"Good enough" representation in L2 Spanish and English *wh*-questions

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Derivational Complexity Hypothesis (DCH) sets out to define the selective nature of structural transfer (e.g., Jakubowicz, 2011; Slavkov, 2011). Specifically, it predicts that structures with fewer internal merge operations taken before spell-out can transfer from the less to the more complex language. Jakubowicz (2011) suggests that DCH is applicable to L1 and L2 acquisition and adult language processing in general. Slavkov (2011) studied the acquisition of long distance *wh*-questions in native Bulgarian and French adults learning English. He found that the two groups produced a wide variety of alternative structures, which had a lower degree of derivational complexity. Consequently, DCH needs to be further investigated in the adult L2 population to determine whether there is a direct association between acquisition difficulties and this hypothesis.

In the present study I examine the acquisition of matrix and embedded *wh*-questions in both Spanish and English. These two languages diverge in the way they represent these constructions (e.g., Pesetsky & Torrego, 2001; Rizzi, 1996):

1. (a) ¿Qué   quería   el vendedor?   (SPAN Matrix)
       wh-phrase + lexical verb + subject

   (b) What   did   the salesman   want?   (ENG Matrix)
       wh-phrase + auxiliary *do* + subject + lexical verb

2. (a) (María le preguntó a su padre) qué   quería   el vendedor.   (SPAN Embedded)
       (ask/wonder verb)   *wh*-phrase + lexical verb + subject

   (b) (Mary asked her dad)   what the salesman wanted.   (ENG Embedded)
       (ask/wonder verb)   *wh*-phrase + subject + lexical verb

In both matrix and embedded constructions Spanish has a strong V-feature in the tense phrase (TP) which motivates the first of two lexical verb head movements, V-(to-T)-to-C. Contrastingly, the English lexical verb merges in [head, VP]. This is due to a weak V-feature. Furthermore, in the case of English matrix constructions, because of a strong T-feature in the complementizer phrase (CP), the finite auxiliary *do* moves from T-to-C.

Part one of this study examines the acquisition of Spanish matrix and embedded *wh*-questions. Fifteen (n=15) advanced SL learners of Spanish (English L1) and fifteen (n=15) Spanish native speakers (control group) participated in the investigation. Results from a dehydrated sentence task indicate that, relative to the control group, the SL learners have difficulty producing target word order, specifically in embedded contexts. This finding is supported by recent studies on bilingual adults and children (Cuza, 2012; Cuza & Strik, 2012; Frank, 2012). Part two investigates the reverse language combination. Fifteen (n=15) advanced SL learners of English (Spanish L1) and fifteen (n=15) English native speakers (control group) participated in the study. Results from a dehydrated sentence task indicate that the SL learners have relative difficulty producing English embedded *wh*-questions.

Based on the results, a native-like representation of embedded *wh*-questions in both Spanish and English does not seem to be in place in the bilingual grammar of advanced SL learners. Furthermore, there does not appear to be a direct association between acquisition difficulties and the DCH. While this hypothesis does provide a possible explanation for the results in part one (the external merge of the lexical verb in the English constructions is an initial step in the syntactic derivation of the Spanish ones), it does not accurately predict the results to part two. Furthermore, one might hypothesize that non-target

production is motivated by an extension of the matrix construction. While this hypothesis partially explains the results to part two (insertion of the finite auxiliary do), it cannot explain part one.

One possible explanation is that the SL learners' representation of embedded constructions in both Spanish and English is conditioned by the input (e.g., Cuza & Frank, 2011; Sánchez, 2002). Embedded *wh*-questions are not very common in day-to-day input and in foreign language classrooms. Furthermore, the conditions for native-like attainment may not be ideal, where the L1 is infrequently used and dominance has shifted to L2 (e.g., Birdsong, 2009). Given that the processor is interested in speed and efficiency, a second possible explanation is that L1 processing prioritizes form, while L2 processing focuses on meaning, specifically in complex sentence constructions (Clahsen & Felser, 2006). In this view, the L2 shallow processing is "good enough" in the sense that there is no breakdown in communication (Ferreira & Patson, 2007). The role of input conditions, sentence complexity, and processing strategy is further suggested by the fact that the SL learners of both language groups produce target matrix questions with little difficulty.

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