

## Editorial

# Advances in Research on Morphosyntax and Multicompetent Speakers of French and Spanish: Introduction to the Special Issue

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Historically, research on language acquisition among multicompetent speakers has devoted significant attention to the area of morphosyntax, compared to other domains of language (Ortega 2009, p. 110). Although there now exists a strong base of knowledge about how multicompetent speakers develop the ability to process, interpret, and use morphosyntactic structures, particularly on languages such as French and Spanish (e.g., Ayoun 2013; Dewaele 2005; Geeslin 2014; Geeslin et al. 2021; Lafford and Salaberry 2003; Lindqvist and Bardel 2012; Pascual y Cabo 2016), many issues that are in need of further investigation remain. For instance, one key topic that is addressed in this Special Issue is that of language pairings. Most research on the additional-language acquisition of French and Spanish has been conducted on first-language (L1) speakers of English. Although some of the contributions in this volume still investigate L1 English participants, studies focusing on L1 speakers of Korean, Polish, and Spanish are included as well. Another topic that is given attention in this Special Issue pertains to research methods. For example, in addition to studies that examine cross-sectional data, others respond to calls for longitudinal investigations of development (cf. Ortega and Byrnes 2008). This collection of articles also seeks to advance the understanding of various morphosyntactic phenomena: accusative clitic pronouns, address pronouns, adjective position, epistemic stance markers, future-time reference, interrogatives, past-tense verbs, and subject expression. In what follows, I organize the contributions by theoretical and analytical approach and discuss each study.

Two investigations in this Special Issue adopted a functionalist approach. First, Maria Kihlstedt and Jesús Izquierdo investigated the acquisition of discourse and morphological features in past-time narratives (the article titled “The Development of Discourse and Morphological Features in L2 [Second-Language] Narratives: A Study with Classroom Spanish-speaking Learners of French”). The participants were native speakers of Spanish who were studying French at a Mexican university. This cross-sectional study consisted of a small group of participants who were at five proficiency levels, which allowed the researchers to examine the learners’ developmental trajectory. Importantly, Kihlstedt and Izquierdo used three measures in order to determine proficiency levels: a general proficiency test, a lexical test, and a past-tense test. Written narratives were elicited by means of silent-film retelling tasks. Each participant completed two narratives. In the data analysis, the authors distinguished between foreground and background clauses, classified the different verb forms that the learners used, and differentiated between telic and atelic properties. The results offered evidence of development: As proficiency increased, learners used more past-time verb forms and their ability to use discourse and morphological features of narratives became more complex.

In the second functionalist study (“The Acquisition of Verbal Epistemic Stance Marking during Study Abroad: The Case of *je pense* in L2 French”), Pascale Leclercq investigated the role that a stay abroad plays in the L2 development of the epistemic stance marker *je pense* “I think” in French. Leclercq examined interview data from the LANGSNAP corpus,

which included data from native French speakers and L2 learners of French (L1 English speakers) who spent an academic year in France. Various findings emerged from the analysis. In terms of morphosyntactic competence, for example, learners were similar to native speakers in that they primarily used *je pense* in main clauses. They diverged slightly from the native speakers, though, in that the forms they used were not limited to the present tense and the affirmative of *je pense*. Forms such as *je pense pas* “I don’t think” were used exclusively by learners. Regarding pragmalinguistic competence, both learners and native speakers used *je pense* largely to express opinions. Although some changes were observed during the nine months that the learners spent in France, they did not become native-like in their pragmatic uses of this epistemic stance marker. Overall, this study sheds light on the value of investigating morphosyntactic and pragmatic features in order to understand L2 stance marking.

