Universal Grammar, transfer and variability: a case study

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the English interlanguage of an adult Spanish advanced subject. It is tried to show here how his variable performance in spontaneous conversation and grammaticality judgements with respect to certain core grammar aspects may reflect a non-native competence based both on his first language grammatical competence and new language rule construction capabilities. Supposedly native clustering parametrical properties appear to be learned separately, some of them requiring negative evidence to be fixed.

Key words: Interlanguage, variable performance, (non-) native grammatical competence, (fixing) parametrical properties.

RESUMEN

GRAMÁTICA UNIVERSAL, TRANSFERENCIA Y VARIABILIDAD: ESTUDIO DE UN CASO

Se examina en este artículo la interlengua inglesa de un sujeto hispano-parlante adulto de nivel avanzado. Se intenta demostrar que la variabilidad de su producción lingüística respecto a algunos aspectos gramaticales nucleares podría reflejar una competencia no nativa basada a la vez en su competencia gramatical nativa y en su capacidad de construcción de nuevas reglas lingüísticas. Una serie de propiedades paramétricas que supuestamente surgen ligadas en la lengua nativa se aprenden por separado y algunas de ellas precisan de corrección para su fijación.

Palabras clave: interlengua, producción lingüística variable, competencia gramatical (no) nativa, (fijación de) propiedades paramétricas.

1.   INTRODUCTION

In Escutia (1993) a study case was reported of an adult Spanish advanced learner of English, named Eduardo, whose second language (L2) spontaneous (everyday conversation) and semi-spontaneous oral production (sentences uttered during a recorded interview) was gathered and presented for him as acceptability judgements. I was looking at some (then considered) derived properties of the Pro-Drop Parameter (PDP) of Universal Grammar (UG), or genetic endowment for language development, and tried to show that he had not fixed it univocally and that his L2 non-native competence was uniform. I meant by this that his grammaticality judgements would show he was not able to detect some of the differences between the L2 native grammar and his own L2 grammar as revealed in his oral production and, thus, that the latter could not solely be attibutable to performance factors. I concluded that this subject had developed an L2 grammar where certain aspects derived from the fixation of the parameter in the L2 native grammar had not been univocally acquired; specifically, the absence of null pronominal referential subjects (the subject sometimes dropped subject pronouns in embedded subject correferential clauses) and the presence of expletive or pleonastic pronouns (which he often dropped and did not detect, especially in embedded clauses).

In the same vein I am going to look now at production and analysis data from the interlanguage (IL), or non-native linguistic system, of another adult, a sixty-five year old Spanish proficient learner of L2 English. He is considered proficient in the sense that he can function fluently in any personal, academic or professional situation. He lived for ten years among native speakers in the United States of America -where he arrived in his late twenties- teaching Philosophy at college level, and still uses and reads English very often. Previous to his stay in North America he had tried to learn the language on his own, by means of self-study methods. I will call him Nico and examine his oral production in unplanned conversation as well as his acceptability judgements of sentences similar to the ones he produces. Specifically, I will look at pro-perties derived from the fixation of both the PDP and the Verbal Agreement Parameter (originally, Chomsky's (1986) Strict Adjacency Parameter), involving verb raising[1]. I want to draw more evidence on apparent competence variability and show that this subject has developed a non-native speaker competence where both direct access to UG and L1 in-fluence or transfer have a place.

I will proceed as follows: first the theoretical parametric framework corresponding to the properties under study will be presented; secondly, I

will quickly review some studies which have dealt with the L2 acquisition of the corresponding parameters and will also explain my position with respect to how parametric acquisition affects the learning of an L2; then the subject's data will be discussed; finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

2. PARAMETERS AND PROPERTIES INVOLVED

2.1.   The Pro-Drop Parameter

Peninsular Spanish[2] and English are different with respect to the possibility of licensing non-overt pronominal subjects in finite clauses, in examples such as *(Ella) canta* vs **(She) sings*. Spanish requires overt subject pronouns (SubjPs) only for semantic or pragmatic effects, as they signal focus on the subject, thus responding to what has been called the Pronoun Avoidance Principle (Chomsky 1981; Jaegli 1982; Fernández-Soriano 1989). In the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995) this would be subsumed under the broader Economy Principle, according to which linguistic elements are inserted when the cost is necessary for interpretation. Thus, Spanish is classified as a pro(noun) drop(ping) ([+PD]) language, as it usually "drops" (overt) SubjPs, while English is [-PD], since in English SubjPs must always be overt. This property has been ascribed to [+PD] languages displaying uniform morphology (with either fully inflected paradigms or with no inflection at all), which licenses a non-overt SubjP *pro*, and rich finite verbal inflection, which identifies it, thus rendering it interpretable (Jaeggli and Safir 1989).

