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## **Multiple Grammars and L2 Optionality: The Case of Acquisition at the External Interface**

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### **Abstract**

The extension of Multiple Grammars theory maintains that the interlanguage grammar of adult second language learners is composed of multiple competing sub-grammars which allow for optionality. To assess the presence of these competing sub-grammars, this article examines the second language acquisition of Spanish word order variation by first language English speakers of three proficiency levels: low beginning, high beginning, and low intermediate. As Spanish word order is flexible, learners must discern the context of use and the rules that constrain outwardly seeming free alternations of Subject-Verb-Object and Object-Verb-Subject word orders. Learners were asked to verbalize pragmatically felicitous questions to sentences with transitive verbs with inanimate direct object in a clitic-left dislocation structure. Results using two-way ANOVA confirm the coexistence of two competing features in the learners' interlanguage grammar representation. The data suggest that more exposure to L2 input point toward better mapping of the discursive sentence-final focus position in Spanish.

**Keywords** Multiple Grammars; optionality; L2 acquisition; interlanguage; interface; L2 Spanish

### **1. Introduction**

Literature in Second Language Acquisition (henceforth SLA) shows that optionality has been discussed at length in relation to the process of acquiring a second language (henceforth L2) (Eubank 1994; Domínguez 2007; Lozano 2006; Sorace 1993, 1999, 2000, 2011; Truscott 2006). As indicated by Truscott (2006), optionality in SLA “can be loosely defined as the simultaneous existence in a single speaker’s grammar of two or more features, each of which should normally exclude the other” (p.311). Explicitly, two (or more) competing features are present and coexisting in the representation of a L2 learner and none has prevailed over the other(s). The existence of these competing features can be recognized in the grammar of L2 speakers even at the initial state of L2 acquisition up to the ultimate attainment of the target language.

In line with Multiple Grammars (MG) as a generative representational theory, “optionality is representationally possible because of the existence of multiple sub-grammars in any human language” (Amaral and Roeper, 2014, p. 13). MG theory was originally proposed by Roeper (1999) to explain the coexistence of incompatible rules in adult monolingual grammar and its role in child first language (henceforth L1) acquisition. The theory suggested that grammars of all natural languages characteristically have sets of analogous

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rules. From these rules, the speaker has to determine which rule is more productive and which one has limited productivity.

It was until recently that MG have been extended “to describe the interlanguage representation in adult second language learners, and bilinguals in general” (Amaral and Roeper, 2014, p.1) in SLA. To be clear, MG maintains the Full Transfer/ Full Access (FT/FA) Hypothesis by Schwartz and Sprouse (1996) which indicates that L1 grammar constitutes the L2 initial state. In other words, L2 learners analyze L2 input through their L1 knowledge which denotes that L1 properties compose the initial state of the interlanguage (henceforth IL). Through the course of L2 acquisition, the initial IL grammar gradually diverges away from L1 grammar as it undergoes a process of restructuring conditioned by the Universal Grammar (UG) as L1 grammar is inadequate to accommodate the L2 input (White 2000). Conversely, MG proposes that feature restructuring as well as parameter resetting are not presumed consequences as a L2 learner moves away from its L1 in its course of acquisition of the target language. The presupposition that a rule or feature will be replaced or deleted is insignificant as MG indicates that the IL grammar of L2 learners will be composed of multiple sub-grammars as well. Rules or features that are absent in the IL of a L2 learner will be added to their IL repertoire. To be precise, these new language properties will neither replace nor delete the old ones since at some point in time, the learner came across evidence where the old rule or feature was essential.

In view of L2 optionality as presented by MG, the present study contributes to the discussion of optionality in the IL grammar of L2 learners. Correspondingly, in order to assess the presence of competing sub-grammars in the IL repertoire of L2 learners, L2 acquisition of Spanish word order variation by L1 English speakers of three levels of proficiency is analyzed. Explicitly, the ability of L2 Spanish learners to discern the syntactic as well as prosodic constraints for constituents in narrow focus is examined in relation to L2 optionality.

The following sections provide a description of focus, a comparison of focus in Spanish and in English, a review of previous second language acquisition studies of Spanish focus, the methodology employed to conduct the present study, the findings, discussion, and conclusion.

## **2. Focus**

Different languages of the world realize focus in distinctive ways. That is to say, focused constituents are reflected differently in different languages. Focused constituents may be reflected through the use of pitch accent placement, prosodic phrasing, constituent ordering, focus morphemes, and in some cases, there are no means for focus realization (Büring 2009). In other words, languages employ specific aspect of their grammar in order to realize focus, i.e., prosodic, syntactic, or morphological.

