

## The Acquisition of Multiple Adjective Order in Second Language (L2) Spanish

Erin Pettibone

*University of Toronto*

A number of studies have suggested that adjective placement can serve as a test to determine to what extent learners project structure into language for which they do not have direct evidence (Anderson, 2001; Rothman, Judy, Guijarro-Fuentes, & Pires, 2010). In a study of L2 learners of French where students were asked to judge the acceptability of singular and multiple referents, Anderson (2001) found that despite the lack of explicit instruction, participants recognized the unacceptability of singular interpretations of nouns with post-nominal adjective placement. Rothman et. al (2010) similarly tested L2 acquisition of adjectival order in Spanish and found that advanced L2 speakers were able to interpret and produce preposed and postposed adjectives with near-native proficiency, despite [a putative] absence of explicit instruction.

I argue that single adjective placement in Spanish cannot be used to demonstrate sensitivity to structural dependence for groups of classroom learners as it is the target of explicit instruction. Spanish language textbooks typically both describe lexical shift alternations associated with adjectival placement (*'viejo amigo'*-long time friend, *'amigo viejo'*- elderly friend) and characterize postnominal adjectives as restrictive, and prenominal adjective as applicable to the whole set (*'los famosos escritores'*- all of the writers are famous, *'los escritores famosos'* – a subset of writers are famous) (King & Suñer 2008:158, and others). Moreover, as the second contrast is equivalent to the restrictive/non-restrictive contrast within relative clause constructions, learners have obvious access to an L1 model. Adjective placement, however, affords other, less ostensive dimensions of learning. I explore L2 acquisition of double adjective constructions, a clear poverty of the stimulus (POS) context, where I seek to answer the following question: *Do L2 learners have access to structural operations that are not instantiated in their first language (L1) grammar or do they demonstrate lack of structure dependent learning methods?*

Adjectival sequences in Spanish mirror the order of adjectival sequences in English. This mirror image order is obtained by pied- piping (Cinque, 2010).

- |     |                                  |                                 |
|-----|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| (1) | a. Faded blue pants.             | A <sub>2</sub> A <sub>1</sub> N |
|     | b. Pantalones azules desteñidos  | N A <sub>1</sub> A <sub>2</sub> |
|     | c. *Pantalones desteñidos azules | N A <sub>2</sub> A <sub>1</sub> |

No access theories of L2 acquisition (cf. Meisel, 2011) predict that learners might not fully access the underlying nature of the word order shift, and might transfer the surface linear order from English to the right of Spanish nouns (1c). Theories of full access/full transfer (cf. Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996; White, 2003) predict that while learners might initially ignore the variable position, as soon as they acquire the L2 preference for the postnominal position for adjectives, they should favour the scope-based ordering (1b).

I report preliminary results of an Acceptability Judgement Task (AJT) designed and run using the Psycholinguistic software Superlab that simultaneously measured L2 speaker ( $n=14$ ) accuracy and latency in response to sentences counterbalanced based on the placement of single, obligatorily postnominal, relational adjectives in Spanish and sentences containing double adjective constructions. Scalar acceptability judgements indicate that while advanced L2 speakers recognize the unacceptability of single preposed relational adjectives in Spanish, they do not favour scope based ordering in multiple adjective constructions. However, reaction time data from the same task indicates that L2 speakers tend to react more slowly to non-scope based ordering, suggesting a sensitivity to the structural anomaly which is not captured by a scalar measure alone.

## References

- Anderson, B. (2001). Adjective position and interpretation in L2 French. In J. C. and C. R. Wiltshire (Eds.), *Romance syntax, semantics and their L2 acquisition* (pp. 27-46). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Cinque, G. (2010). *The Syntax of Adjectives*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- King, L. D. & Suñer, M. (2008). *Gramática española, análisis y práctica*. (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Meisel, Jürgen M. (2011). *First and second language acquisition: Parallels and differences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schwartz, B. D., & Sprouse, R. A. (1996). L2 cognitive states and the full transfer/full access model. *Second Language Research*, 12, 40-72.
- Rothman, J. Judy, T, Guijarro-Fuentes, P. & Pires, A. (2010). On the (un)— ambiguity of adjectival interpretation in L2 Spanish: Informing debates on the mental representation of L2 syntax. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 32(1), 47-77.
- White, L. (2003). *Second language acquisition and Universal Grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.