

**THE INTERPRETATION OF PRESENT PROGRESSIVE  
ASPECTUAL FEATURES BY L2 SPANISH LEARNERS AND  
HERITAGE LANGUAGE SPEAKERS**

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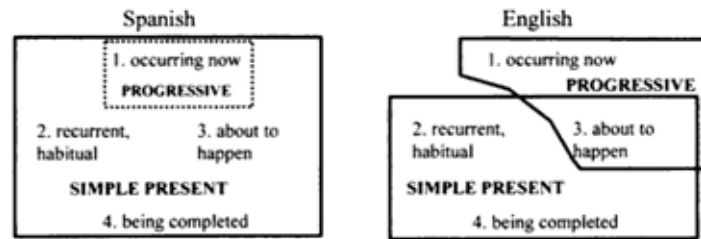
*In the last decade, researchers within Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have adopted Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar (UG) in order to investigate the role linguistic features play in the acquisition of language (Licerias et al., 2008; Montrul: 2009, 2011). This study is centered on 1) the acquisition and nature of the semantic features that configure Spanish and English present progressives and 2) the role transfer plays in the attainment of the aforementioned properties. According to Lardiere (2009) and Travis (2008) the process of language acquisition consists of learning how linguistic features are assembled in a specific language. By adopting this theoretical framework, it can be implied that the role of the second language learner is to discover where the cross-linguistic differences lie (if there are any) and to acquire and reassemble the new configurations. The aim of this study is to shed light on the acquisition of semantic properties by heritage speakers and Spanish second language learners whose L1 presents a different feature configuration than the target language. In addition, it was also studied whether or not the lexical aspect of the verbs affected the way L2 and heritage language learners interpreted the targeted tense. The aforementioned issues were analyzed through a grammaticality judgment test administered to two experimental groups: 14 L2 advanced Spanish students (+120 hours) and 11 advanced heritage speakers, as well as a control group formed by native speakers of peninsular and Latin American Spanish.*

**INTRODUCTION**

The interpretation of the present progressive by English-speaking L2 Spanish learners has been discussed from very different perspectives. On the one hand, it is fairly common to find indications in Spanish language textbooks warning both students and teachers about cross-linguistic differences: "The progressive tenses in English convey in certain contexts events that have not taken place yet, thus anticipating their completion: *We are visiting Aunt Rose tomorrow*. The equivalent in Spanish would be the future form, *not* the present progressive" (Alonso García, 2003, p.13). These contrasts have also been presented through visual and schematic explanations:

By bringing these pre-emptive warnings and descriptions forward, these observations attest that there is a problem lurking around the foreign language classroom that is acquisitional in nature (Cuza-Blanco, 2008, 2010;

<http://slat.arizona.edu/arizona-working-papers-second-language-acquisition-teaching>



**Figure 1: Graphic found in Whitley (2002, p.124) to explain cross-linguistic differences.**

Fafulas, 2010). The field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has been the site of a plethora of investigations regarding the acquisition of tense and aspectual properties (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000; Cuza-Blanco, 2010; Salaberry & Shirai, 2002). The majority of the analyses related to the acquisition of Spanish as a second language have been centered on the distinction between the preterite and the imperfect tenses (Montrul, 2009; Cuza-Blanco, 2010; Liskin Gasparro, 2000). To our knowledge, there are only three studies, those of Espunya (1996), Fafulas (2010) and Cuza-Blanco (2008) that address the acquisition of the present progressive in L2 Spanish. Out of the three studies, only the last two incorporate experimental data collected in the classroom, which is precisely the line of work followed in the present study. By taking into account classroom-based observations and more theoretical and empirical findings in the field of SLA, this project intends to shed some light on the following research questions:

1. Do Spanish heritage speakers and L1 English L2 Spanish learners generalize the feature [ $\pm$ future] present in the English progressive when interpreting the Spanish tense?
2. Does the lexical aspect of the verbs tested influence the way progressive features are interpreted by L2 Spanish learners and heritage speakers? Are these students more likely to license a [+future] reading when describing certain types of events?