In Spanish, focus realization is governed by constituent ordering as word order is flexible. This flexibility allows for sentence constituents to appear in more than one configuration (e.g. SVO, OVS, SV, VS). One may deem that these configurations may seem to appear as cases of free alternation. However, these instances of optionality are “constrained by defined syntactic

rules (depending on the type of verb) and pragmatic rules (depending on the type of information encoded in the sentence)” (Domínguez, 2007, p. 45).

### 2.1. *Focus in Spanish*

To define, focus is separated from topic in relation to informational articulation. Topic is understood to be “what the sentence is about” while focus is “the informative part of a sentence” (Casielles-Suárez, 1997, p.15). As exemplified in (1)b, focus is the new information that is being asserted in a given statement. That is, it is the foregrounded element in an utterance. In addition, as shown in (1)a, focused constituents can be elicited by wh-questions.

- (1) a. Who called Scott?  
b. John called Scott.  
focus topic

As previously stated, Spanish word order is flexible, which in turn allows for constituents to appear in different positions in a sentence. L2 learners of Spanish are regularly exposed to outwardly seeming free alternations of Subject-Verb (henceforth SV) and Verb-Subject (henceforth VS) word orders, as shown in (2) (unaccusative verb) and (3) (unergative verb), as well as Subject-Verb-Object (henceforth SVO) and Object-Verb-Subject (henceforth OVS) word orders as illustrated in (4) (transitive verb). As current Spanish textbooks as well as Spanish language instructors do not address the issue of word order alternations, L2 learners must discern the rules that constrain each of the configurations and their context of use from the L2 input.

- (2) Mariela llegó / Llegó Mariela  
Mariela arrived / Arrived Mariela  
'Mariela arrived.'
- (3) Un niño gritó / Gritó un niño  
A boy shouted / Shouted a boy  
'A boy shouted.'
- (4) Juan comió la manzana / La manzana la comió Juan  
Juan ate the apple / The apple it ate Juan  
'Juan ate the apple.'

Bolinger (1954) and Casielles-Suárez (1997) indicate that focused constituents in Spanish are marked syntactically instead of prosodically as in English. That is to say that instead of employing pitch accent to a focused constituent as in English, in Spanish, sentence-final placement marks focused constituents. However, according to Zubizarreta (1998), following the syntactic structure configuration in Spanish, nuclear stress is ascribed by C-NSR, which indicates that main prominence is assigned to the lowest constituent in asymmetric c-command wherein asymmetric c-command means whichever is the rightmost constituent. This rule corresponds with focus structure in Spanish as new information is always at the right edge of the sentence regardless of the type of verb as maintained by Bolinger (1954)

and Casielles-Suárez (1997) as shown in 8b. The subject Sara, which is the focused constituent, appears at the sentence-final position and is assigned main prominence. Main prominence or the use of pitch accent is reflected through the use of all capitals in the subsequent examples. (5)a is the corresponding translation of (6)a while the focus structure in (6)b along with the stress on the subject corresponds to (5)b in which the subject is focalized solely through the use of pitch accent. Whereas focus is reflected through the sole use of pitch accent in English, sentence-final placement and the subsequent use of pitch accent are employed in Spanish to reflect a focused constituent. In addition, (7)b corresponds to (8)b. Notice that to place a subject postverbally in Spanish is partly productive in view of (6)b and (8)b whereas (5)c and (7)c are both ungrammatical and unproductive in English as they are ineffective answers to *wh*- questions. Thus, new information in Spanish must appear in sentence-final position and is consequently assigned main prominence.

- (5) a. Who came last night?  
 b. ANA came.  
     focus topic  
 c. \*Came Ana.
- (6) a. ¿Quién vino anoche?  
 b. Vino ANA.  
     topic focus
- (7) a. Who bought the gift?  
 b. SARA bought the gift.  
     focus topic  
 c. \*Bought the gift Sara.
- (8) a. ¿Quién compró el regalo?  
 b. El regaló lo compró SARA.  
     topic focus

The type of focus that has been illustrated above is narrow focus which refers to a part of a sentence, a word or a phrase, as the new information. Another type of focus is called broad focus. In this type, no one part of the statement is stressed more than the other(s). That is to say, all constituents or words in the sentence are presumed to have equal significance.

- (9) a. ¿Qué preguntó Pepe?  
     What asked Pepe?  
     ‘What did Pepe ask?’
- (10) a. Si la carta la escribió la presidenta argentina.  
     If the letter CL wrote the president Argentinian  
     ‘If the Argentinian president wrote the letter.’

As shown in (10)a, no particular constituent has more significance as the entire statement itself presents the new information. (10)a simply provides the information posed by the question in 9a. In view of this, as no one word is highlighted more than the other, the statement is said to be in broad focus.

