

Individual Paper Session 11
Syntax
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Syntactic Competence Similarities Despite Target-Deviant Performance: Pragmatic Deficiencies in L2 Acquisition

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Contemporary research in generative second language (L2) acquisition has attempted to address observable target-deviant aspects of L2 language while assuming adult UG-continuity (e.g., Lardiere 1998, 2000; Prévost & White 1999, 2000; Sprouse, 2004). The present attempt stems from the observations of several acquisition studies, which have pointed to the independence of pragmatic and syntactic development (e.g., Grodzinsky & Reinhart, 1993; Lust et al., 1986; Pacheco & Flynn, 2005; Serratice, Sorace & Paoli, 2004). Accordingly, it follows that deficiencies in pragmatic knowledge can manifest themselves in performance as what appear to be particular syntactic errors. As a result, some errors in interlanguage (IL) development thought to occur for reasons of syntactic deficiencies are perhaps better understood as problems at the syntax-pragmatics interface, despite actual native-like syntactic competence. This hypothesis is examined in the present study by analyzing the status of the Null-Subject Parameter in the IL of intermediate English adult learners of L2 Spanish.

A coupling of the findings of a grammaticality/correction, an interpretation and a production task, the present study demonstrates that many of these intermediate L2 learners of Spanish have acquired native-like syntactic knowledge to license null subjects in Spanish as confirmed by their knowledge of the Overt Pronoun Constraint (Montalbetti, 1984), a *poverty of the stimulus* property associated with the pro-drop grammars only. Nevertheless, they continue to have syntactic errors in performance.

In accord with data from the present study, I argue that the lack of knowledge of a necessary associated pragmatic constraint, the Avoid Pronoun Principle (Chomsky, 1981), which imposes a need-based requirement for all overt subject pronoun use in Spanish-type languages, explains observed L2 overuse of overt subject pronoun, as seen in many studies (e.g. Liceras, 1989; White 1985, 1986), and acceptance of ungrammatical overt expletive subjects in grammaticality judgment tasks, despite native-like syntactic competence.