This study begins with a general overview of 1) the role linguistic features play on this investigation, including a brief description of L2 and heritage aspectual acquisition; and 2) a description of the present progressive in both English and Spanish.

## **THE L2 ACQUISITION OF TENSE AND ASPECTUAL FEATURES**

### ***Why features?***

According to Lardiere, in order to acquire a language, learners have to “discern the specific configurations of features (in their L1) from the properties and placement of particular lexical items present in the linguistic input” (2009, p.174). This vision of language acquisition places a lot of emphasis on two aspects: the first is the fact that the second language learner already possesses a fully-assembled system of the L1’s functional and lexical categories. This observation is neither vacuous nor gratuitous, as it points out the main difference between L1 and L2 acquisition: the existence of a fully-formed language-specific linguistic system. This project will depart from the assumption that the L1 of the acquirer will have an impact on the reanalysis and the representation of the L2 features. The other idea distilled from Lardiere’s proposal, is the reappearance of linguistic features, which could be defined as “the building blocks of functional categories (that) constitute a universal inventory from which all languages make a selection” (Liceras et al., 2008, p.8). One of the advantages of using features in the description of syntactic and semantic development in SLA is that the task of characterizing the nature of functional categories becomes much more concise. If the latter are defined as categories formed by bundles of different linguistic features, the description of these smaller units automatically entails a better understanding of how the linguistic system is configured. Also, if parametric differences between languages are based on divergent feature mappings, the path of acquisition can be highly predictable in terms of transfer and non-target like utterances. Therefore, if a parameter like “pro-drop” was examined in terms of feature assembly in both Spanish and English, the Romance language would be characterized by the feature [- overt], while English would be described as [+ overt]. This property captures the possibility (or lack thereof) of omitting subjects in a wide variety of situations. By taking this divergent feature mapping into consideration, transfer errors should be expected in Spanish and English native speakers learning L2 English and L2 Spanish respectively. If these learners had not internalized the feature mappings of the target language, they would either omit or overproduce grammatical subjects, depending on the configuration of their L1s.

This study is based on this view of language acquisition for two reasons. First of all, and going back to the observations presented at the beginning of this paper, Spanish L2 learners tend to reconfigure the present progressive features erroneously (Whitley, 2002; Alonso García, 2003) by generalizing the L1’s feature mappings to the target language. As it will be explained in the second section of this study, the scope of this investigation will be limited to the analysis of one of the most problematic features in the present progressive: [ $\pm$  future]. In addition to that, this study is also centered on analyzing the way in which the inherent aspectual features of the verb interact with the ones present in the progressive tense. Therefore, what Lardiere refers to as the “second language task” (2009, p. 175) is eventually based on the reassembly and remapping of the L1’s linguistic features so that they match that of the target language. For practical reasons, the scope of this investigation does not discuss the acquisition of uninterpretable features; for

additional information on the topic, see Tsimpli & Mastropavlou (2008) and Montrul (2011).

### ***L2 learners and aspectual feature acquisition***

As mentioned in the introduction, the majority of studies centered on the acquisition of aspectual features in L2 Spanish have been devoted to the analysis of the preterite and the imperfect (Slabakova & Montrul, 2003; Salaberry & Shirai, 2002; Licerias et al., 2008). In spite of this, many of the comments present in this area of research can be applied to the topic at hand. As Slabakova and Montrul (2003) point out in one of their most recent investigations: “As linguistic theory and language development researchers have observed, languages differ parametrically as to what aspectual meanings they encode in their inflectional morphology” (p. 364-365).