Regressing to the notion of narrow focus, clitic left-dislocation (henceforth CLLD) is a structure used in Spanish to realize focus, as shown in (8)b (Zubizarreta, 1998). In the structure, the focused constituent, which is the subject Sara, appears in the sentence-final position by left-dislocation of the direct object from the core clause and subsequently followed by a resumptive clitic pronoun referring to the dislocate. As a result, in CLLD structures, the subject always appears postverbally. In comparison to Spanish, English does not have CLLD constructions given that it lacks clitics. Nonetheless, constituent preposing is present in English in which allows for the dislocation of only one noun phrase per clause. Notwithstanding, Gundel (1988), Prince (1981), and Ward (1988) had proposed a distinction between the two types of noun phrase preposing in English, i.e. ‘Focus Topicalization’ and ‘Topic Topicalization’ by Gundel (1988), ‘Focus Movement’ and ‘Topicalization’ by Prince (1981), and ‘Focus Preposing’ and ‘Topicalization’ by Ward (1988). To illustrate examples of the distinction, I will follow the labels used by Ward (1988).

- (11) a. HIBISCUS I think they are called.  
b. Cheeseburger, she ORDERED.

In Focus Preposing, as exemplified in (11)a, the preposed constituent is assigned the main prominence, while in Topicalization, as shown in (11)b, the heavier stress is placed on the verb. As illustrated, constituent preposing in English can either be Focus Preposing or Topicalization depending upon which constituent receives the main prominence and the discourse context. Bearing this in mind, although English lacks CLLD structures due to the absence of clitics in the language, direct objects may appear in sentence-initial position.

To indicate, the main interest of the present study is with the Spanish CLLD structures with transitive verbs accompanied by inanimate direct object. L2 learners of Spanish (L1 English) will have to discern the function of the CLLD structures accompanied by focus intonation in Spanish. Before we turn to our study, in the next section, previous studies regarding the L2 acquisition of Spanish focus will be briefly reviewed.

## 2.2. *Second Language Studies on Spanish Focus*

L2 studies regarding the acquisition of focus in Spanish as a discursive property has been underexplored. Thus far, few studies (Hertel, 2003; Lozano, 2006; Domínguez, 2007) have been carried out in the field of L2 acquisition. These studies had primarily investigated the alternation between SV and VS word order with unergatives and unaccusatives with regards to focus position in Spanish.

The task employed by Herter (2003) was a contextualized paper and pencil production task in which English was utilized for both the contexts and the instructions not only to ensure understanding by the less proficient learners but to prevent the use of grammatical forms from the contexts. Only the test questions following the given contexts were presented in the target language. Results from the study revealed that the production from the advance and

high intermediate learners of Spanish (L1 English) were nearly identical to the native speaker preference for the VS word order for both unaccusatives and unergatives for focused subjects. Low intermediate learners produced very few VS word order whereas the beginner group did not produce this word order at all. The study was then concluded by stating that focus structure is acquired gradually after a stage of L1 transfer which is then followed by indeterminacy. Lozano (2006) also investigated L2 learners of Spanish (L1 Greek) ability to discern the syntactic constraint for focused constituents in Spanish. In keeping with the data he had analyzed from several studies (Georgiafentis, 2004; Keller & Alexopoulou, 2001; Kiss, 1998), focused subjects in Greek are sentence-initial as licensed by prosodic mechanisms. The task he employed for the study was a contextualized acceptability judgment test wherein the context and the eliciting question were presented in the target language followed by two target replies which appear to be in free variation. Results from the study show that L2 upper advanced learners of Spanish significantly prefer VS word order for focused subjects, which is in line with the native subjects who dramatically prefer VS word order for focused subjects. Nevertheless, these learners still accepted a few SV word orders for focused subjects. The lower advanced as well as the upper intermediate learners showed no preference for either VS or SV word order for focused subjects. He concludes the study stating that learners are aware of the focus position in Spanish; however, they are unable to grammaticalize it syntactically through word order. Furthermore, in the study carried out by Domínguez (2007), the same methodology was employed as Lozano (2006). Results from this study exhibit significant differences between three learner groups. L2 advanced learners of Spanish (L1 English) showed more preference towards VS word order over SV word order while the L2 intermediate learners of the study accepted both options without exhibiting any preference for the other. In addition, the low proficiency group subjects accepted a few of the VS structures. From these findings, she concludes that the simultaneous existence of two options in the representation of the three L2 learner groups illustrates that their L2 grammar is undergoing a process of feature restructuring as these learners map each word order to the context which they can be used.

