The Overt Pronoun Constraint in L2 and L3 acquisition

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1 Contradictory observations in SLA
▶ Observation #1: near-native representations in end-state grammars (i.e., advanced levels of proficiency): L2 learners show (residual) optionality (Parodi, 2001; Sorace, 2000), incomplete/ divergent representations (Sorace, 1993) and persistent selective fossilisation (Franceschina, 2001; Hawkins, 2000, 2001).

2 Questions
▶ Q1: Why near-native / native-like within-learner contrast?
▶ Q2: Why near-native / native-like between-learner contrast? Due to L1?

3 Distribution overt/ null pronouns in Spanish

**[+pro-drop] languages**
(1) a. Yo voy al cine (Spanish)
b. pro voy al cine
(2) a. Ego pao sto sinema (Greek)
b. pro pao sto sinema

**[-pro-drop] languages**
(3) a. I go to the cinema (English)
b. *pro go to the cinema

▶ Conclusion: overt and null pronouns seem to be in free alternation in Spanish and Greek languages...BUT is this really so??
▶ There are 2 constraints:
(a) Universal principles: Overt Pronoun Constrain (OPC)
(b) Language-specific factors: Contrastive Focus Constraint (CFC)

4 Overt Pronoun Constraint (OPC)
  Context: ▶ The government has published a report about students’ financial situation. The report concludes that...
  
  .. cada estudiante dice que { * él | pro } tiene poco dinero
  
  .. each student, says that { he ; * pro } has little money

▶ Facts:
(i) OPC applies cross-linguistically (even in typologically unrelated languages) and is claimed to be a universal invariant (Kanno, 1997; Montalbetti, 1986).
(ii) Poverty of stimulus: OPC is about what cannot be said (see Schwartz, 2000 for discussion).
5 Contrastive Focus Constraint (CFC)

Pérez-Leroux & Glass (1997), focus constraints on pronouns:

Context: Mr López and Ms García work at the university and at a famous publishers. However...

.. cada estudiante dice que \( \begin{cases} \text{él} & \text{tiene poco dinero.} \\ \text{pro} & \end{cases} \) each student says that \( \begin{cases} \text{he} & \text{has little money} \\ \text{pro} & \end{cases} \)

Facts:

(i) one of the 2 referents (Mr Lopez / Ms Garcia) needs to be focused contrastively.

(ii) hence the need for overt pronoun: \( \text{él 'he' [+masc], ella 'she' [-masc].} \)

(iii) \( \text{pro} \) causes ambiguity as it is specified for [+masc] / [-masc].

6 Subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Language configuration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish natives</td>
<td>n=10</td>
<td>L1 Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English natives</td>
<td>n=19</td>
<td>L1 English L2 Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek natives</td>
<td>n=20</td>
<td>L1 Greek L2 English L3 Spanish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learners: all advanced level; two standardised placement tests: one in Spanish (University of Wisconsin, 1998), another in English (Allan, 1992) for the Greek natives.

Subjects who participated=129. Those whose (i) proficiency level was <80% in Spanish (and also <80% in English for the Greek natives) and (ii) whose language configuration different from above were discarded. Total usable subjects=49.

7 Predictions

Questions:

(1) Will both groups be sensitive to instantiations of UG principles (like OPC) in L2s, however their L1 might differ from the L2?

(2) On the other hand, where language-specific pronominal constructions differ between the L1 and the L2 (like CFC), will this be a potential source of fossilisation or representational deficits?

1 OPC scenario:

UG L1 English L2 Spanish
[OPC] [ ] [OPC]

native-like

UG L1 Greek L2 English L3 Spanish
[OPC] [OPC] [ ] [OPC]

native-like

Interestingly, if both groups, English and Greeks, behave alike, then UG (and not L1) is the privileged source of transfer in L2/L3.

Hypothesis 1: if knowledge of principles (like OPC) is constrained by UG, all learners will show native-like representations whatever their linguistic configuration.
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2 CFC scenario:

Persistent Selective Fossilisation (PSF), Hawkins (2000): post-childhood L2 learning, some features cause PSF to learners even after long immersion in L2. Source of PSF = learner’s L1:

L1 L2 L1 L2
[+F] [+F] [] [+F]

L1 English L2 Spanish
[ ] pro [+masc]/[-masc]

near-native

Lack of instantiation of [F] in learners’ L1English leads to under-representation of [F] in L2 Spanish.