Up to now, the primary issue that has been taken into consideration when acquiring aspectual features in the L2 is that of remapping mismatching features between the L1 and the L2. However, Slabakova and Montrul (2003) tackle a very important problem, which is the need to reconceptualize what the target linguistic construction entails grammatically. The process, thus, is much more complex than initially described. Lardiere’s SLA task includes not only the rearrangement of linguistic features from the L1 to the L2, but also the internalization of a different viewpoint. Seeing that the feature [+future] is a possibility in the array of interpretations allowed in English progressives (1a-b) the second language learner has to be aware of the fact that this option is no longer available in the L2 (2a); and that other features will play a role in the configuration of Spanish progressives, such as [+simultaneous] and [+present] (2b).

1a. My sister *is singing* a song with the choir (present progressive reading).

1b. We *are starting* a new business next month (prospective reading).

2a. \**Estamos empezando* un negocio el mes que viene (prospective reading).

Are<sub>(3ppl)</sub> starting a business next month.

“We are starting a business next month”.

2b. Mi hermana *está cantando* una canción con el coro (present progressive).

My sister is singing a song with the choir.

“My sister is singing a song with the choir”.

The study of the nature of second language learners’ interlanguage (IL henceforth) has obtained conflictive findings when it comes to the acquisition of aspectual features. While some investigations agree that morphology does not seem to be an issue for the L2 learner (Sorace, 2011; Lardiere, 2009), the semantic component, which is closely related to the matter of transfer, is much more obscure. What has been observed, however, is that “several studies of L1 and L2 acquisition indicate that the learners’ interpretation of verbal

morphology appears to be correlated to lexical aspect rather than tense in itself” (Salaberry & Shirai, 2002, p. 4). Therefore, and as Bardovi-Harlig (2000) also points out, it seems to be the case that the inherent aspect of a verb has a significant effect on the selection of specific morphological markers by second language learners.

***Heritage speakers and aspectual feature acquisition***

The acquisition of tense-aspect features in heritage language acquisition raises general questions such as the one posed in the Lalenko (2010) study: “whether (and up to which extent) heritage speakers resemble early L1 and L2 learners in preferring the most prototypical, rather than marginally- or non-prototypical combinations of the tense-aspect markers” (p. 74). It has been extensively reported that the situation of heritage language speakers is comparable to that of L2 learners in the sense that their divergent behavior could be justified by means of transfer (Sánchez-Muñoz, 2004; Cuza-Blanco, 2010) as well as by the influence of lexical aspect (Lalenko, 2010; Salaberry & Shirai, 2002). Another issue that should be taken into account is the fact that there are many studies that have reported tense-aspect features to be extremely difficult to acquire and vulnerable to incomplete acquisition (preterite and imperfect in the case of Cuza-Blanco, 2008; and Montrul, 2009). This tendency was observed in Silva-Corvalán’s 1994 study, which supported the idea that form and meaning connections were easily confused in stative and achievement verbs (2009, p. 245). Even though this project is not centered on production, it is relevant to point out that the lexical aspect of a verb seems to have a tangible impact on the way second language learners and heritage speakers conceptualize linguistic predicates.

What should also be considered when dealing with heritage language acquisition are diatopic differences. This is precisely the case of the progressive construction, where dialectal variations play a very important role, as discussed in sociolinguistic studies such as the ones presented by Sánchez-Muñoz (2004), Cortés-Torres (2005), and Márquez Martínez (2009). These authors point out that the use of present progressive constructions is more widespread among Puerto Rican and Spanish speakers living in the United States than in other dialectal varieties, especially among simultaneous bilinguals. However, this construction is not apparently used in ungrammatical utterances, but rather seen as a preferred option when talking about the present:

3a. *Construyen* casas nuevas en mi calle (simple present)

Build<sub>(3ppl)</sub> houses new in my street.

“They build new houses in my street”.

3b. *Están construyendo* casas nuevas en mi calle (present progressive)

Are<sub>(3ppl)</sub> building houses new in my street.

“They are building new houses in my street”.