As stated beforehand, L2 learners of Spanish are consistently presented with seemingly free alternating structures from which they must draw rules that constrain each word order and their context of use. As indicated in the aforementioned studies regarding L2 acquisition of focus in Spanish, it is observable that optionality occurs at all levels of development. Accordingly, the study presents an analysis regarding the L2 acquisition of Spanish CLLD structures and prosodic constraints by L1 English learners. One motivating question of the study is whether L2 learners of Spanish accept sentences with non-SVO word order, i.e. OVS. In addition, another question is whether learners are able to distinguish the context of use of the CLLD structures accompanied by focus intonation which was not initially present in their initial IL grammar.

The present study sets out to test the hypothesis that L1 English learners of Spanish who have been exposed to more L2 input will show more knowledge of the sentence-final focus position in Spanish.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

A total of 40 adults participated in the present study. 10 of these participants acted as the control group, six of which are native speakers of Peninsular Spanish while four are native speakers of South American Spanish. The experimental group consisted of L2 learners of Spanish who are native speakers of English. The proficiency level of these learners was divided according to the number of hours of formal university instruction corresponding to the number of successful completion of Spanish language courses offered by the university. From the 30 experimental participants, 10 were low beginning learners (completed two courses of Elementary Spanish with c. 78 hours of university instruction), 10 were high beginning learners (completed four courses of Elementary Spanish with c. 156 hours of university instruction), and 10 were low intermediate learners of Spanish (completed four courses of Elementary Spanish and two courses Spanish Grammar with c. 234 hours of university instruction). A description of the participants of the present study with proficiency levels and the numbers of hours of formal university instruction is shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Participant Summary*

Proficiency Level	Mean Age	Approximate Number of Hours of Formal University Instruction	Educational Level
Low Beginning N=10	20	c 78	Undergraduate
High Beginning N=10	20	c 156	Undergraduate
Low Intermediate N=10	19	c 234	Undergraduate
Native Speakers N=10	31		Graduate

#### 3.2. Materials

The main task of the present study is a production task whereby participants were asked to verbalize pragmatically felicitous questions to 30 sentences. The purpose of the task is to determine if L2 learners of Spanish are aware that the subject of a CLLD structure is in focus position and that nuclear stress is assigned to this subject. In total, there were 12 target sentences and 18 sentences acted as fillers in which they were randomly distributed amongst each other (Refer to Appendices). The target sentences were transitive verbs accompanied by inanimate direct object in a CLLD structure. Six of these target sentences was assigned main prominence on the subject while no pitch accent was assigned to the other six CLLD structures. The subject of three of the CLLD structures in narrow focus was a partial determiner phrase (henceforth DP) whereas the other three were full

DP. The same was applied to the six CLLD structures in broad focus. In other words, the independent variables consisted of learner type, nuclear configuration, and the type of DP while the verb type, direct object, and the syntactic structure remained constant as shown below in Table 2 and Table 3. The inclusion of nuclear configuration and the DP type as independent variables enables the identification of the ability of the L2 learners to discern prosodic constraints in Spanish following syntactic structure configuration.

Table 2  
*Independent Variables*

Variable Name	Variable Value
Learner Type	[1] English Low Beginning [2] English High Beginning [3] English Low Intermediate [4] Spanish Native Speakers
Nuclear Configuration	[B] Broad Focus [N] Narrow Focus
DP Type	[P] Partial DP [F] Full DP

Table 3  
*Constants*

Constant Name	Constant Type
Verb Type	Transitive
Direct Object	Inanimate
Syntactic Structure	Clitic Left-Dislocation

Table 4  
*Target Sentence Examples*

Type of Focus	Sentence	Nuclear Configuration
Narrow Focus	Los periódicos los vende Roberto.	L+H* L%
	La teoría la explicaron los profesores.	L+H* L%
Broad Focus	Las flores las compró Rodrigo.	L* L%
	La hipótesis la investigan los científicos.	L* L%

Table 4 illustrates the nuclear configuration of the target sentences with narrow and broad focus using Sp\_ToBI labeling system. In L+H\* L% nuclear configuration, a rising stress is realized during the last accented syllable followed by a low level while in L\* L%, the stress is realized as a low plateau during the last accented syllable followed by a fall or a low plateau.

The sentences that acted as fillers for the present study were unaccusative and unergative verbs accompanied by either an adverb of place or time whereby the focused constituent is either the adverb of place or time or the subject and transitive verbs with inanimate direct object whereby the new information is the direct object.