A number of authors in the Generative Grammar framework (Perlmutter, 1971; Chomsky 1981; Rizzi, 1982; Jaegli 1982) have related this property to others like: (2) inversion of overt definite subjects in declaratives, as in *pro$_i$ Ha llamado Juan$_i$* vs "*Has called Juan", where the canonical subject position would be filled by the nominative covert pronoun *pro*; (3) absence of overt pleonastic pronouns with other verbs (as in *Llueve* vs *(It) rains), in constructions with extraposed clauses (as in *(pro) parece que Juan está enfermo*, 'it seems Juan is sick'), as their subjects cannot be focussed or used contrastively, or in *there* constructions with unaccusative verbs (as in *(pro) Llegaron tres chicas* vs "There arrived three girls"); (4) presence of the so-called "*that*-trace effect", or the extraction of the subject of an embedded clause across an overt complementizer (*that*, in English), as in Spanish *Quién$_i$ dijiste que pro vino t$_i$?*[3] ("Who did you say (*that) came?").

Languages with non-overt SubjPs have rich agreement and the above properties in common. The lack of overt expletives follows from the availability of *pro* in conjunction with considerations of Economy. The availability of post-verbal subjects is related to that of non-overt expletives. Finally, the subject can perhaps move across a complementizer because it may be extracted from a post-verbal position[4].
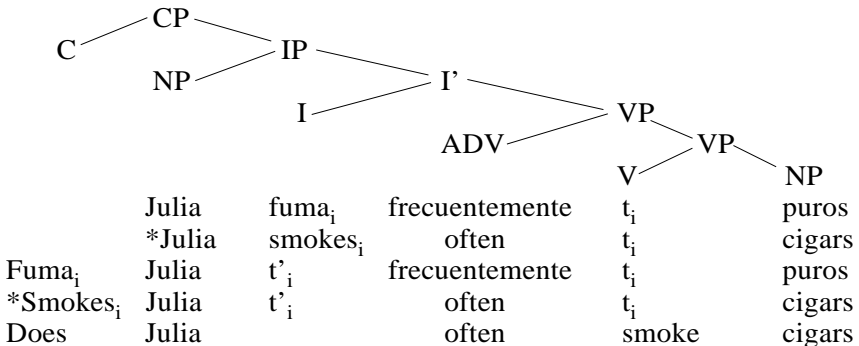
Although the four properties mentioned above will be examined, only the dropping of either referential or expletive/pleonastic SubjPs will be considered here as clearly related parametric properties.

2.2. Verbal Agreement Parameter

The need for overt adjacency between the verb and its object is currently ascribed to the availability of overt verb movement to its agreement functional projection (Pollock 1989, Chomsky 1989, Ouhalla 1991). In this sense, the Verb Agreement or Movement Parameter accounts for language variation in the word order of verbs, adverbs, verbal complements and negation as a result of how "strong" verbal inflection is, as shown in the richness of their inflectional morphology. Compare:

a)   Julia fuma frecuentemente puros

b)   *Julia smokes often cigars
     'Julia often smokes cigars'

Languages with verb raising, like Spanish, allow adverbs to intervene between a verb and its object because of this movement. The following would be an abbreviated representation of such movement:

		Julia	$fuma_i$	frecuentemente	t_i	puros
		*Julia	$smokes_i$	often	t_i	cigars
$Fuma_i$		Julia	t'_i	frecuentemente	t_i	puros
*$Smokes_i$		Julia	t'_i	often	t_i	cigars
Does		Julia		often	smoke	cigars

They also allow inversion of the subject and the main verb in questions[5] (e.g. *Fuma (el/ella) frecuentemente puros?* *Smokes s/he often cigars 'Does s/he often smoke cigars?'*, represented above as well). Languages like English, which do not allow raising in overt syntax, must resort to other mechanisms (such as *do* insertion).

In pre-Minimalist approaches, the verb raised in order to join with agreement inflection (I), or functional phrasal head where auxiliary verbs and verbal inflectional morphemes were located, that is, in order to be marked for tense and aspect; in more recent theory, an already-inflected verb raises to AGR(eement), one of the split verbal Inflection heads (along with Tense)[6], in order to check its inflectional abstract features[7]. Verbal inflection is treated as abstractly featural, rather than phonetically spelled-out.

This parameter would require that all tensed verbs in Spanish be overtly raised into I because they contain the grammatical feature [+STRONG] in the sense of displaying rich overt morphological form[8], which makes them be computed in overt syntax. In English, lexical verbs are [-STRONG] and this movement takes place covertly, at the level of Logical Form (LF), or abstract representation containing those syntactic aspects of meaning at the interface between syntax and semantics. That is, being Weak means not showing phonetic differentiation and having to be processed by LF. So verb raising is subject to parametric variation, and lexical verbs can move to AGR (and, subsequently, to C, in questions) if they carry strong features. Thus, the two properties of strength of verbal agreement and the timing of V movement to AGR cluster and characterize this verbal agreement parameter.