This Special Issue also includes three variationist investigations. One is “Variable Future-time Expression in Spanish: A Comparison between Heritage and Second Language Learners” by Ana de Prada Pérez, Inmaculada Gómez Soler, and Nick Feroce. They examined the verbal expression of future-time reference in Spanish and compared L2 learners and heritage-language learners. The data came from a contextualized acceptability judgment task, a less-commonly used instrument in variationist research. Their analysis focused on the three most frequent future-time verb forms in Spanish—the periphrastic future, morphological future, and present indicative—and three linguistic factors that have been found to influence their occurrence in previous research—temporal distance, certainty, and the presence/absence of a temporal adverbial. They also analyzed whether the acceptability ratings varied according to proficiency. The participants, who were enrolled in undergraduate Spanish courses in the United States, were either L2 learners of Spanish or heritage-language learners of Spanish. The results showed that both groups rated the periphrastic and morphological future forms higher than the present indicative. Concerning the linguistic factors, the participants exhibited different acceptability patterns for each verb form. For example, heritage-language learners accepted the periphrastic future more when a temporal adverb was absent and the present indicative more when a temporal adverb was present; no difference was observed between the presence and absence of temporal adverbs for the morphological future. For the L2 learners, these variable patterns of acceptability were largely modulated by proficiency. The authors concluded that the study offers additional evidence of the advantage that heritage-language learners have over adult L2 learners—an advantage that is due to their linguistic experience, which has exposed them to variable input of future-time expression in Spanish from a young age.

Rebecca Pozzi contributed another variationist investigation to this Special Issue (“Learner development of a morphosyntactic feature in Argentina: The case of *vos*”). In her study, she examined the L2 development of *vos*, a second-person-singular address pronoun that is used in various regions in Central and South America. The participants were university students from the United States who spent a semester (five months) studying in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Whereas *vos* is used in Buenos Aires, the learners had previously been exposed to another second-person-singular address pronoun during their classroom experience in the United States: *tú*. Data were collected at three points: before or just after arriving in Argentina, halfway through the study-abroad semester, and at the end of the semester or right after returning home. Pozzi collected oral interview data during the first data-collection period. Then, in order to encourage the oral production of second-person-singular verb forms at the second and third data-collection times, participants completed discourse completion tasks and role plays. At the first data-collection period, the results showed that learners used *tú* verb forms categorically; they did not use *vos* verb forms during the interview. The findings at the second and third data-collection periods indicated that participants used *vos* verb forms 65.3% of the time at the second data-collection period and 70.4% at the third data-collection period. In other words, during their semester in Buenos Aires, their use of second-person-singular verb forms changed from producing *tú* exclusively to using *vos* a majority of the time. Furthermore, the mixed-effects model

revealed that the linguistic factor of verbal mood and the extralinguistic factors of task, strength of their social networks, and L2 proficiency worked in concert to predict the use of *vos* verb forms. Thus, this investigation adds to the growing body of research on the L2 development of dialect features.

The final variationist contribution, by Avizia Y. Long, focused on subject expression in Spanish (“Korean Learners’ Acquisition and Use of First-Person Subject Forms in Spanish”). While many studies have examined L2 learners’ development of subject expression in Spanish, most have concentrated on L1 speakers of English learning Spanish. Instead, Long’s investigation focused on native speakers of Korean who were studying Spanish at a Korean university; they were at four instructional levels. She analyzed variability in the use of first-person subject forms in oral interviews. In terms of frequency of use, the results showed that the participants used null subjects most of the time, followed by personal pronouns. The use of lexical noun phrases with first-person plural subjects (e.g., *mis amigos y yo* “my friends and I”) was rare. The second step of the analysis consisted of a mixed-effects model. The dependent variable distinguished between null subjects and overt personal pronouns. Long examined numerous linguistic and extralinguistic factors and found that verb number, verb semantics, verb-form regularity, and the use of Spanish outside of class significantly constrained the use of first-person subject forms. Long then compared these findings to what is known about L2 learners who are L1 English speakers, beginning the important work of determining how generalizable the observations made about native speakers of English are to learners of other L1s.