### 3.3. Procedure

The task was administered using an HP Laptop PC using PsychoPy2, a program used to design and run psychological experiments (Peirce 2007). The instructions for the task, which was presented in the target language, were initially displayed on the screen before the participants began the task. Initially, the instructions gave directions on how to operate the program. Subsequently, it asked to verbally provide felicitous questions to 30 given sentences.

Participants sat in front of the computer and listened to each of the sentences. Each sentence was articulated twice by a native Spanish speaker and appeared on the screen for three seconds after the second articulation. A three second gap was incorporated in between the first and the second articulation as well as in between the second articulation and the appearance of the sentence on the screen. As participants, especially the ones belonging to the low beginning group, have low proficiency in the target language, the appearance of the sentence on the screen was necessary. After the participants heard (and read) each sentence, they had to state the question for that sentence. As practice for the task, three sentences in the target language indicating one's name, age, and residence were first presented to the participants in order to get familiarized with the task. Their responses for the production task were audio-recorded using an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder.

### 3.4. Analysis

Logical responses using 'who' were assigned the value *o*. An example of this would be *¿Quién vende los periódicos?* to the target statement *Los periódicos los vende Roberto*. Logical responses using 'what' were assigned *x*. An example would be *¿Qué vende Roberto?* to the given target sentence. Responses such as *No sé*, non-production of a question, and the production of illogical questions were coded *i* to indicate cases that were not included in the analysis. Examples of questions that were considered illogical are the repetition of the given sentence with initial placement of 'what' or 'who' (*¿Qué los periódicos los vende Roberto?* or *¿Quién los periódicos los vende Roberto?*, *¿Qué vende los periódicos?*, and *¿Cuál vende los periódicos?*). The independent variables were coded with the values presented in Table 2.

If participants are aware that in Spanish new information is placed at the sentence-final position and that the focused constituent, in this case, the subject, subsequently receives main prominence, they should provide logical questions using 'who' only to sentences with narrow focus. It is expected that the low intermediate as well as high beginning L2 learners of Spanish (L1 English) will produce logical questions using 'who' to CLLD structures in narrow and broad focus as well as with partial or full DP subjects as previous studies have shown that proficiency plays a principal role in determining the extent of acquisition of the Spanish narrow focus. However, low intermediate learners are predicted to produce more logical questions with 'who' to these CLLD structures than high beginning learners. Low beginning learners are expected to provide a few logical questions with 'who' to CLLD structures. The basis for these predictions is that the more these

participants are exposed to more L2 input, the better they are able to map out the context of use of CLLD structures. As learners are exposed to more L2 input, they will recognize that this structure is used to mark focus in Spanish.

#### 4. Findings

For the present study, binary logistic regression was used for the analysis of the significance of the independent variables. This type of regression employs binominal probability theory whereby the dependent variable is dichotomous and categorical, in this case, the production and non-production of the pragmatically felicitous logical question with 'who'. It predicts the presence or absence of the dependent variable based on values of the independent variables. In addition, two-way ANOVA was used to analyze whether the effects of one factor depend on another factor. Out of 408 cases, 85% were analyzed as there were 72 cases in which the participants either provided an illogical response or did not provide a response. These cases are composed of different combinations of learner type, nuclear configuration, and DP type. Observing the model provided by binary logistic regression in Table 5, the learner type was highly significant ( $p=0.00$ ) while the nuclear configuration ( $p=0.29$ ) as well as DP type ( $p=0.39$ ) were not significant.

Table 5  
*Variables in the Equation*

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1	Learner Type	0.95	0.11	71.81	1	0.00	2.60
	Nuclear Configuration	0.24	0.23	1.13	1	0.29	1.28
	Type of DP	-0.14	0.23	0.39	1	0.53	0.87
	Constant	-1.95	0.33	34.20	1	0.00	0.14

As the effect of learner type was highly significant, an analysis regarding the effect of learner type and its relationship with each one of the two insignificant independent variables was carried out using two-way ANOVA (Table 6 and Table 7).

Table 6  
*Interaction between Learner Type and Nuclear Configuration*

Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Learner Type	6.24	3	2.08	35.57	0.00	2.73
Nuclear Configuration	0.05	1	0.05	0.85	0.36	3.97
Interaction	0.02	3	0.01	0.11	0.95	2.73
Within	4.21	72	0.06			
Total	10.52	79				

Table 7  
*Interaction between Learner Type and DP Type*

Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Learner Type	6.21	3	2.07	30.29	0.00	2.73
Type of DP	0.05	1	0.05	0.73	0.40	3.97
Interaction	0.04	3	0.01	0.18	0.91	2.73
Within	4.92	72	0.07			
Total	11.22	79				

As shown again on both tables learner type is statistically significant ( $p=0.00$ ). However, the interaction between learner type and nuclear configuration ( $p=0.79$ ) as well as the interaction between learner type and DP type ( $p=0.99$ ) are insignificant.