3. PARAMETER FIXING IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

With respect to second language acquisition (L2A), the position is adhered to here of authors like Tsimpli and Roussou (1991) -following Borer (1984), Chomsky (1988), Ouhalla (1991) and Tsimpli and Ouhalla (1990)- who postulate that parameters are linked to functional projections. Parametric variation is determined by the different values associated with functional categories (or scheleton with agreement projections like IP and CP), which constitute UG's lexicon (or supposed inventory of functional elements provided by nature in order to "hang" lexical categories there). The latter is conceived of as a modular component, the Functional Module,

subject to biological maturation, related by Tsimpli and Roussou to the so-called Critical Period of language acquisition (Lenneberg 1967). This is situated around adolescence and would mark the end of the Functional Module's developmental processes. However, its development could be characterized less dramatically –following Johnson and Newport (1989) and Newport (1990)– by a decreasing access to the nuclear manifestations of UG –such as canonical L2 word order– inversely proportional to the beginning age of exposure to the L2. Thus, parameter resetting would be impossible for adult learners, having as a consequence that the properties derived from a particular parametric option do not all necessarily obtain or do so univocally (in all applicable cases for a particular property), as it does in L1A.

   If the Functional Module is not accessible to adults, the parametric values of the L1 are transferred into the L2 at the beginning of L2 learning. For the most proficient learners, those who seem to have adopted the right parametric option, as they display L2 production and intuitions very consistent with its derived properties in the L1[9], it is assumed here with Liceras (1996) that this is the result of restructuring the L1 toward a non-equivalent underlying representation of the L2 which, nevertheless, gives rise to the same surface representations. This is so because, according to the latter author, adult L2A would count on the following resources: (1) previous linguistic experience, through which UG principles may be accessible; (2) second level domain specific procedures, not equally sensitive to the L2 input triggering experience as the first level ones, of child language acquisition, which are specifically tuned to detect the right information in the input setting in motion language development and are no longer available; (3) problem-solving mechanisms. If this is the case, those parametric properties would neither be given automatically nor fixed univocally and may have to be learned individually by restructuring the already acquired linguistic representations (*cf.* Escutia 1997).

4. THE PRO-DROP AND AGREEMENT PARAMETERS IN ENGLISH L2A BY ROMANCE L1 LEARNERS

4.1. Pro-Drop Parameter

   The studies about this parameter in adult English L2A claim to show some evidence for transfer of the L1 setting (acceptance and use of null

subjects by L1 Romance language speakers), especially at the beginner level (*cf.* White 1985), and also of resetting to the L2 value at more advanced levels (*cf.* White 1985, Phinney 1987, Hilles 1986). Not all of the properties originally associated with this parameter seem to cluster in adult L2A, in particular the *that*-trace violation effect, which does not cluster either for English speakers learning Spanish L2 (*cf.* Liceras 1989); in fact, some authors do not consider it part of the parameter (*cf.* Culicover 1993). Escutia (1993) also found that even if an adult subject has learned that English does not allow dropping SubjPs, this knowledge may not include correferential SubjPs in embedded clauses or expletives, a fact which might indicate that it is qualitatively different from the native speaker's.

Within this framework, when I look at [-PD] English L2A by native speakers of [+PD] Spanish, production and acceptance of sentences with missing overt subjects is expected if the L1 value is carried over to the L2. If this is the case with advanced learners, it may be ascribed to performance factors or to a need for negative evidence[10] in order to reset some manifestations of the parameter since the L2 is, on the surface, in a subset relation to the L1 in this case (L1 Spanish has both possibilities, although not interchangeable, of overt and non-overt subjects, while English only has the former). As Liceras puts it, in English as a second language, production of sentences with missing subjects may stem from the "fact that there may be rules of parameters of core grammar that will be fixed in a variety of ways or not fixed at all" (1985: 355). Furthermore, its manifestations are not normally part of the teaching curriculum and this is crucial if what actually happens in L2A is that they are not acquired parametrically but learned individually, as it is maintained here.

