'*Pedro comió la torta*' vs. '*Pedro se comió la torta*': L2 Acquisition of Spanish Telic 'se' constructions

Sonia Suárez Cepeda

Abstract

This paper reports the findings of an experimental research into the acquisition of the Spanish clitic *se* in transitive constructions as a telic marker . The study examined how the aspectual properties of the Spanish clitic *se* were acquired by adult English L2 learners of Spanish to determine what aspects of the acquisition are constrained by the learners' native language (NL) specific properties. It also looked into how the typology of the target language might play a significant role in the L2 acquisition process.

Based on a parameterized distinction of the telic features in English and Spanish, we examine whether second language (L2) learners are able to reset the aspectual value of the English parameter to that of Spanish in their interlanguage grammar. Results indicate that L2 learners' responses to a picture interpretation task vary according to proficiency levels. Low-intermediate and intermediate learners did not differentiate between telic and atelic constructions whereas advanced learners successfully acquired the telic properties of the transitive *se* constructions. Results were interpreted in the light of current theories of second language acquisition and the mental representation of aspect in the interlanguage.

Key words: second language acquisition, Spanish clitic *se*, interlanguage.

'**Pedro comió la torta**' vs. '**Pedro se comió la torta**': Adquisición de las construcciones télicas con '**se**' del español por hablantes de inglés

Resumen

El siguiente trabajo presenta los resultados finales de un trabajo experimental sobre la adquisición de las construcciones transitivas con el clítico *se* como marcador aspectual en el español por hablantes de inglés aprendiendo español como segunda lengua (L2) . El estudio examinó cómo las propiedades aspectuales del clítico se eran adquiridas por hablantes de inglés adultos aprendiendo español como segunda lengua con el fin de determinar qué aspectos de adquisición estaba determinado por las propiedades específicas de la lengua nativa (LN) de los alumnos (i.e. inglés). Asimismo, se analizó cómo las diferencias tipológicas entre una primera lengua y una segunda lengua podrían tener un rol significativo en los procesos de adquisición .

Sobre la base de una distinción parámetrica entre los rasgos télicos que marcan el inglés y el español, analizamos si los alumnos hablantes de inglés logran reacomodar los rasgos aspectuales del parámetro de telicidad del inglés al del español en una gramática de lengua intermedia (i.e. *interlanguage*). Los resultados demostraron que las respuestas de los participantes a una tarea de interpretación gráfica de acciones télicas y no télicas (i.e con *se* ó sin *se*) varía de acuerdo a sus niveles de conocimientos en la L2: los alumnos de nivel inicial e intermedio no lograron diferenciar entre construcciones télicas y no télica

Palabras clave: adquisición segunda lengua, español, clítico *se*, interlenguaje.

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Introduction

This paper reports the findings of experimental research into the acquisition of the Spanish clitic *se* in transitive constructions as a telic marker by second language (L2) learners of Spanish.

The study examines whether the aspectual properties of the Spanish clitic *se* were acquired by adult English L2 learners of Spanish to determine what aspects of the acquisition are constrained by the learners' native language (NL) specific properties. It also looks into how the typology of the target language might play a significant role in the L2 acquisition process.

Characteristics of the Spanish Telic *se* construction

The Spanish telic *se* construction involves a transitive verb with a direct object and a clitic that is homophonous with the reflexive *se*. The clitic agrees in j-features (person and number) with the subject of the sentence and it can be optional. However, those sentences without se can be interpreted as not being telic. Sanz (1996) argues that this interpretation is the result of not considering the object as a measurer of the event. Compare the sentences in (A).

(A)   1. *Mi hermano leyó un libro.*
              My brother read a book

         2. *Mi hermano se leyó un libro.*
              My brother *se*-TCL read a book

.

When the clitic is present, such as in (A2) the interpretation is unambiguously that of an accomplishment. The presence of the clitic *se* (*se*-TCL) makes the sentence less ambiguous in favor of an accomplishment interpretation.

Some of the verbs that enter in this type of construction with the telic *se* allow null subjects (1). The clitic *se* can appear in transitive constructions such as the one in the example in (B).

(B)   *Juan se comió dos bananas.*
         John *se*-TCL ate two bananas
         John ate up two bananas

However, mass nouns and bare plural yield ungrammatical constructions when the telic reflexive *se* is present. Compare the examples in (C).

(C)   1. *Lucía (*se) comió pochoclos/ naranjas*
              Lucy (*se-TCL) ate popcorn / oranges
              Lucy ate (*up) popcorn/oranges

Sentences with indefinite object, such as (D1) or with a non-specific object, such as (D2) are also allowed in this construction.