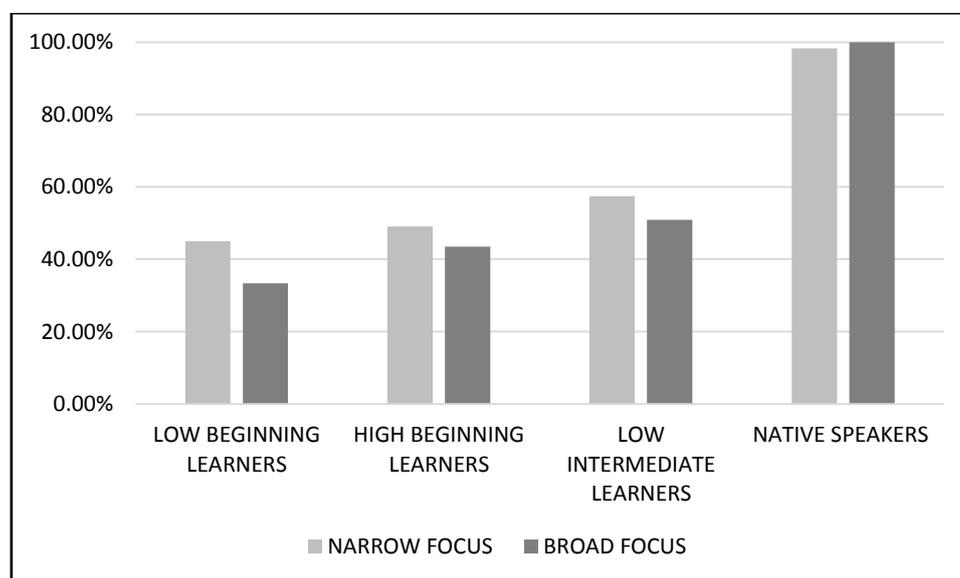


Figure 1. Percent rate of logical questions with *quién* 'who' with narrow and broad focus

To observe the pattern regarding the interaction between learner type and nuclear configuration, the production rate of logical questions with 'who' in percentage for the target sentences with both types nuclear configuration by the three experimental groups as well as the control group is illustrated in Figure 1. The figure shows that native speakers of Spanish recognize that in a CLLD structure, the subject is in focus position. However, placement of stress does not appear to be of importance as these native speakers produced questions with 'who' 100% to the six target sentences in broad focus while with the six sentences in narrow focus, questions with 'who' were also provided 98% of the time as one of the native speakers produced one question with why. As expected, L2 low beginning learners of Spanish provided few logical questions with 'who' to CLLD structures with narrow focus, 45%, and to CLLD structures with broad focus, 33%. In addition, the results show that high beginning learners produced more questions with

‘who’ to CLLD structures with narrow focus, 49%, than to the ones with broad focus, 43%. Also, the low intermediate group shows the same pattern as the high beginning learners as they provided more questions with ‘who’ to CLLD structures with narrow focus, 57%, than to the structure with broad focus, 50%.

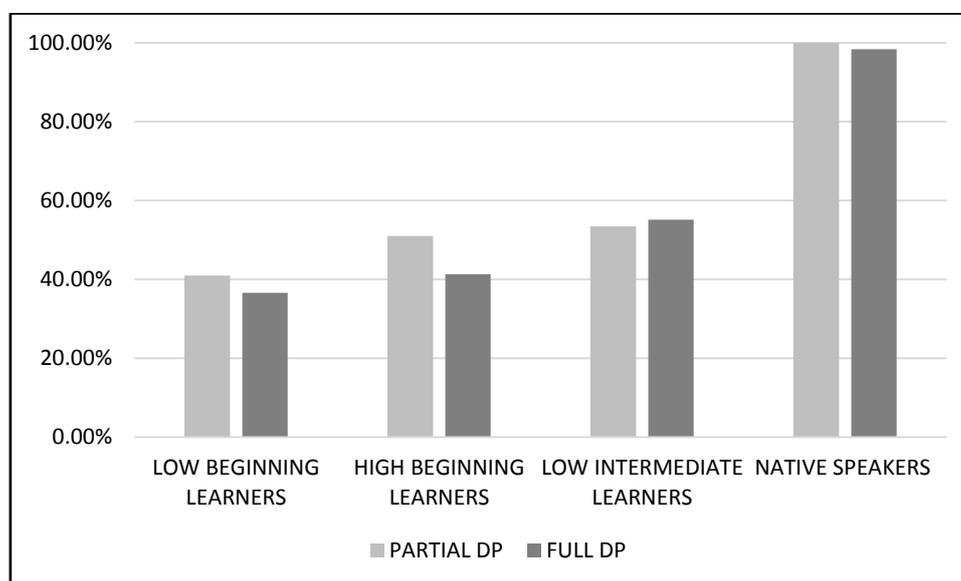


Figure 2. Percent rate of logical questions with *quién* ‘who’ with full and partial DP