4.2.   Verbal Agreement Parameter

White (1991a) tested French speaking learners of L2 English on what was called then the Strict Adjacency Parameter, according to which, there are languages like English which require adjacency between a lexical verb and its non-prepositional object in order to assign Case to it and others, like French and Spanish where adjacency is not required. English, for this parameter as well, is in a subset relationship with respect to French and Spanish in sentences such as (a) above, since the adverb can be placed both before and after the object in the latter two, while in English the former option is not possible. Her adult students, representing all proficiency

levels, completed three tasks: grammaticality judgements, multiple choice and preference task. These included both grammatical sentences and non-grammatical ones with adjacency violations and they basically rated both kinds of sentences the same. She concluded that the L1 value of the parameter was transferred. In subsequent studies (White 1991b, Trahey and White 1993), she tried to find out whether either explicit instruction or 'input flooding' –an extended exposure of the learners to English data containing many strict adjacency items– would help them improve but there was only short-term improvement in the sense of an increased use of the grammatical pattern. However, neither method taught the ungrammaticality of non-adjacent patterns. The only "stable" rules in the learners' IL would seem those of the L1, which allow more freedom in terms of the position of the adverb.

Her students, on the other hand, did not have difficulties in correctly inserting *do*-support in their questions or realising negative placement -both, supposedly, properties derived from the [-STRONG] setting of this parameter. This might show that if the verb movement parameter is formulated correctly or is really a UG parameter at all, its derived properties do not seem to cluster but rather function independently in L2A.

5.   SOURCES OF DATA

Production data from our subject were jotted down during every day interaction (comprising meals, sports, outings and get-togethers) in a residence hall in England, where both of us stayed together for one month along with native speakers, most of them university teachers or students. These data are presented only as specific examples of our subject's violations in spontaneous performance of some of the properties of the parameters in question, not as an inventory of all the examples of the kind that he produced during that period. They do not preclude the fact that our subject may have also produced grammatical items of the same sort.

The following non-native-like sentences produced by Nico were taken on different occasions of our daily interactions and would represent some of the phenomena sought after in the task given him (* marks the exact location of ungrammaticality):

   (i)   Inversion of overt definite subjects:
        a. *That was the day that *played my friends*
        b. *The moment that *represents that picture was ......*

(ii)   Subject pronoun dropping in embedded clauses

      a. *Strategy is very important because *(it) ensures our position*

      b. *I knew people that lived there because of the fact that *(it) was a tax haven country*
      (Neither *it* was provided by our subject)

(iii)   Adjacency violations

      a. *...others who knew *very well those people*

      b. *I saw *physically the university*

Nico's production seemed to show that he was treating these three types of constructions the way his L1 does, that is, as optional (order) possibilities in the case of (i) and (iii) and as a [+PD] item in the case of (ii). In order to check if this was only the consequence of performance factors, a battery of forty-one grammaticality judgements (GJs) was given him, where most of the items had been extracted from advanced Spanish speaking students' written compositions. Only ungrammatical sentences were used because, given the supposedly optional nature of the above violations, I only wanted to check if the ungrammatical options had any stability in his L2 knowledge. Besides, following Felix (1988) and Zobl (1992), detecting ungrammatical sentences may depend strictly on computational (grammatical) knowledge and that was what I was after[11].

Transcribed below are only those items dealing with the four properties of the PD and the verb movement parameters and reproduce the instructions the subject was given to complete the task. After each sentence the subject's judgements are given, √ meaning acceptance on his part (that is, not detecting ungrammaticality), in which case the corresponding undetected error location is marked in brackets, and X meaning rejection, which is followed by the subject's own correction (as the numbers indicate, they were not generally consecutive items).

Mark if the following sentences sound right (√) or wrong (X) to you at first reading. If you are not sure, state it so (NS) and grade it: +NS, if closer to right, and -NS if closer to wrong. When you think a sentence is wrong, give the correct version of it. Please do not return to any sentence already checked nor ask anybody's opinion, particularly a native speaker. If there is any word you do not know ask me.

Inversion items

#2.   There was apparently no solution to their children's problem. The decision that [*took the parents] finally was to call the school's advisory program. √

#3.   The road was too dangerous and, [*having drunk alcohol the bus driver], the football team were very scared.   X: ...having the bus driver drunk...

#6.   In a house were living two men who [ate *continually green apples]. X: ...two men were living...

#23. Football is a sport that see many people at home.   X: ...many people see...

#25. I think that the story that tell this text is incredible.   X: ...this text tells...

#38. I were in a city where during the war [*died many people]. √

#39. I planted carefully the tree where had been buried the cat.   X: ...the cat had...

#41. She'd like to live the way [*that lived the first settlers in the country] √

Subject pronoun dropping in embedded clause

#4.   The man was accused of murder but he denied it for a long time until at last he accepted that *(he) had killed the little girl. √

#11. Everybody was playing tennis and golf because were the most fashionable sports. X: ...because they were...