(D)   1. *Pedro se comió una manzana* (singular, indefinite object).
          Pedro *se*-TCL ate an apple.
          Peter ate up an apple.

          2. *Pedro se tomó algunos/unos vinos* (plural, non-specific object)
          Pedro *se*-TCL drank some wines.
          Peter drank up some/a couple of/ wines

As we observe, it is neither the specificity nor the plurality of the object that can best describe the properties of the object in this telic construction. Evidently, the object acts as a delimiter, which has some particular properties such as being affected by the verb event. In the following section we analyze how the main property of the object in this telic *se* construction is that of being the delimiter of the event as part of a compositional aspectual relation between verb event and characteristics of the object.

Affectedness and delimitedness: The object as a delimiter
Tenny (1994) defines 'delimitedness' as 'the property of an event's having a distinct, definite and inherent point in time' (2). Her analysis involves only those sentences in which delimitedness is achieved through the presence of an object. This relationship between the object and the verb is referred to as affectedness (i.e., the class of verbs and the arguments they take) and implies a homomorphic relation (i.e., the event comes to an end when the object is consumed) between the theme argument and the event (see Dowty 1991, Krifka 1992, Tenny 1987, 1994, Verkuy 1972 1993).

There are three aspectual roles that this measure-out property can have in transitive constructions. It can act as measure, path, and path and terminus. Compare examples in (E).

(E)   1. *Federico se pintó la pieza* (measure)
          Federico *se*-TCL painted the/his bedroom.
          Federico painted up his bedroom.

          2. *Josefina se corrió el circuito* (path)
          Josefina *se*-TCL ran the race track.
          Josephine ran up the race track.

          3. *Eduardo se recorrió el camino desde el principio hasta el fin* (path and terminus)
          Eduardo *se*-TCL walked along the path from the beginning to the end.
          Edward walked up along the path from the beginning to the end.

In (E1) the measure of the event of painting is the nature of the object *bedroom*. In (E2) the verb is a route type of verb with a path object that measures out the event over

time and makes it telic. In (E3) the verb is a route verb also but with a path object that has a signal that marks the terminus of the event.

In both examples the object does not undergo any change of state or motion, but it provides a kind of scale that indicates when the event is completed.

On the nature of the subject in telic se *constructions*
Some authors have referred to this clitic *se* in transitive constructions as a reflexive (Fernandez Ramirez 1986, Nishida 1994, Strozer 1976). Although it is morphologically similar to the reflexive Spanish *se*, when it appears in transitive constructions it is licensed by specific aspectual (Aktionsart) properties of the sentence that contains it and it expresses some kind of subject-affectedness related to the subject of the sentence (Sanz 1996).

This notion of affectedness can be explained by considering the subject of the transitive sentence as the originator of the event, in Borer's (1994) terms. The originator can participate in the event in a direct or indirect way. In a direct participation, the originator is understood as the active agent that has some bearing in how the event came about. It is also affected by the event itself (Sanz 1996) as it is shown in the example in (F).

(F)   *Mi hermano se gastó todo el dinero* (y ahora esta seco).
        My brother *se*-TCL spent all the money (and now he is broke).
        My brother spent all the/his money (and now he's broke)

Examples of the subject as originator in an indirect way can be found in the sentences proposed by Nishida (1994), although she does not favor this analysis. The non-agentivity that verbs of state denote when used in telic *se* constructions, such as '*saber (se) la lección*' (know the lesson) and '*conocer (se) la ciudad*' (know the city) is not similar to that of real state verbs, such as '*existir*' (exist). In the example shown in (G), the subject can be considered as being halfway between passive subjects of states and active subjects of dynamic situation (Sanz 1996). In such cases, the subjects also have a volitional property: they are or were actively involved in the event of achieving a goal, in this case, learning the lesson (Rigau 1994, Sanz 1996)

(G)   *Pedro ya se sabe la lección.*
        Pedro already *se*-TCL knew/learned the lesson
        Peter has already learned the lesson.

The final state of *Pedro se sabe la lección* (Peter has already learned the lesson) in (G) is the resultative state of the accomplishment of the event of learning. The benefactive interpretation arises by virtue of the action being completive (i.e., telic) and that the subject is agentive.