Moreover, to observe the pattern regarding the interaction between learner type and DP type, the production rate of logical questions with ‘who’ in percentage for the target sentences with both types DP by the three experimental groups as well as the control group is shown in Figure 2. The figure shows that native speakers of Spanish recognize that the subject in a CLLD structure is in focus position regardless of the DP type as native speakers produced questions with ‘who’ 100% to the six target sentences with partial DP subjects while with the other six sentences with full DP subjects, questions with ‘who’ were also provided 98% of the time due to the production of a question with why by one of the native speakers. As observable in the figure below, there is no considerable difference in the low beginning learners’ production of logical questions with ‘who’ to CLLD structures with partial DP, 40%, and full DP, 36%. The same pattern is shown for low intermediate learners as they provided logical questions with ‘who’ to CLLD structures with partial DP 53% of the time while with sentences with full DP, 55%. However, the results show that high beginning learners produced more questions with ‘who’ to CLLD structures with partial DP, 50%, than the ones with full DP, 41%.

## 5. Discussion

The present study evaluates L2 optionality as presented by MG in the IL grammar of L2 learners in their acquisition of the Spanish focus. The theory of FT/FA (Schwartz and Sprouse 1996) suggests that L1 grammar composes the initial state of the IL grammar of L2 learners. Therefore, if the IL

grammar of L2 learners only has the syntactic and prosodic properties of their L1 grammar, the participants should only provide logical questions with ‘what’ since in English, the most comparable structure to the Spanish CLLD structure is constituent preposing in which the direct object appears before the subject.

The results of the present study show that the L2 low beginners, high beginners, and low intermediate learners of Spanish accept sentences with non-SVO word order, i.e. OVS word order, as they provided logical questions with ‘who’ suggesting that they accept the left-dislocation of the inanimate direct object and the sentence-final position of the subject which was not initially present in their initial IL grammar. The low beginning learners to some extent are aware that CLLD structures in Spanish present narrow focused subjects, i.e. the new information in the syntactic structure is the subject, as they verbalized questions with ‘who’. In addition, although nuclear configuration and DP type are not significant factors, the figures show that the three experimental groups are more inclined in producing questions with ‘who’ to CLLD structures in narrow focus and partial DP subjects. Both figures show an increase in the production of logical questions with ‘who’ as learner proficiency increases. This indicates that as learners are exposed to more L2 input, they show more knowledge of the sentence-final focus position in Spanish as they add more information to the existing feature in their IL representation, which consequently confirms the hypothesis of the present study.

The beginning learners may be uncertain about the degree of productivity of the Spanish CLLD structures in their IL representation; for this reason, they provided only a few questions with ‘who’. Given that English and Spanish are typologically divergent languages and are dissimilar in realizing focus, the learner must add the Spanish sentence-final focus position feature to their IL grammar representation as the feature was not present at the initial state of their IL grammar. Information will be added gradually to these features as the learner is exposed to more L2 input, i.e. prosodic constraints. The findings show that the analysis of the independent variables, nuclear configuration and type of DP, illustrates that L2 learners of Spanish are able to discern prosodic constraints following syntactic structure configuration as the three experimental groups are more inclined in producing questions with ‘who’ to CLLD structures with main prominence on the subject and with partial DP subjects. The production of ‘who’ questions alludes to the indication that learners recognize main prominence on the subject that refers to a particular entity or proper nouns, partial DP. With common nouns accompanied by a determiner or full DP as subjects, learners were disinclined in producing questions with ‘who’, which can be accounted for the level of proficiency of the L2 learners.

Focus realization in Spanish is governed by syntactic structure configuration followed by prosodic constraints, which is an example of an external interface. To define, interface refers to the sensitivity of a syntactic structure to the “domain that defines the conditions on its grammaticality and/or felicity” (Sorace, 2011, p.6). In other words, the appropriateness of a structure is conditioned by cognitive domains or modules such as

phonology, morphology, and semantics. The Interface Hypothesis proposes that “language structures involving an interface between syntax and other cognitive domains are less likely to be acquired completely than structures that do not involve this interface” (Sorace, 2011, p.1). That is to say that properties at the interfaces are vulnerable to optionality at the very advanced stages of adult L2 acquisition. In general, it predicts that properties related to external interfaces will present more difficulties to L2 learners than those related to internal interfaces.