#14. These people are so different that *(they) can't talk to one another. √

#15. I can solve the problem if it is simple but not if *(it) is complicated. √

#16. The problem with the girl began when started to starve herself because she was thinking that was very fat.   X: ...she started/she was very...

#17. The bell was so heavy that *(it) must have been heard everywhere. +NS

#22. He wasn't sure if had seen his father.   X: ...if he had...

#28. I like the book because of the love story that *(it) represents. √

#30. She enjoyed the trip but her eyes hurt so much that *(she)started to cry. √

There expletive

#5.   All the lights in the village Int off because the previous night had been a big storm. X: ...there had been...

#26. In an ideal city wouldn't exist violence.   X: ...there wouldn't exist...

***It* expletive**

#8.   It is true that rains all the time in Manchester?   X: ...that it rains...

#20. In the text says that she felt very sorry for everything.   X: ...it says…

#29. In Spain it's so hot that *(it)is not possible to do anything after lunch √

#40. I go often to parties in which is impossible to listen to a normal conversation.   X: ...in which it is...

***That* trace sequences**

#10. What film did you say (*that) was on TV last night? √

#37. Who did you say (*that) came last night? √

Non-adjacent objects

#6.   In a house were living two men which ate [*continually] green apples. √

#32. Driving [*fast] a car pleases me enormously. √

#33. Does he enjoy [*very much] action films? √

#39. I planted [*carefully] the tree where had been buried the cat. √

6.   DISCUSSION

6.1.   Oral production items

6.1.1.   Inversion items

Nico shows variable non-native competence since he seems to be inconsistent within the categories selected, noticing some ungrammatical items but not others of the same kind. The first logical explanation to think of is that his grammar may rely partially on the L1, where the Spanish counterparts of those items he accepts are viable. On the other hand that cannot be the whole story and other capabilities must also be at work since otherwise items like #20 and #40, which cannot be attributed to familiarity, would not be detected. The same would apply to the correctly identified inversion violations (#3, #6, #23, #25, #39).

In the case of items #2, #38 and #41, Nico may be applying the L1 grammar, perhaps analyzing the last two as covertly including a preverbal null expletive checking Case and forming a chain with the postverbal subject[12]. The problem is that Spanish has the same possibility with other verbs as well, as that in #2, a case of free inversion which he accepts, where the subject moves supposedly for stylistic reasons from its preverbal position leaving an empty category in its original place. Also, the movement of the Wh word in the relative embedded clause from its original position to its CP does generate inversion in Spanish (*cf.* Torrego 1984) and this might explain the acceptance of #2[13]. However, although this possibility of transfer could give an account of his judgements of #2 and #41, it would inconsistently not apply to #23 and #25 when they have the same structure.

The corresponding literal translations of the rest of the GJs' inversion cases (#3, #6, #23, #25 and #39) are grammatical in Spanish, as are those of ia and ib of Nico's oral production, and still he has rejected them in favor of the Subject-Verb word order. There is also in #6 another sentence with the same unaccusative verb as #41 but he has rejected it this time, thus showing variable intuitions within the same task.

Therefore, the inversion items considered show that Nico's IL also has other grammatical specifications different from those of the L1, which, similarly to those of the L2, do not allow free S-V inversion. It could be that, following Liceras' restructuring theory of the L1, this learner has developed a restructuring rule according to which inversion is possible in the IL grammar only with unaccusative verbs but there are not enough data to assert this. In this respect, the correction provided for #3 might also be enlightening since the corresponding Spanish literal counterpart is perfectly alright and his version corresponds to, at least, an L1 awkward sentence. His

analysis of this sentence seems to have left its subject in the VP internal subject original specifier position[14], which would be neither an L1 nor an L2 option.

6.1.2. Subject pronoun dropping in embedded clauses

Nico both produces and accepts null SubjPs in embedded clauses, as shown in iia & b and his responses to #4, #14, #15, #28 and #30. On the other hand, he rejects them in #11, #16 and #22. For all the former sentences, the subject of the matrix and of the embedded clause are coreferential and most of them (all apart from iia and #15) contain null SubjPs following the complementizer *that*. The latter might have non-native syntactic feature specifications in his IL allowing the licensing of the null pronoun in the subject position of the embedded clause[15], whose identification would probably be controlled by the matrix clause subject[16]. Thus, the complementizer in Nico's IL may have neither the [-WH] (non-interrogative) feature of English *that* or French *que*, nor the [+WH] (interrogative) of French *qui*, but would rather be [±WH], a combination of French *que/qui*, taking either value *ad casum*. This could be the explanation to his "incoherence" in accepting #4 and at the same time rejecting #22, which differ only in the complementizer, *that* for the former and *if* for the latter.