Some authors have interpreted the reflexive-like properties of the clitic *se* as benefactive. That is, the subject of the telic *se* construction is affected by the result of the event he himself generates (Rigau 1994, Sanz 1996) .The presence of the telic reflexive *se* makes the subject be in some way affected by the event. This means that when an agentive subject, in a volitional act performs the event upon the same argument that started it, the event is telic and the subject is affected by the result of the event

Syntactic properties of telic *se* constructions

Borer's (1994) proposes a syntactic analysis of telic predicates that offers a suitable framework to complete Nishida's explanation. She assumes that all verbs are intransitive, and that their aspectual and syntactic properties are determined by the nature of their predicates. She also proposes that arguments be base-generated within the local scope with no hierarchy –no thematic roles– and that phrase structure be constructed on the basis of the projection of these arguments which have to move to a Specifier position (Spec) of a functional projection for case assignment. In the case of transitive constructions, the accusative case is available at the Spec. position of a functional projection [AspP], which is optional and depends on the specificity of the direct object NP.

For telic interpretations, Borer assumes that the head of [AspP], includes a feature Event Measurement [EM]. Thus, in telic predicates, the NP acting as a direct internal argument, in Tenny's (1994) terms, moves to Spec, AspP to stand in a Spec-Head relationship with the [EM] feature under Asp, thus the whole statement receives a telic interpretation.

Following Borer, we argue that accomplishment verbs denoting consumption of the object (e.g. *eat (an apple)*, gaining information (e.g. *learn (the lesson)*, experiencer's performance (e.g., *take away (the gifts)*, *prepare (a sandwich))*, or gaining an object (e.g. *win (the lottery)*)) have a complex VP structure with an Event Measurement [+EM] marker in the AspP. Borer's (1994) Condition on aspectual Realization (CAR) states that verbs of accomplishment have two arguments that are neither internal nor external until they rise to the Spec of a functional category. Accusative case is assigned in the specifier of a phrase AspP with a [+Event Measure] feature. One of the arguments moves to Spec, Asp P to check Accusative case and triggers an [+EM] reading, the other moves to Spec, TP to receive Nominative case. The measure argument in Spec, AspP relation is interpreted as measuring the change and is associated with an 'internal argument' interpretation (Borer, 1994).

We propose that Spanish *se* has reflexive-like properties such that, when in Spec/Head relation with the external argument, it forces a volitional reading on the whole proposition. We base our analysis following Borer's account on the distributional

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properties of the possessor dative in Hebrew, which exhibits binding-like properties with respect to the possessed NP. She assumes the dative possessor is in a c-commanding position of all the VP-internal material, excluding the external argument, so it can bind its internal argument both post- and pre- verbally. To the purposes of syntactic representation, Borer suggests a higher aspectual node associated with propositions, which, when specified, is responsible for assigning to the argument associated with it a reading of 'originator', similar to Van Valin's (1987) 'actor' or Dowty's (1991) 'proto-agent'. The originator acts as an agent or subject of a state predicate.

Within this framework, Spanish *se* can occupy the higher aspectual Asp P or node, which is fully specified due to the reflexive-like properties of *se*, and give a volitional reading to the proposition. This interpretation can be combined to the Telic [+EM] properties of *se*. Consider the representation in (H).

(H)
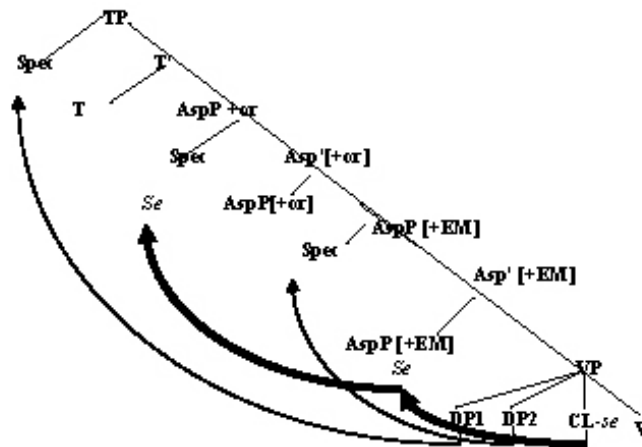
Telic events in English and Spanish

English has three types of Aktionsart constructions, namely the resultatives, middles and the verb-particle construction. For the purposes of this work, we consider the third type, the verb-particle combination, because of the similarities this construction shares with that of Spanish telic *se*.

English verbal particles

In English there are some particles which, when attached to a verb, can turn the verb type of achievement or activity into one of accomplishment. Compare the examples in (I).

(I)   1. *He tried to think up an answer in an hour/ *for an hour*
             2. *He thought it up in less than an hour / *for an hour*

In (I1) *the event of thinking up* has a clear termination: the object (i.e., *the answer*) measures it out. In English, verb particles yield a notion of delimitedness because they measure out the event: the action of *thinking up* is completed and achieved through the object. When the event of thinking up is accomplished, *the answer* is the result.