Aponte Arlequín and Ortíz López (2010) focused on the uses of the present progressive with a future meaning in all the Caribbean territories. They considered the following pragmatic variables: time span (immediate future, proximate future, distant future and indefinite future) and the feature [ $\pm$  certainty]. The results show a high degree of variability between the periphrastic future and the present progressive. According to the authors, the feature of [ $\pm$  certainty] is the most decisive factor in the acceptance of the progressive construction in future contexts among monolingual Spanish speakers, although this is not a widespread use.

One could attempt to use these sociolinguistic observations to hypothesize about the preliminary results of the heritage speakers experimental group. On that note, it was predicted that it would be likely to find some overextension of the progressive form to non-canonical contexts, but this preference would not be related to the feature [ $\pm$  future] analyzed in this investigation.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE LINGUISTIC STRUCTURE

As its name indicates, one could define the progressive aspect as a tool to describe an action that is in “progress”, that is, an event that is simultaneous to the moment of the utterance. The morphological form to express the progressive aspect in Spanish consists on a periphrasis constituted by the verb *estar*, followed by a gerund form (4). In English, on the other hand, the progressive construction is formed by a conjugated form of the verb *to be* followed by a present participle (5).

4. *Están jugando al ajedrez.*  
 Are<sub>(3ppl)</sub> playing<sub>(prep + Det Msg)</sub> chess  
 “They are playing chess”

5. They are playing chess.

Even though there is no apparent difference in morphology, there is an important divergence in terms of the contexts where these two tenses can be used. In Spanish, not only can the present progressive form be used to express a simultaneous action, but it can also be used to talk about an event in the present. The use of the present progressive form in English is basically dependent on the notion of simultaneity (6); and the simple present is restricted to the expression of habitual actions (7).

6. He *is singing* in the choir right now/ \*every weekend.

7. He *sings* in the choir every weekend.



There are other uses of the progressive aspect in English that would be completely ungrammatical in Spanish: this construction can be used to refer to future events, especially when expressing definite arrangements in the near



future (*are you playing football tomorrow?*); or to tentatively express a present wish or attitude (*I'm hoping to borrow some money*). According to Quirk (1985), “the meaning of the progressive can be separated into three components, not all of which need to be present in a given instance”. These components are the following: 1) the happening has duration; 2) this duration is limited; and 3) the happening is not necessarily complete. Consequently, progressive constructions can be used to describe actions in progress (8a), but also incomplete or unlimited events, either temporary or impermanent (8b). These components also explain why the progressive structure is commonly used to refer to single occurrences, in other words, to non-recurrent events, and why certain verbs are less likely to accept it due to their inherent aspectual nature.

8a. *I am eating* the chocolate cake that my mom baked.

8b. *We're buying* a house next week, that's why we are so nervous.

In both languages, the semantic properties of each verb determine their potential to be combined with specific morphological constructions. This tendency has been analyzed in the Aspect Hypothesis, also known as Primacy of Aspect Hypothesis (PAH) and Lexical Aspect Hypothesis in the literature. For the sake of brevity, only Shirai's implementation of the Primacy of Aspect Hypothesis (PAH) will be reviewed in this proposal. His 2002 study was centered on how the aspectual feature of habituality interacted with the lexical aspect of verbs in the acquisition of L2 Chinese and Japanese (Salaberry & Shirai, 2002). In order to classify the verbs according to their inherent lexical aspect, Shirai used Vendler's (1957) classification. This is the same system that will be used in the present investigation, because it is assumed to be directly related to the acceptance -or lack thereof- of the feature [ $\pm$  future] in the Spanish present progressive.