With respect to #11, #16, #22, as stated before, our subject is functioning within the rules of the L2 as he rejects them, when their L1 surface counterparts are possible in the L1, and provides the corresponding embedded SubjPs. These are not coreferential with the matrix subjects, except for #22, whose embedded subject can be correferential or not. The difference with the others might lie in the impossibility of identification of the embedded null SubjPs by the matrix subjects.

6.1.3. Adjacency violations

Nico is functioning with L1 rules in both producing and accepting sentences where the adjacency condition is not respected. These rules make the position of the verb somehow optional between adjacent to its object or not. In the L2, movement of the verb to AGR is prevented from happening because the verb is not adjacent to its DP object and cannot check its Case feature. Although #6 and #39 might be misleading because they also include another type of violation, which might confuse our subject, that is not the case with #32 and #33. These results are consistent with those of White (1991a).

6.2.   Grammaticality judgements

Let us now check Nico's GJs of the other types of items, all of them related to the PDP, which I have no record of in his oral production. He has not been able to detect the *that*-trace violations in #10 and #37. In fact, he is one of the group of English-non-immersed-from-childhood proficient subjects, as opposed to another group of inmersed-from-childhood ones, reported in Escutia (1999). In this case, as was pointed out there and also above, for the null SubjPs in embedded clauses, our subject may be functioning with a complementizer with L2 phonetic features and L1 syntactic ones.

The last two types of items contain the expletives *it* and *there*. With respect to the sentences with the former, Nico has got them all right (#8, #20, and #40) except #29. There seem to exist again both L1 and L2 rules at work, the former showing in the provision of expletives, especially in #20 and #40, as the placing of the atmospheric dummy pronoun in #8 and #29 may have been learned as a rule in itself[17] and lead to the special expletive marking of atmospheric verbs. It is difficult to tell why #29 has not been detected, as compared to #20 and #40, particularly the latter, since they are very similar. This may just show again within-task variable competence in the non-native L2 grammar with both L2-like rules and L1 transferred ones.

The case of expletive *there* may be different. There might not really be an expletive+verb analysis but rather the whole lexical unit may be learned together as two independent but necessary elements to convey existential meaning, it being thus more difficult to drop the expletive or not to detect its absence in an existential sentence[18]. If this is so, the fact that Nico has added *there* to both #5 and #6 might not be due to reasons of grammatical competence but to translation. However, this explanation would not suit #26, where no explicit element is required in the L1. The L2, on the other hand, requires either the overt expletive or a preverbal position for the subject *violence*[19]. Once again, there seem to be L2 grammar rules at work.

Summarising the previous discussion, Nico shows –as Eduardo, the subject of Escutia (1993), did too– a uniform or homogeneous competence across tasks, in the sense that he exhibits the same kind of knowledge in his oral production as in his GJs, that is, he sometimes produces and does not totally identify free inversion, adjacency violations and dropping of embedded SubjPs. Apart from these types of items, which appear both in his oral production and the GJs, the latter reveal that both knowledge and use of expletive *it* and *that*-trace sequences are not native-like either.

7. CONCLUSION

In L2A models which only take into account surface contrasts between the L1 and L2, dropping or overproducing SubjPs or misplacing manner adverbs would probably be dealt with as just omissions or overgeneralizations of SubjPs (depending on which L2 is being acquired) and explained as the consequence of L1 transfer or processing or discourse factors. Since some approaches just look at morpheme developmental sequences in L2A to compare them with L1A (equating both kinds of acquisition in terms of underlying processes), the fact that SubjPs are either dropped (e. g., the case of an L2 English student of Spanish) or overproduced (the case of an L2 Spanish student of English) or adverbs misplaced may be overlooked because, in a way, the students have those morphemes already, and that is what matters. Besides, for those models with a strong orientation towards language use and communication, errors in this area tend to be overlooked since they do not hinder the latter.

The UG parameterized framework sees the allowance of phonetically null subjects or adverb placement as pointing to the existence of abstract and underlying linguistically significant principles related to other surface linguistic manifestations. Only a theory of this scope may see these properties as a worthwhile focus of study in itself and give a non-trivial account of them.

Our subject Nico seems to be working with a computational system with both L1 and L2 rules and this might explain the lack of apparent coherence or variability in our learner's L2 competence (what Adjémian 1976 called *permeability*). This can be seen within a task in those kinds of items which do not seem to be uniformly evaluated (in this study, expletives, inversion cases and embedded PSubjs dropping).