The existence of verbal particles shows that the feature [+measure] is present in transitive constructions of this type. Mainly, we can argue that particles such as up can only appear with some kinds of verbs that indicate completion of an action, such as *break (up)*, *eat (up)*, *open (up)*. The particle up can also be used in transitive constructions indicating completeness.

Also, there are some semantic restrictions that apply to the verbal particle *up*. As a norm, up does not occur with verbs indicating dispersion without boundary, as shown in (J).

(J)   *Spread *up* the news.
             *Scatter *up* the seeds.

It does not occur with verbs that denote movement, like oscillation without agitation, such as it is shown in (K).

(K)   *He nodded *up* his head
             * She rocked *up* the cradle

Verbs of psychological reaction (*hate, loathe, detest*), verbs that denote aggressive physical activity (*slam, stab, wrestle*) do not allow the particle *up*. Compare examples in (L).

(L)   1.* He hated her *up*
             2.* He slammed *up* the book
             3.* He stabbed her *up*.

Verbs of direct motion, such as *move, raise, lift, pull, push*, etc. can occur with the verbal particle *up* when the whole predicate has a directional meaning and it can be optional, such as it is shown in (M).

(M)   1. He lifted (*up*) the weights
             2. She raised (*up*) her hand.

We can conclude from the previous examples that the particle *up* expresses telicity, namely the notion of telicity achieved through measure. Verbs that express activity, such as *spread*, verbs that express states, such as *hate*, or verbs that express achievement, such as *slam*, do not allow the verbal particle *up*.

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Therefore, we can state that some English particles, such as *up*, have an aspectual role similar to that of the Spanish telic *se*. Both are overt markers of a strong feature. In the case of the Spanish *se* the feature is [+telic], in the case of the English verbal particles, the feature is [+measure]. The feature [+telic] in Spanish is strong (i.e. triggers movement) and it gets checked by the insertion of the clitic se because the clitic has an inherently [telic] feature. In English, there is no evidence of any overt operation to check telicity. However, the evidence denoted from verb-particle combinations suggests that the [+measure] feature is strong in English.

Telicity in English and Spanish: A comparative analysis
This reverse pattern (i.e., in Spanish the feature [+telic] is strong whereas in English it is [+measure]) can be interpreted as an example of how Aktionsart properties are encoded in different languages. In Spanish, the clitic *se* marks telicity and the object marks measure. The clitic has theta-features (3) and checks them with the subject in a Spec-Head relationship. The presence of this clitic is also contingent on the presence of an object with the [+measure] feature. In other words, the clitic cannot be present unless an object that measures out the event also appears in the sentence.

In English, however, the feature [+telic] is weak, which means that there is no overt movement for telicity and no overt marker is present. The verbal particles act as measuring-out elements and trigger a [+measure] feature in transitive constructions that is checked at the Transitive phrase.

Comparing how Aktionsart properties are encoded in languages, we observe, in the case of Spanish and English, that only one of the two interpretable features (i.e., [+measure] and [+telic]) can be strong. If [+measure] is strong, [+telic] needs not to be because it would be redundant at LF. Therefore, we can postulate that both languages, Spanish and English , have Aktionsart features in transitive constructions which are overtly marked at Asp P ([+telic] in Spanish) and at Tr P ([+measure] in English). The parametric variation that we observe between these languages is reduced to two different interpretable features that encode Aktionsart in each of them.

In the following section we analyze how these two features interact in the acquisition of the telic *se*. Generally, advanced learners of L2 can interpret derivational morphology much better than learners who have had little exposure to the target language grammar. Also, studies on the acquisition of aspectual constraints have shown that L2 learners can learn overt morphological marking even when this feature is not present in their native language (NL). However, at an initial stage, they tend to disregard morphological markers. Some studies show that at this initial stage they resort to their NL parameters to interpret telicity (Slabakova 1999a, Montrul 1997).

L2 acquisition of Aktionsart parameters

Slabakova (1999a), citing Verkuyl (1972, 1993), argues that aspectual meaning derives from combining a property of the verb and a property of the object NP that brings forward an aspectual interpretation of the whole predicate. Language transfer plays a crucial role in the semantic variations found in different languages due to changes in derivational morphology and argument structure. When dealing with aspectuality, L2 learners have to guess at the way in which the target language expresses argument structure or morphologically marks aspectual properties.

Studies in English show that if the learner's NL has overt morphological distinctions to indicate aspectuality, and the target language has zero morphology, L2 learners initially assume their NL morphological marking and either reject structures that are not overtly marked or resort to surrogate morphological forms in L2 that carry a meaning similar to that expressed by the L2 morphology (Adjemian 1983, Montrul, 1997, Slabakova 1999a, 1999b). These studies support Schwartz and Sprouse's (1994, 1996) Full Transfer/ Full Access Hypothesis which predicts that NL transfer errors occur at all levels of grammar, whereas developmental errors would emerge later on.