The remaining three studies were conducted within the generative tradition. In the article entitled “Feature Matching Does Not Equal Convergence: Acquisition of L2 French Accusative Pronouns by L1 Spanish Speakers,” Elena Shimanskaya and Tania Leal investigated the processing and interpretation of third-person singular accusative clitics in French by French native speakers and Spanish-speaking L2 learners of French. One unique aspect of this investigation was that they drew on both generative and usage-based frameworks in order to examine the roles that abstract-level similarity (a generative construct) and surface-level similarity (a usage-based construct) play in L2 acquisition. Within generative SLA, the Feature Reassembly Hypothesis predicts that learners’ L1 should facilitate the acquisition of third-person singular accusative clitics because French and Spanish encode the same formal features (e.g., number, gender) in accusative pronouns. Usage-based SLA also expects the surface similarity of *la*, the feminine accusative clitic in French and Spanish, to promote L2 development. At the same time, though, there may be challenges for L1 Spanish learners of French with the mapping of *le*. In French, the clitic *le* [lə] is masculine and accusative, but in the variety of Spanish under investigation, *le* [le] is dative and does not overtly mark gender. In order to investigate the possible roles of abstract-level and surface-level similarity, they conducted two experiments. The first was a picture selection task that examined participants’ interpretation of accusative pronouns. The second experiment assessed processing via a self-paced reading task. The results did not lend support to the Feature Reassembly Hypothesis because the learners exhibited challenges with the interpretation and processing of the clitics, whereas the native speakers did not. The authors suggested that the data provided limited support for the role of surface-level similarity because learners performed better with feminine accusative clitics. More generally, the study exemplifies the value of drawing on multiple theoretical approaches in SLA.

In another generative investigation (“Effects of Adjective Type on Position and Interpretation in Native Polish Classroom Learners of Spanish”), Tiffany Judy examined the effect of adjective type (i.e., qualifying, intensional, and classifying) on the position (prenominal or postnominal) and interpretation of Spanish adjectives among L2 learners of Spanish who were native speakers of a typologically different language—Polish. The participants completed three tasks. The first was a grammaticality judgment task with correction that assessed syntactic knowledge of prenominal intensional and postnominal classifying adjectives. The second instrument was a semantic interpretation task, which

examined the interpretation of qualifying adjectives whose meaning changes based on position (pre- or post-nominal). Lastly, a semantic collocation task also focused on the distribution of qualifying adjectives and interpretation. The context of each item determined the appropriate placement; prenominal adjectives had a non-restrictive reading and postnominal adjectives had a restrictive reading. The participants were asked to place the adjective in the position they felt was suitable. Judy compared two groups of learners (intermediate and advanced) to one group of native speakers of Spanish because her goal was to determine whether the native-like convergence on the distribution and interpretation of Spanish adjectives was possible. Her findings showed greater evidence of native-like convergence on the interpretive tasks than on the syntactic task. The author explained that the mixed results might be due to explicit instruction or the high frequency of postnominal adjectives in Spanish.

In the final generative study in this Special Issue (“The L2 Acquisition of French Interrogatives: Pragmatic Inferences in Clefted *wh*-Questions”), Emilie Destruel and Bryan Donaldson investigated clefted *wh*-questions in French. French interrogatives are at the interface of syntax and pragmatics, which enabled the researchers to test the Interface Hypothesis. This generative hypothesis predicts that areas of grammar that connect internal (syntax, in this case) and external (pragmatics, in this case) modules are challenging for learners to acquire. Destruel and Donaldson designed experiments to investigate two pragmatic interpretations of *wh*-questions: the presupposition of existence and exhaustivity. The first experiment focused on the presupposition of existence, or the assumption that the clefted constituent in the question exists. Participants completed a rating task in order to determine whether they were sensitive to the presupposition of existence interpretation; in this task, they judged the naturalness of the answer to the *wh*-question. The participants were intermediate- and advanced-level L2 learners of French enrolled in French classes at a university in the United States and native speakers of French living in France. The second experiment examined the exhaustivity inference, which means that the questioner expects a complete (or exhaustive), rather than a partial, answer with respect to the individuals who completed the action in question. In this experiment, the same individuals who participated in the first experiment completed a sentence-picture instrument. In this task, the participants first read a passage that contextualized each item. They were then presented with an image, a *wh*-question, and an answer to a question, and they were asked to rate the naturalness of the question. In both tasks, the patterns exhibited by the learners—and particularly those of the advanced-level learners—were similar to the native speakers’ patterns. Thus, Destruel and Donaldson concluded that their findings did not support the Interface Hypothesis. Instead, they find that linguistic phenomena that are at the syntax-pragmatics interface can be acquired by adult L2 learners.

In sum, valuable insights into how morphosyntactic phenomena develop among multicompetent speakers have emerged from the eight articles in this Special Issue. Moreover, this volume has brought together investigations from different frameworks, showcasing diverse approaches to research on additional-language acquisition. Finally, the studies in this collection highlight specific directions for future research, which demonstrates the continued vibrancy of scholarship in this area of linguistics.

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