On the other hand, the same as Eduardo, the subject of Escutia (1993), Nico shows a homogeneous competence in the sense that he cannot sometimes detect in the GJs those same L2 "errors" he occasionally makes in his oral production. Eduardo (also a proficient adult Spanish learner of L2 English) showed variability in performance too, since he was able to correct most of his own spontaneous oral production presented as sentences in a GJ task. However, he showed a variable competence too since, within the same category of items, not all violations were unmasked as he had problems detecting ungrammatical sentences without expletive *it* and embedded SubjPs, just as Nico did. Although Eduardo detected the two inversion violations he was presented with[20], they were neither included within embedded relative clauses nor belonged to his own recorded sentences, unlike the rest of the GJs[21].

In this study I have also tried to determine (following Liceras 1996: 147) what the units of acquisition are with respect to the Adjacency Condition and

the different properties ascribed to the PDP. The absence of null SubjPs (referential or expletive) seems to be problematic only in embedded clauses where transfer of licensing and identification methods of the L1 can take over, but not in matrix or simple clauses where it is learned without explicit teaching. In relation to inversion there may be both syntactic (constructions with unaccusative verbs) and stylistic transfer factors at play (as the results obtained by De Miguel 1993 point to). In the case of the *that*-trace effect and embedded SubjPs, the same kind of licensing and identification L1 procedures might be used having to do with the morpho-syntactic features of functional categories. A hypothesis has been advanced here according to which not detecting the *that*-trace phenomenon and allowing correferential null SubjPs in embedded clauses could be related to the syntactic features of the Complementizer, in the sense that [+PD] languages such as Spanish, might have Comps which license an empty category in Spec Agr.

It is clear both in Escutia (1993) and in this study that, compared with the L2 native grammar, there is not that uniform fixing of grammatical properties across the board, the result in our framework of uniformly setting the PDP or the Verb Agreement Parameter. If adult learners do not fix parametric properties, or do not do so in a monolithic fashion, they should be taught or given specific (negative) evidence about those properties they find difficulties in acquiring (all of the ones I have looked at, except the overt presence of SubjPs in simple and matrix clauses). This means showing how possible Spanish examples are ungrammatical in English (explaining, for instance, that some Spanish constructions with *que* must not have *that* in English or have to be followed by a SubjP, or that adverbs cannot come between the verb and its complement or the few and very specific cases where inversion is possible in English). However, in spontaneous oral production this knowledge is very difficult to monitor. In this sense, this may have an interest mainly in writing the L2 because the corresponding errors are not problematic for oral communication purposes[22].

Finally, I believe that the lack of clustering of parametric properties may be related to the L2 starting age of acquisition. However, that matter will not be pursued here[23].

NOTES

[1]   I am not trying to relate the two parameters here but just considering (some of) their postulated derived properties as two separate sets of parametric objects.
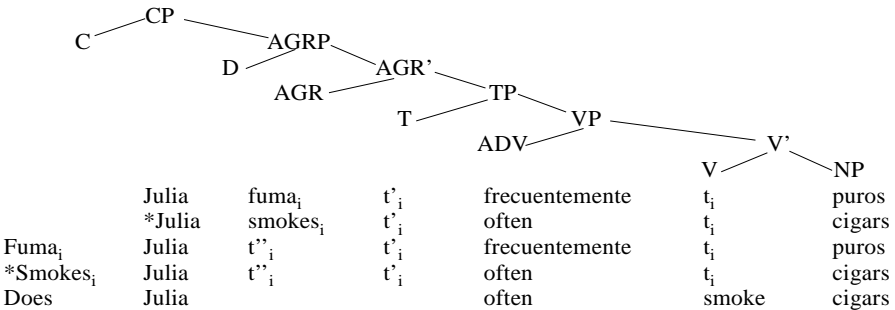
[2]   I will be referring to this variety of Spanish in the rest of the article without mentioning it again.

3   The subindexed *t* marks the place of origin of the Wh word which has moved leaving a trace behind. In general, items bearing the same sub-index are correreferential or the highest is the antecedent of the others.

4   *Cf.* Rizzi (1986). In order to compare the original position of the Wh- word in English and in Spanish one can look at the echo question, which in the first case is preverbal and in the second postverbal: *you said WHO came?* vs *dijiste que vino QUIÉN?*

5   Inversion is necessary in order for an abstract strong affix contained in the head position of questions (the complementizer head C) to be adjoined to a verbal head, realized either by a lexical (as in Spanish) or an auxiliary verb (as in English).