Montrul (1997) argues that once learners have realized that a particular morphological pattern is important in a given language, they use it correctly, with the relevant verbs, but they also tend to produce developmental errors, such as overgeneralization of a morphological form to the wrong class of verbs (Montrul 1997: 261).

Research on L2 competence should be able to determine which aspects of L2 knowledge are constrained by UG and which ones are largely dependent on the interaction of the learners' NL and the typological features of L2. Montrul (1997) suggests that errors in derivational morphology in L2 are largely due to NL influence and L2 language typology (see also Slabakova 1999a).

On the acquisition of Spanish telic se

One of the fundamental questions in L2 acquisition has been whether parameters can be reset, that is, whether learners can acquire language properties that are not instantiated in their NL. One option, following Clahsen and Muysken (1996) is that at the end of NL acquisition, all used parameter values are pruned down, and thus, not available for resetting. Another option would be that adult L2 learners have access to parameter values not present in their NL. In both cases, the crucial question is: what is the nature of the initial hypothesis for L2.

A second critical issue to address is how the resetting of parametric values correlates with the actual acquisition of the related grammatical function. If we assume that the knowledge of the grammatical cluster relates to the parameter value and that both appear together, then we could argue that parameter resetting is possible, because the appearance of one predicts the appearance of the other (see Slabakova 1999a).

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A third crucial point is the effect of NL constraints on L2 acquisition. Under the assumption that NL knowledge plays a prominent role in early stages of acquisition (see Schwartz & Sprouse's (1994, 1996) Full Transfer/Full Access Hypothesis), the question is how transfer might constrain the acquisition of aspectual constraints that have overt morphosyntactic properties in the target language (e.g. telic marker *se*).

Both languages English and Spanish share a similar morphological marking for telicity. Both languages use aspectual markers -Spanish *se*, English verb particles *up, down, through-,* which have a measuring-out function. Theoretically, following Schwartz and Sprouse's hypothesis, English NL learners acquiring Spanish would have a similar background and would have NL parametric values for telicity in their initial L2 grammar. We might assume that in their interlanguage (IL) they might be able to relate Spanish *se* telic properties to those of English verbal particles. Thus, in a subsequent developmental stage, they would restructure their interlanguage and have Full access and reset the Spanish *se t*o its parametric values. However, the critical point of this assumption is that studies on L2 Spanish (see Montrul 1997, 1999, in press, Toth 1997) show that English learners have serious difficulties with the Spanish reflexive morphology, especially in intransitive alternating verbs because they tend to produce forms without overt morphological markers.

Following Smith (1991), we argue that the mental representation of the aspect parameter can be transferred from the English NL value, but that evidence of the learners' acquisition of the L2 Spanish parameter has to combine the notion of telicity and the acquisition, or identification, of the complex predicate construction [*se*+V+definite DP]. The co-occurrence of these two features would indicate that learners master both aspect and aspectual related predicate properties.

This study investigates whether transfer could occur, especially when the parameter values of NL and L2 diverge with respect to telic features. This lack of structural congruity between the two languages may prevent transfer into the learners' IL. However, those learners that have attained a certain level of development in their L2 structure may tend to relate the value features of telic *se* to those of the reflexive morpheme *se*. At this stage learners may have a functional projection to account for the position of *se* as a reflexive, but the features [+telic] and [+measure] may be unspecified.

We also hypothesize that this deficiency in NL grammar can also be lexical. Learners may not yet be able to correctly associate the appropriate lexical item with its grammatical category. Therefore, advanced level L2 learners' grammar may have functional projections but the feature value of the lexical item is underspecified.

Description of the experiment

A new type of test was designed for the aspectual interpretation task. Most recent studies on the acquisition of aspectual parameters cross linguistically (Montrul 1999; Slabakova 1999a) point out that judgment in the area of aspect sometimes results in murky interpretation from control groups and L2 learners. To avoid this potential problem, a test based on visual interpretation (i.e., comic strip sequences) was designed. The criteria followed were that the test items have to show clear telic/atelic situations, all involving one character and an object. Extra clues, such as adverbials like *todo/toda* (*all*), were excluded since they can provide extra aspectual information.