L1 English L2 Spanish
[ ] pro [+masc]/[-masc]

near-native

pro same set of features in Greek & Spanish.

L1 Greek L2 English L3 Spanish
pro [+masc]/[-masc] [ ] pro [+masc]/[-masc]

Hypothesis 2: if the feature set of a category (e.g., pro) is not instantiated in the learners’ L1, they will select the least restrictive configuration, leading to near-nativeness.

8 Method

Acceptability judgement test, 4 conditions:

TARGET STIMULI:

1 Hawkins (2000) proposes that under-representation deficits are due to [– interpretable] features. We will not discuss the issue of interpretability of features in this study.

2 Even though the features [+masc] and [-masc] are present in some categories in English, they are certainly not present in pro since English does not allow pro.

6 OPC stimuli
6 CFC stimuli
DISTRACTER STIMULI:
6 other pronominal stimuli
6 other pronominal stimuli

1 OPC:
The government has published a report about students’ financial situation. The report concludes that...
(a) cada estudiante dice que él tiene poco dinero. −2 −1 0 +1 +2
(b) cada estudiante dice que tiene poco dinero. −2 −1 0 +1 +2

2 CFC:
Mr López and Ms García work at the university and at a famous publishers. However…
(a) cada estudiante dice que él tiene poco dinero. −2 −1 0 +1 +2
(b) cada estudiante dice que tiene poco dinero. −2 −1 0 +1 +2

2 different versions of the same test: version 1, version 2. Order of presentation of items varies in each version to avoid presentational effects.

Sentences were randomised (following Cowart’s 1997 ‘blocking’ procedure) in each version of the test.

Vocabulary was controlled (vocabulary for beginners).

Sentence length was controlled.

9 Results

Normal distribution: our samples follow the Normal distribution (one-sample Kolmogorov Smirnov test, p≥0.05 for each group in each condition).

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1. OPC results: acceptance rates of overt/null pronouns

- **Within group**: *paired samples t-test* each pair (grammatical vs ungrammatical condition) is statistically significant for each group (p<0.05)
- **Between groups**: (1-way ANOVA, post-hoc comparison Tukey HSD)
  - **Grammatical** [*QDPi ... NULLi*] → no difference between groups (p>0.05)
  - **Ungrammatical** [*QDPi ... OVERTi*] → no difference between groups:
    - English = Spanish (p=0.222)
    - Greek = Spanish (p=0.998)

- Results support previous research (Kanno, 1997, 1998; Marsden, 1998; Pérez-Leroux & Glass, 1997, 1999): L2 learners are sensitive to OPC whatever their L1.

2. CFC results: acceptance rates of overt/null pronouns

- **Within group**: *paired samples t-test* each pair (grammatical vs ungrammatical condition) is statistically significant for each group (p<0.05)
- **Between groups**: (1-way ANOVA, post-hoc comparison Tukey HSD)
  - **Grammatical** [*QDPi ... OVERTj*] → no difference between groups (p>0.05)
  - **Ungrammatical** [*QDPi ... NULLj*] → between groups:
    - English ≠ Spanish (p=0.030)
    - Greek = Spanish (p=1.000)

- Results support previous research: Pérez-Leroux & Glass (1997, 1997).
- Also, Liceras & Díaz (1999): identification amenable to repres. deficits.
- **Explanation?** CFC → Spanish group: *pro [+masc]/[-masc]*
  - English group: *pro [±masc]* (least restrictive, underspecification)
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10 Conclusion

- Original questions answered?
  - Q1: Why near-native / native-like within-learner contrast?
    Due to sensitiveness to UG principles (OPC) [near-native] and to language-specific constructions [native-like].
  - Q2: Why near-native / native-like between-learner contrast? Due to L1?
    Due to mismatch of features between L1 and L2/L3.

- Overall: L1 seems to be the key to representational deficits.
- Least restrictive feature set in CFC constructions derives from economy principles (Chomsky, 1995), though it leads to syntactic optionality (Sorace, 2000):
  "as in L1 acquisition, the pattern of preferences for one option over the other changes over time, until a potentially permanent stage is reached at which the target option is strongly, but not categorically, preferred, and the dispreferred non-target option is never completely expunged, but still surfaces in some circumstances" (p. 98)

- OPC conclusion: not necessarily potential target for fossilisation and/or representational problems.
- CFC conclusion: a likely candidate for fossilisation and/or representational problems, depending on learners’ L1.

11 References