Type of verbs	Definition	Graphic interpretation	Telicity <sup>1</sup>	Duration <sup>22</sup>	Dynamicity <sup>3</sup>
States <i>Ser (to be)</i>	describe a situation that continues indefinitely in time and space		-	+	-
Activities <i>Jugar (play)</i>	describe actions both durative and dynamic and with no clear end-point		-	+	+

Accomplishments <i>Pintar un cuadro</i> ( <i>paint a picture</i> )	describe actions with the same characteristics as activities but with a clear limit		+, but with a clear ongoing process in between	+	+
Achievements <i>Llegar (arrive)</i>	describe a situation both instantaneous and punctual		+	-	+

**Table 1: Classification adapted from Shirai (2002) and Fafulas (2010)**

Marked features may not be changed by other sentential constituents, whereas unmarked complements may become marked (Broman Olsen, 1994). For instance, achievements will not always refer to punctual actions since this feature may be cancelled by durative temporal adverbials such as “during the same period”, “for a long time” or “when-” clauses (9).

9. Lately, *they are arriving* late to all the meetings.

Stative verbs may also be reinterpreted as temporary and dynamic depending on the context of the utterance, although they usually refer to permanent and alienable properties of their referent, thus, being generally incompatible with the progressive construction (10b). However, some verbs of perception, cognition, affection, existence, or of attributive and circumstantial relation can be used in a progressive construction when they refer to mental and/or temporary situations (11).

10a. My brother *owes* me \$15 dollars.

10b. \*My brother *is owing* me \$15 dollars.

11. I *am being* silly, right now. Don't take me seriously.

Thus, durative and dynamic verbs, which belong to the category of activities, are more likely to be part of a progressive construction. Although accomplishments and achievements are also dynamic, the duration of the event described is limited by a goal or an endpoint that constrains it. Consequently, they are marked with another feature, that of telicity. It is in these types of verbs where the use of the progressive construction is more unstable and may depend on the context. Therefore, due to the aforementioned reasons, neither accomplishments nor achievements were used for this experiment. In the case of states, it was determined that only verbs compatible with progressive readings (see 11) would be used.



The Prototype Aspect Hypothesis claims that tense and aspectual morphology will not appear with all types of predicates at the same time. If learners were only mimicking the input they received from native speakers (NS), there should not be a discrepancy between the uses of the NS and the non-native speakers (NNS) (Shirai, 2002, p. 459), but the reality of the reviewed studies shows otherwise. With this information in mind, this investigation hypothesizes that, in the case that learner's licensed non-target like sentences, there could be two underlying causes behind their behavior. On the one hand, it could be a mere overgeneralization and transfer of the futurity that can also be expressed by the present progressive in English in the case of accomplishments, achievements and activities. On the other hand, L2 learners and heritage speakers could be influenced by the lexical aspect of the verbs, accepting a future interpretation of accomplishments and activities in the present progressive tense because of their durative and dynamic nature. The only type of predicates where no overextension should be expected is states (Salaberry & Shirai, 2002, p.130).

## THE PRESENT STUDY

### *Participants and data collection*

The task designed for this study was administered to three different groups of participants: the experimental group (divided in two) and the control group. The former was integrated by advanced L2 Spanish learners (n=14; Minors and/or Majors in Spanish), whose L1 is English; and by advanced Spanish heritage speakers (n=11). The control group was formed by native speakers of Spanish of both peninsular and Latin American origin (n=14). It was decided that the group of native speakers would be as varied as possible in order to control for sociolinguistic variation in the input received by both L2 learners and heritage speakers. As it was mentioned in the previous sections, there are some Latin American communities that show a particular extension of the present progressive forms to contexts that would not be considered by peninsular Spanish speakers. Given the important presence of Latin American speakers in both academic and non-academic spheres to which the participants could be exposed, it was decided that at least a 60% of the control group would be integrated by speakers of Latin American origin.

The experiment consisted of the completion of an interpretation task and a basic questionnaire. These were given to all the participants in a controlled classroom environment, and they had approximately 15 minutes to complete them. The questionnaire (Appendix 1) was designed to gather basic information about the language background of the participants by means of four questions. The first one inquired about their native language(s), and the following three were related to their knowledge of the target language. Participants were asked to specify how long they had been learning Spanish, and to rate their performance from 1 to 5 (1 corresponding to beginner and 5 to near-native/ native). The last question included a table where participants had to list any other language they had learned and include an estimate grade for

their overall performance (values also ranged from 1 to 5). The goal of this last question was to identify if the participants' performance in the task could have been influenced by their knowledge of another language.