The picture judgment task

The purpose of this task was to see how learners judge how well sentences containing verbs of accomplishment and the clitic *se* describe telic situations. The criteria for judging sentences were focused on object affectedness (i.e., how telic/atelic events were presented as complete or incomplete actions in the picture sequences). Participants were presented with a series of 20 comic strip sequences that describe telic and atelic situations. Below each picture sequence there was a sentence referring to the situation that contains one of the verbs listed below. The verb complexes used in the experiment have been taken from Nishida's (1994) semantic classification of dynamic verb complexes with *se*. A list of the types of verbs tested is shown in (N).

(N)   Types of verbs and their objects
    1. Consuming an object
    1.1. Spatial object
      tragarse (la comida)= to swallow-*se*TCL (the food).
      beberse (las cervezas)=To drink-*se*TCL (the beers).
      comerse (un sándwich)=To eat-*se*TCL (a sandwich).
    1.2. Temporal object
      pasarse (la noche) despierto=To spend-*se*TCL (the night) awake.
    2. Gaining an object
    2.1. Material object
      ganarse (un millón) de dólares= To win-*se*TCL (one million dollars).
      robarse (el dinero)= To steal-*se*TCL (the money).
    2.2 Gaining knowledge or information
      Saberse / aprenderse (la lección) de memoria= To know/learn-*se*TCL
              The lesson by heart.
    3. Experiencer's performance
      Leerse (un libro / un poema=To read-*se*TCL (a book/a poem).
      Aguantarse (el sermón)= To sit through-*se*TCL (the sermon).
      Mirarse (su programa favorito de TV)= To watch-*se*TCL (one's
              Favorite TV program)
      Prepararse un sándwich= To prepare-*se*TCL (a sandwich).
      llenarse (una taza) de café / de azúcar=To fill-*se*TCL (a cup) of coffe/ sugar.
      llevarse (los regalos/ la plata)= To take away-*se*TCL (the gifts/the money).

All test items focused entirely on object affectedness by presenting telic and atelic situations. To avoid misinterpretation key words were translated. Object affectedness involved sequences in which the focal event of the comic strip was either complete or incomplete. Below each comic strip sequence was a stimulus sentence with *se*. An example of a test item describing atelic situations where the use of the clitic *se* was considered incorrect is shown in (O), and an example of a test item depicting a telic situation where the use of *se* is considered correct is shown in (P).

(O)   Test item number 7
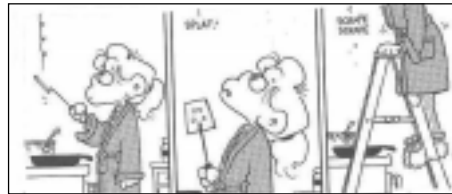
Clara se preparó un panqueque.
(preparar= to prepare) (pancake)

← Imprecise-Precise →

(P)   Test item number 15

Pedro se preparó un sandwich
(preparar: prepare)

← Imprecise-Precise →

Participants were asked to make a mark on the line below the sentence in proportion to how well the sentence described the situation shown in the picture. If the sentence was perceived as very accurate (i.e., precise) participants were told to place the mark farther to the right than to the left, or farther to the left if they perceived it to be inaccurate (i.e., imprecise). The terms 'precise' and 'imprecise' were used to avoid grammaticality judgments from all participants since all the sentences were grammatically

correct. The test items relevant to the study were the ones that elicited the 'imprecise' answer, that is the atelic ones. The expected results for these test items were that learners would identify the incorrect use of the telic marker in atelic situations.

Subjects

A total of 53 L2 speakers of English (33 female, 20 male; age range from 20 to 51; M= 25) were tested. All subjects were matriculated at the Spanish Department, at the University of North Texas (UNT) during spring 2000. Participants were divided into three groups: low intermediate, intermediate and advanced level.

The control group was 43 native speakers of Spanish. 10 of them were graduate students at the University of Illinois, and 33 were native speakers from Argentina. Table 1 summarizes background information on the L2 participants.

Table 1

	Age (Mean)	Sex		Years of Spanish (Mean)	N# Subjects Studied/ lived Abroad	Time of Residence (range)
		M	F			
Low-Intermediate Level (N= 21)	24	10	11	3	4	1 to 12 weeks
Intermediate Level (N= 20)	22	6	14	4	6	1 to 16 weeks
Advanced Level (N= 11)	27	3	8	5	11	1 to 13 months

Information on L2 learners

Analysis

A total of 10 sentences marked as 'imprecise' were computed as test items for the statistical analysis. Marked responses were converted into interval data by measuring the distance between subjects' marks and the left end of the line in mm. All statistical analyses involved testing ratio data (mm to the left) with f-tests. Subjects were classified into four different levels (i.e., level 1=low-intermediate, level 2=intermediate, level 3= advanced, and level 4= native speakers). Frequency and descriptive statistics were performed on the three groups and a one-way ANOVA was used to compare means. An overall F ratio was calculated for each of the means. A second analysis using one-way ANOVA was performed to compare each group means and significance. Means for each item were calculated and compared to observe group variation and verb type significance in the interpretation of the sentences. Finally, all results were analyzed and discussed in terms of the study's specific research questions.