The findings show that L1 English learners who are exposed to more L2 input show more knowledge of focus in Spanish. It illustrates that focus realization as an external interface is acquired gradually in the course of L2 acquisition. Learners recognize that the subsequent use of main prominence on the subject after syntactic structure configuration conditions focus realization in Spanish. With CLLD structures unaccompanied by main prominence on the subject, learners recognize that it partially conditions focus realization, which exemplifies the presence of competing sub-grammars in the IL of L2 learners. The results from the present study supports L2 optionality as presented by MG in that rules or features that are absent in the IL of a L2 learner will be added gradually to their IL repertoire. As MG indicates that the IL grammar of L2 learners will be composed of multiple sub-grammars, the presupposition that a rule or feature will be replaced or deleted is insignificant. As two (or more) competing features will be present at the IL grammar of a L2 learner, optionality will continue to be present at all levels of proficiency in view of the fact that the learner encountered instances in where the other feature was essential.

## **6. Conclusions**

As defined by Truscott (2006), optionality is the presence of two (or more) features in the IL representation of a L2 learner. Correspondingly, MG maintains that the IL grammar of adult L2 learners is composed of multiple competing sub-grammars which allows for optionality (Amaral and Roeper 2014). Rules or features that are absent in the IL of a L2 learner will be added to their IL repertoire and these new language properties will neither replace nor delete the old ones since at some point in time, the learner came across evidence where the old rule or feature was needed.

The present study tests the hypothesis that L1 English learners of Spanish who have been exposed to more L2 input will show more knowledge of narrow focus in Spanish. The data shows that more exposure to L2 input point toward better mapping of this grammatical feature. In addition, the results show optionality in the IL grammar representation of low beginning, high beginning, and intermediate learners. The existence of optionality is not due to the inability of L2 learners to syntactically and prosodically grammaticalize informational structure, but it is because optionality will be present at all levels of proficiency even at the early stages of L2 acquisition.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

Table 8  
*List of verbs used for the study*

Transitive Verbs Used for the Target Sentences	Unaccusative Verbs Used for Filler Sentences	Unergative Verbs Used for Filler Sentences	Transitive Verbs Used for Filler Sentences
<i>comprar</i> <i>preparar</i> <i>levantar</i> <i>investigar</i> <i>comer</i> <i>explicar</i> <i>vender</i> <i>perder</i> <i>escribir</i> <i>leer</i> <i>distribuir</i> <i>presentar</i>	<i>entrar</i> <i>llegar</i> <i>venir</i> <i>salir</i> <i>subir</i> <i>ir</i>	<i>patinar</i> <i>bailar</i> <i>acampar</i> <i>luchar</i> <i>gritar</i> <i>llorar</i>	<i>colgar</i> <i>diseñar</i> <i>atrapar</i> <i>cortar</i> <i>pintar</i> <i>construir</i>

Table 9  
*Target Sentences of the Study*

Narrow Focus	Broad Focus
El pastel lo comió GABRIELA. Los periódicos los vende ROBERTO. Las llaves las perdió RICARDO. La teoría la explicaron LOS PROFESORES. La carta la escribieron LOS NIÑOS. La mesa la levantaron LOS ALUMNOS.	El artículo lo leyó Miranda. Las flores las compró Rodrigo. Los lápices los distribuyó Carla. Las evidencias las presentaron los investigadores. La cena la prepararon los cuñados. La hipótesis la investigan los científicos.

Table 10  
*Filler Sentences With Unergative and Unaccusative Verbs*

Focused Constituent	Unergative Verbs: Narrow and Broad Focus Statements	Unaccusative Verbs: Narrow and Broad Focus Statements
Subject	Esta mañana bailó ALBERTO. En la arena lucharon los boxeadores.	Al hotel vinieron LOS INVITADOS. Ayer entraron los ladrones.
Adverb of Time	Los amigos patinaron ANOCHE. Juan lloró ayer.	Los novios llegaron ESTA NOCHE. La niña salió esta mañana.
Adverb of Place	Los senderistas acamparon EN EL MONTE El niño gritó en el cine.	Los señores fueron AL CENTRO. Enrique subió al Everest.

Table 11  
*Filler Sentences With Transitive Verbs*

Focused Constituent	Transitive Verbs: Narrow and Broad Focus Statements
Inanimate Direct Object	Alicia colgó LA CHAQUETA. Felipe diseñó EL JARDÍN. Los ingenieros construyeron EL EDIFICIO. El pintor pintó el cuadro. El electricista cortó la luz. El portero atrapa el balón.