The interpretation task (Appendix 2) consisted of a series of 14 sentences that students had to read and match with the most accurate interpretation. Half of them were target sentences that presented two types of verbs based on their lexical aspect: activities (5 cases) and states (2 cases). Participants were presented with sentences that had verbs in the present progressive form (12), and they had to choose which of the two contexts provided could describe the event in the sentence better. As it can be observed in the following example, only one of the contexts targeted a purely present ongoing action (12a), as the other implied the presence of a [+future] reading – ungrammatical in Spanish (12b).

12. La profesora Méndez *está leyendo* para su clase.

“Miss Méndez is reading for her class”

a. Estoy en clase y la puedo escuchar (“I am in class and I can hear her”)

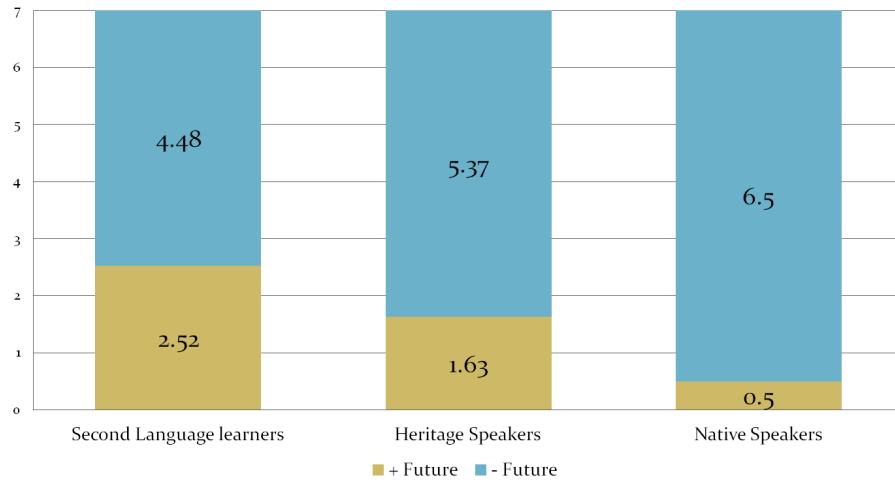
b. La profesora leerá el libro pronto (“She will read the book soon”)

It was decided that the fillers would include sentences with varied grammatical topics that were being covered in the Spanish course taken by all the participants. It was also deemed important that these fillers presented two types of answers: for some of them only one context was appropriate, for the rest, both options could be chosen as valid interpretations for the sentence given. The purpose of this decision was to introduce the possibility of having two valid options when solving the task, so as not to limit the students' answers in the target sentences. It was considered that, if a participant chose both contexts as possible situations, the results would be coded as [+future].

### ***Coding and results***

In order to analyze the participants' results, a coding scheme based on scores was adopted. It was determined that whenever participants chose a [+future] reading in any of the target sentences, they would be awarded with a point (7 being the maximum, as they were only 7 target sentences). As mentioned in the previous section, this also included the cases where students allowed both readings, as it was considered that their response entailed a generalization of the [+future] feature to the Spanish present progressive. The results of this task were calculated by means of a one-way Anova test, where it was determined that the relation between the scores of the control group and those of the L2 learners and heritage speakers were statistically significant<sup>44</sup>.