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Results

The results of the study showed that differences between the low intermediate, intermediate, advanced and control groups were significant (F=5.177, p=0.002). Differences between native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) were also significant (F=6.018, p=0.015) Figure 2 shows the results of descriptive statistics and f-statistics for the four groups.

Table 2

Group	Mean	Standard deviation
Native speakers (N=42)	34.08 *	31.5
Advanced (N=11)	28.83 *	27.3

ANOVA: (F= 5.177, p.= 0.002)
Mean responses for each group

Results of a Post Hoc (Scheffe) test show that there was no significant difference between the low intermediate and the intermediate levels (p=0.999). Their means (see Table 2) show that their answers were skewed towards the 'precise' marking. Their failure to draw a distinction between telic and atelic events may suggest that in an initial stage L2 learners do not recognize overt morphosyntactic markings (i.e., clitic *se*) as telic.

By contrast, there was a significant difference between advanced and low-intermediate levels (p=0.037). Significant difference was also found between advanced and intermediate levels (p=0.024). These differences suggest that advanced learners were more likely to draw a distinction between telic and atelic picture sequences. A bar chart comparing the performance of the three levels to the control group, as shown in Figure 1, reveals a clustering effect for both intermediate groups and both advanced and control groups.

Figure 1

Means Comparison for each group
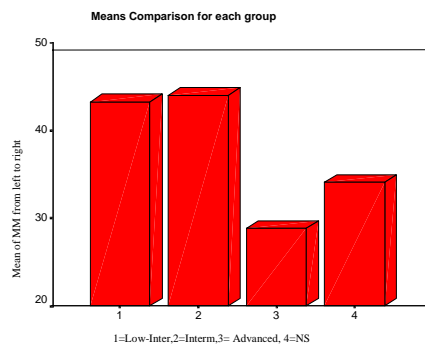
1=Low-Inter,2=Interm,3= Advanced, 4=NS

Chart for all four levels

Variations in the subjects' performance, as observed between the advanced level and the two intermediate groups, suggest differences in their underlying linguistic competence. Low-intermediate and intermediate learners were more likely to mark sentences as 'precise' (i.e., telic) than advanced learners. By contrast, advanced learners were able to differentiate between telic and atelic sentences and showed no difference in their intuition when compared to native speakers (p=0.698).

A closer look at the type of verb used in each test item may indicate whether subjects based their interpretation of the sentences on the sentence verb type.

Table 4 shows each group's mean value for the test items and a description of the type of verb used in each test items Note that these mean variations is a comparative table based of no statistical analysis. Significant differences between groups as regards test items were not evaluated for the reduced number of subjects.

> Table 3

Test item	Verb type	Low-Interm.	Inter.	Adv.	Native sp.
Item 8	Gaining knowledge	44.85	53.09	27.45	38.02
Item 10	Consuming temporal object	47.45	40.14	30.09	36.50
Item 12	Experiencer performance	61.50	63.14	30.18	51.50
Item 13	Experiencer performance	44.65	43.23	21.72	25.66
Item 17	Consuming spatial object	19.71	22.00	16.72	13.04

Mean judgment for each item for all levels.

Verbs that refer to consuming a spatial object (e.g., item 17) were interpreted as telic by all groups This similarity in the responses suggests that those test items where there was no sequence but a clear endpoint indicating incompleteness were more easily interpreted as 'imprecise' by most L2 learners in all groups. In those items where there was a sequence followed by an incomplete endpoint, suggesting an atelic event (i.e., item8, item10, item12, and item13), low-intermediate and intermediate learners were not accurate in interpreting the atelic effect.

Intermediate level subjects tend to disregard the presence of the clitic se and the event endpoint as a mark of telicity. An example is item 10 .The stimulus sentence (i.e., *Lucía se pasó la noche despierta* (Lucía spent the night awake)) indicates that the sentence is 'imprecise' (i.e., atelic) to describe the situation because the sequence indicates an interruption of the event (i.e., incompleteness). Both low-intermediate and intermediate learners interpret item 10 as telic (see Table 3). This result suggests these learners' interpretation of the sentence might have been influenced by the semantic characteristics of the predicate

pasar (a noche despierta) which refers to a period of time over which the character performs and action. Intermediate learners failed to interpret the endpoint of the ongoing event indicated by the final state of the sequence: the character sleeping.

