stative predicates more frequently. Learner 23 used it three times in two different texts, whereas learner 8 reported the highest frequency of use across a greater number of texts, with eight instances in five different texts. Interestingly, students who overextended the progressive to statives in more than one text did not normally do so in the same academic year, except

for learners 2 and 8. Another notable finding was that some students only overextended in the General English texts (learners 7, 14, and 23), while others only did so in Academic English texts (learner 19), despite the fact that stative progressives in academic texts are infrequent.

The role played by learner 8 and learner 23 is of the utmost importance when analysing the overextension of the progressive to stative verbs in General English texts, as their more frequent uses bias the overall results by the learner group. Since the students' proficiency level was not checked by means of a standardised test, it is difficult to know if their most frequent overextension of the progressive to statives might be attributable to a higher proficiency level shown in their General English texts. Another possibility might be the type of input, i.e., the mode and variety of English, students have had access to outside the classroom. Individual differences, therefore, are to be considered in the analysis of the overextension of the progressive to stative predicates:

Table 10. Intra-corpus variation in the extension of the progressive to stative predicates

	GE1	AE1	GE2	AE2	GE3	AE3	GE4	AE4
Learner 2			1				1	1
Learner 4	3							
Learner 6								1
Learner 7	1				1			
Learner 8	2		1	1	3	1		
Learner 9					1			
Learner 12	1							
Learner 13				2				
Learner 14	1						1	
Learner 16								
Learner 18						1		
Learner 19				1				1
Learner 20				1				
Learner 22								
Learner 23	3						3	
Learner 25	1							
Total	12	0	2	5	5	2	5	3

6. Discussion

The findings from this study reveal Spanish students' high frequency of use of the progressive. Their ratio of use of the progressive *ptw* is higher than the ratios in reference and ESL varieties (either by peers or academic writers) as well as in the L1 German EFL variety. However, the higher the Spanish students' proficiency level (as expected of consecutive academic years), the fewer progressives they employ, coinciding with previous results (Muñoz & Gilabert, 2011; Wulff & Romer, 2009; Hundt & Vogel, 2011). Advanced EFL-instructed Spanish learners produce more progressives in General English texts than in Academic texts. In both cases, this learner group seems to be on route to reducing their high ratio of use to resemble the target ratios.

The results from this study show that the third association of the AH needs to be fine-tuned for this learner group. Although dynamic verbs are the most frequently used in the progressive, stative verbs are also found. Furthermore, differences are observed in the frequency of activity, accomplishment, achievement and stative verb predicates in the progressive, considering tense, accuracy, academic year and task type. The knowledge gained, therefore, can be used to fine-tune the third association of the strong version of the AH for this learner group.

The use of the progressive with the four verb predicates highlights how this learner group does not only adopt the prototypical meaning of the progressive. The association of the progressive with activity verb predicates in both tasks is clear and in line with previous research (Robison, 1990; Giacalone Ramat, 1997; Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Robison, 1995; Shirai, 1995; Bardovi-Harlig & Bergström, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 1998, 2012; Huang, 1999; Leńko-Szymnska, 2007; Edwards, 2014). Learners use the progressive more frequently to convey its most prototypical meaning, process, by means of activity and accomplishment predicates, regardless of the tense (present or past) or accuracy (target- or non-target like uses) of the progressive employed. However, students' higher proficiency level comes across in the more frequent use of accomplishment predicates for both tasks at Year 3 and Year 4 of their undergraduate degrees. Therefore, their reliance on activity predicates in the progressive decreases in order to express other meanings in the progressive during the final years of the BA. This suggests that Spanish EFL advanced learners are on their way to a more target-like use of the progressive (Vraicu, 2013; Meriläinen, 2018). Students' increased

proficiency level is also evident in the fact that statistically significant differences in progressive use with different verb predicates in consecutive years are only found for target-like uses of the progressive.

Non-target like uses of the progressive, stable along the course of the degree, are also observed in this cohort of Spanish EFL learners. If tasks are considered, the Academic English task triggers more non-target-like uses of the progressive than the General English task, as can be seen in the five statistically significant differences in non-target like uses in the two tasks for different academic years. The need to express the content within literature exams under pressure may cause students to make mistakes in their use of the progressive with activity and accomplishment predicates. The higher ratio of use for three verb predicates in target-like or non-target like uses of the progressive in academic texts also points to the learners' different use of the language in this task. Although preliminary, an interrelation may be at work among the non-target like uses of the progressive, tense, the verb predicates employed and task.

The fourth association of the strong version of the AH is not confirmed by this study's data. In fact, EFL-instructed Spanish learners at university level also convey the 'marginal' meaning of the progressive (Levin 2013). The findings obtained by considering the roles played by task type, accuracy, academic year and intra-corpus variation in the overextension of the progressive to stative verbs may be used to fine-tune the fourth association for this learner group.

Although generally scarce, the ratio of use is higher in the General English component (especially at Year 1) than in the Academic English one. The ratio of use of progressives with stative predicates in this learner group supersedes that of beginner and intermediate learners of English in Fuchs and Werner (2018b), which points to an increased use of this marginal use of the progressive with proficiency. Most of the students in this learner group have used stative progressives, albeit differently. However, intra-corpus variation is to be considered, as previously reported in the literature (Vraicu, 2013; Dose-Heidelmayer & Götz, 2016; Deshors, 2017; Meriläinen, 2018), since two students' preferences or proficiency level may have biased the results of the learner group regarding the ratio of overextension of the progressive to stative verbs.

The frequency of use of non-target-like stative progressives, as determined by their unboundedness in time, is limited. This may also point to this group of students' proficiency level, since students at higher levels report fewer non-target-like stative progressives (Housen, 2002; Vraicu, 2013; Mariläinen et al., 2017). Also in line with the literature (Giacalone Ramat, 1997; Fuchs & Werner, 2018b), the verbs *think* and *hear* are employed in target-like progressives, whereas *hear*, *love* and *agree* are used in non-target-like stative progressives.

7. Conclusion

The results of this longitudinal corpus-based SLA study have cast light on the use of the progressive by EFL-instructed Spanish learners at university level when writing two different tasks throughout their four-year BA degree. Important variables or factors such as tense, accuracy in the use of the progressive, academic year, task type and individual preferences were explored to gain a better understanding of their effect on the use of the present and past progressive.

The results from this study highlight the need to consider several variables or factors when analysing the progressive in light of the AH, also advocating for the need to fine-tune the AH. If variables or factors including tense, the accuracy of use of the progressive, students' academic year and expected higher proficiency level, task type and individual preferences when analysing progressive use in learner writing had not been considered in this study, other results may have been obtained, thus hiding the interaction of such variables or factors in this group of students' use of the progressive. Further research is needed to triangulate these results with the production of other cohorts of EFL-instructed Spanish learners at university level in similar tasks, to then extend the research to other tasks and proficiency levels.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments.

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