6   A more complete representation of the example sentence including the Split Inflection Hypothesis would look like this (omitting other details, like the VP internal origin subject hypothesis).

```
          CP
     C        AGRP
           D       AGR'
             AGR        AGR'
                 AGR        TP
                     T          VP
                         ADV        VP
                                V        V'
                                     V        NP
```

C	D	AGR	T	ADV	V	NP
	Julia	fuma$_i$	t'$_i$	frecuentemente	t$_i$	puros
	*Julia	smokes$_i$	t'$_i$	often	t$_i$	cigars
Fuma$_i$	Julia	t''$_i$	t'$_i$	frecuentemente	t$_i$	puros
*Smokes$_i$	Julia	t''$_i$	t'$_i$	often	t$_i$	cigars
Does	Julia			often	smoke	cigars

7   Features relative to the kind of subject it takes: nominative, 3rd person, singular, for example.
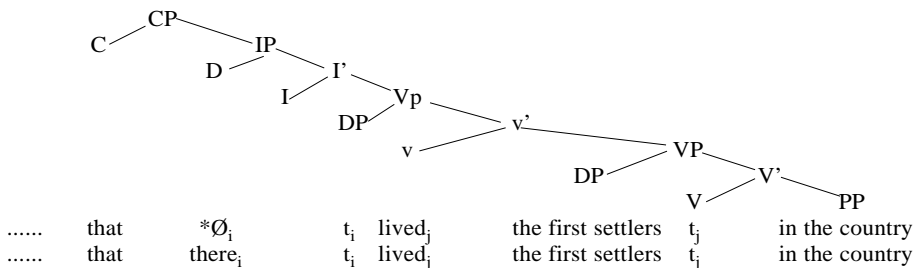
8   For some authors (see, for example, Rohrbacher 1994) feature strength is defined as first and second person distinctively marked from each other, from the third person and from the infinitive, in at least one number (singular or plural) of one tense of regular verbs.

9   Actually, they do not seem to be totally consistent, particularly intutitions about grammaticality of certain items, which are much more clear-cut for native speakers: *cf.* Coppietters 1987.

10   By negative evidence it is meant explicit information about the ungrammaticality of certain constructions.

11   I am aware of the methodological flaws this entails: an unbalanced design of the test instrument in terms or grammatical and ungrammatical items; an also unbalanced number of test items per sentence type; a possible expectancy on the part of the subject to encounter both grammatical and ungrammatical sentences –although he was told that they could all be right or wrong as well. However, apart from the reason pointed out in the text, one should understand that this is not an experimental study *strictu sensu*; hence the heading for this part of the text is just "sources of data".

12   Just as the L2 may do with the overt expletive *there* in the case of unaccusative verbs like those of these two sentences since ergativity does not have the same syntactic manifestations in all languages (*cf.* Travis 1984). The corresponding (abreviated) syntactic representation for sentence like #41 would be the following:

......	that	*$\emptyset_i$	t_i	lived$_j$	the first settlers	t_j	in the country
......	that	there$_i$	t_i	lived$_j$	the first settlers	t_j	in the country

(For more information on the VP shells –explaining the nature of both Vp and VP– see Radford 1997)

[13]   The representation of the sentence in question would be the following: *The decision$_j$ [$_{CP}$ e$_j$ that$_j$ [$_{IP}$ pro$_k$ took$_i$ the parents$_k$ t$_i$ t$_j$]] was...*, the relexified English counterpart of the L1 sentence *La decisión que tomaron los padres...*, where e_j is the non-overt antecedent of t_j (*cf.* Haegeman and Guéron 1999).

[14]   I refer here, for example, to the position occupied by *the first settlers* in the representation from note 12.

[15]   As advanced in Escutia (1999) with respect to the *that*-trace effect, our subject may have transferred what DuPlessis *et al.* (1987) called the Proper Government Parameter value of the Spanish complementizer *que*, according to which if Comp is a proper governor, the subject specifier position of an embedded clause (the D position under IP above) can be phonetically empty (*cf.* Rizzi 1990).

[16]   Similarly, in a way, to Chinese and Japanese subjects, who would produce discourse-controlled null SubjPs.

[17]   For Spanish adult speakers learning English or French through formal instruction and study, atmospheric expletives are very salient.

[18]   Instructed adult Spanish students tend to learn expletive *there* together with the different conjugated forms of *be* as corresponding to Spanish *hay* and its various tense inflections and are conscious of their being separate members of the lexical inventory of English.

[19]   In fact, this sentence was translated literally from its Spanish version as given by an L2 English speaker. He wrote it with the subject preverbally placed, which sounds unacceptable in native Spanish unless preceded by a definite determiner.

[20]   They were: *I should go to the airport because has arrived the plane already* and *Yesterday came my parents to Boston*.

[21]   Eduardo was not presented with adjacency violations –although they were present in his recorded production– because that study dealt only with PDP-related properties.

[22]   In fact, when native speakers were asked privately about Nico's performance in English they all considered him excellent both in terms of his pronunciation and language constructions.

[23]   See the already mentioned Escutia (1999) for a study of the *that*-trace effect relating advanced adult learners of different ages with different starting ages of L2 acquisition.

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