In those test items where the verb and the event structure converge in showing an incomplete situation such as in item 17, low-intermediate and intermediate learners' performance was near the range of the advanced and control groups' responses (see Figure 1).

Learners in-group 3, on the other hand, performed consistently and accurately. The means response for test items in this group suggests that these learners' criteria for judging sentences were similar to native speakers'. The consistent pattern in their responses suggests that their grammar may have specific functional features that allow them to interpret aspectual differences in Spanish. These results provide evidence for these learners having acquired the morphosyntactic properties of *se* in Spanish transitive sentences. Further research on this area should indicate whether these aspectual properties are actually present in these advanced learners' L2 grammar.

Conclusions

The findings confirmed the hypothesis for low-intermediate learners who did not treat atelic sentences as 'imprecise, which indicate that they were not able to relate the presence of the clitic *se* as a telic marker. Intermediate learners showed an identical performance. These results suggest that the morphosyntactic properties of the clitic *se* were not instantiated in these L2 learners' initial grammar. On the other hand, the predictions for advanced learners were correct. They marked more 'atelic'sentences for imprecise test items than the two intermediate groups, which indicates they were able to differentiate telic from atelic test items. These results may also suggest that advanced learners were able to identify the clitic *se* as a telic marker.

These findings demonstrate that the resetting of the parameter to a L2 value occurs at an advanced stage. Results are also consistent with the predicted effects of typological differences on L2 parameter resetting. constraints are overtly realized having specific morphosyntactic properties.

Further questions

Finally, a critical question to address in future studies is how these two different features (i.e., two different parametric values for aspectuality) can interact in L2 grammar. A further discussion would lead us to consider whether these learners (i.e., advanced group) have developed a new functional category that accounts for this representation. As it has been argued in the previous sections, this telic *se* construction in Spanish has compositional properties that require the clitic to se co-occur with a specific object and an agentive

subject. If we assume that advanced learners have acquired the properties of the telicity in these *se* constructions, as results seem to suggest, we can postulate the presence of some functional category in their interlanguage grammar. However, results in this study do not allow us to conclude whether advanced learners' mental representation of this telic predicate has native-like properties.

However, the analysis presented seems to support Vainikka and Young-Scholten's (1994, 1996) view of L2 acquisition. Specifically, they argue that in an initial stage, L2 grammars consist only of lexical projections, such as VP, but a subsequent L2 development results in the development of functional projections (FP). These FPs are underspecified at first, to later become fully specified as IP and CP. Within this framework, we can assume that L2 advanced learners in this study have a fully specified FP that allows them to interpret the compositional properties of the predicate. The underlying assumption in this analysis is that the lexical properties of clitic *se* as a reflexive are learned by L2 learners as part of the lexicon (Montrul 1997), and are ruled-governed and compositional in nature. Once learners have acquired how these properties of reflexive se apply to the lexical item, they may have an FC instantiated in their L2 grammar that accounts for the lexico-syntactic and semantic properties of the clitic *se* as a reflexive. As a consequence, high proficiency learners may become sensitive to the presence of the clitic *se* as a predictor of subject-affectedness (i.e., reflexivity) and tend to relate the presence of this clitic to a subject affectedness or beneficiary effect upon the agentive subject of the sentence. Further research is necessary to assess this assumption.

Notas

(1)They can also have an intransitive use expressing atelic activities. For instance, the verb *comer* (to eat) can express an intransitive (i.e., atelic event) in a sentence such as:

Juan comió a las cuatro

John ate   at   four

With the insertion of the clitic se, as shown in, the sentence is ungrammatical because it yields a reflexive reading of *Juan ate himself*. Observe example the following example:

*Juan se   comió   a las cuatro.

*John se-REFCL ate (himself) at four.

(2)Dr. Robert (Haj) Ross (p.c.) pointed out that a better definition for delimitedness should consider the notion of 'bounded interval' instead of 'definite point in time'. He suggested that in sentences such as:

It took her four days to eat up the apples

The event is telic but it occurs in a bounded interval of time (four days). This analysis seems to be true for those main verbs of time, like *take* and *spend* when followed by sentential complements. An example taken from Smith (1997) supports Ross's remark:

It took me an hour to write the letter.

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However, Smith argues that *spend* is not compatible with telic constellations (i.e., compositional predicates), as it is shown in the following example, again taken from Smith:

I spent an hour writing the letter

She finds this sentence atelic because the event of *writing the letter* does not seem to have been completed. Personally, I don't agree with Smith 's analysis because the presence of the object *the letter* affects the whole predicate and makes the event telic (see Tenny 1994, Sanz 1996).

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