As it can be observed in Figure 2, there is a considerable number of participants in both experimental groups that allowed for a generalization of the feature [+future] when interpreting the Spanish present progressive. The average score for second language learners, although far lower than expected, showed that at least 2.52 out of 7 responses were interpreted in a non-target

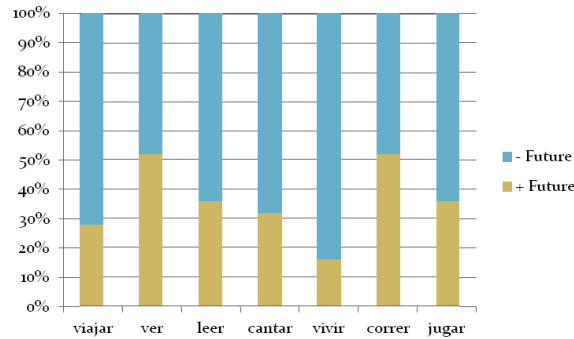


**Figure 2: Average score in relation to the number of [+future] readings accepted**

way, that is, with a [+future] interpretation. As expected, the results of the heritage speakers were more similar to those of the control group, as future readings were only allowed in 1.63 out of 7 possible cases. Once the scores had been calculated, it was decided that a more detailed distribution was needed in order to observe how the target verbs had been interpreted across the groups.

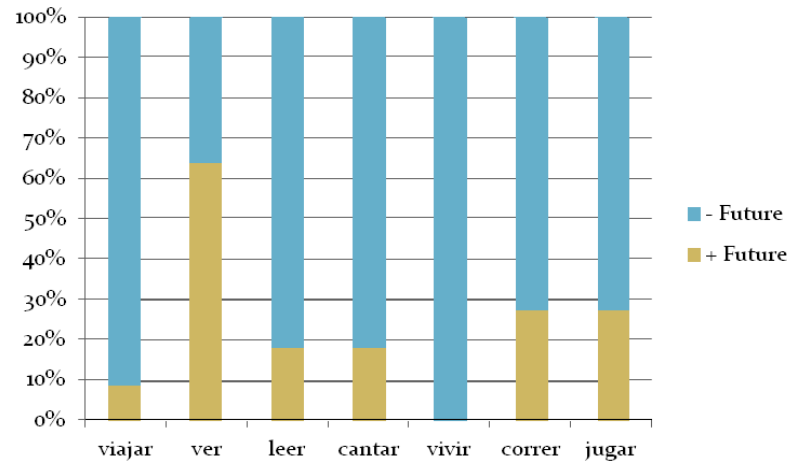
Figure 3 shows how second language learners interpreted each of the target verbs that appeared in the task. As hypothesized, the inherent lexical aspect of activities facilitated a [+future] reading, which would be considered ungrammatical in standard Spanish:

13. \**María está viajando a México la próxima semana.*



**Figure 3: Interpretations of the target verbs by L2 learners.**

The case of stative verbs, as it will be argued in the discussion section, was more problematic. Although “vivir” (to live) behaved as expected, that is, its lack of aspectual duration prevented it from being interpreted as a future event; the verb “ver” (to see) did not. Whereas only a minority of the L2 learners interpreted “vivir” as having a [+future] reading (11% of the responses), more than a 50% of their answers accepted the verb “ver” with a future reading. As it can be seen in the following graphic (figure 4), the same tendency was observed in heritage speakers:

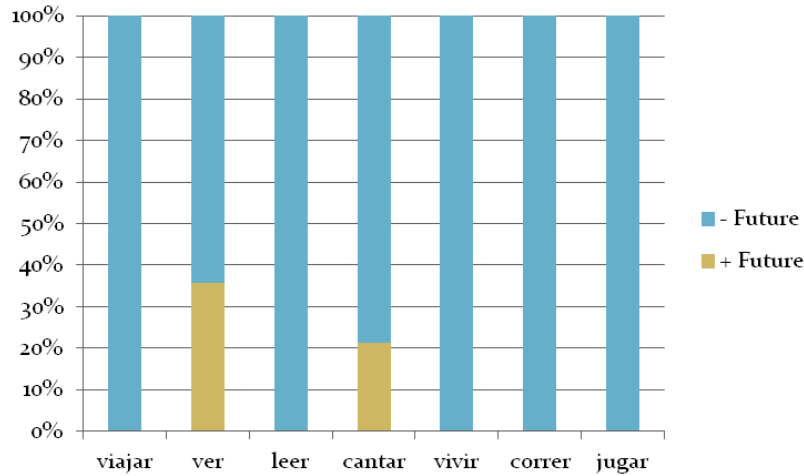


**Figure 4: Interpretation of the target verbs by the group of heritage speakers.**

Although there were no instances of the stative verb “vivir” being interpreted as a [+future] event, the progressive form of the verb “ver” was very often seen as having a prospective reading (60%). On the other hand, the percentage of activity verbs understood as [+future] events, ranged from 10% to 30%. This indicated that, although the number of activity verbs with a prospective reading was much lower in heritage speakers, it was still superior to the results observed in the control group.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

There are two different sets of results that should be taken into account when reconsidering the research questions that were originally proposed. In reference to the research question of whether Spanish heritage speakers and English L2 Spanish learners generalize the feature [ $\pm$ future] present in the English progressive when interpreting the Spanish tense, it seems to be the case that both groups show the same tendency to generalize the feature [+future]. This prospective reading, accepted in the English progressive



**Figure 5: Interpretation of the target verbs by native speakers.**

constructions, is ungrammatical in Spanish, and therefore, it could be labeled as a clear example of negative transfer. In Lardiere’s own words: “One of the greatest sources of difficulty may be transfer of the representations of how the same features are assembled in lexical items in the L1” (2009, p. 187). Therefore, and as it has been observed in this study, it is very likely that English-speaking L2 Spanish learners assumed that the features configuring the Spanish present progressive were assembled identically to those present in their L1, hence committing a transfer-induced error.

As hypothesized, the percentage of instances where second language learners allowed future readings for Spanish present progressive constructions (36%) was considerably higher than the observed in heritage speakers’ responses (23%). Even though the difference between L2 learners and heritage speaker’s scores was not deemed to be statistically significant, individual choices prove to be more descriptive. While 11 out of the total of 14 L2 learners interpreted Spanish progressives as having a [+future] reading at least once in the task (78.5%), only 6 out of 11 heritage speakers behaved as mentioned (54.5%). These percentages show that, even though the number of non-target like responses given by HS and L2 learners is relatively low, remarkable individual differences can be observed between both groups. This could be an indicator of the level of restructuring undergone by both groups: while L2 learners seem more reluctant to reassemble features successfully, heritage speakers appear to have internalized the configuration of the features in the target language better. Although it will not be discussed in this project, it would be very interesting to see how these findings could contribute to the investigation of heritage language acquisition and to the study of multilingual contexts in general.

What seems to be relevant in the interpretations of both groups is the lexical aspect of the target verbs. Unlike the control group, L2 learners and heritage speakers are affected by the durative and progressive nature of activity verbs, which facilitated the selection of a [+future] reading in the interpretation of these events. This divergent behavior could be justified by means of the Aspect Hypothesis. If, as the results seem to indicate, lexical aspect has a notable impact on the way the present progressive is interpreted by L2 Spanish learners and heritage speakers, it would be interesting to use these findings in the foreign language classroom. Lexical aspect-induced errors could be prevented by being more aware of the effect this grammatical component has on the interpretation of specific verb tenses (see Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006 for a proposal on how to teach aspect to Spanish L2 learners using Concept-Based Instruction).

The only jarring elements in the equation are stative verbs. The results obtained (including those of the control group) seem to be contradictory. Whereas the verb “to see” (*ver*) was largely interpreted as an event with a [+future] reading, the verb “to live” (*vivir*) was not. According to the literature, the non-dynamic nature of these types of verbs should facilitate the blocking of a [+future] interpretation, although the collected data seemed to contradict this hypothesis. After a thorough analysis of the sentences provided in the task, it was determined that the unexpected reading of the stative verb “to see” (*ver*) could have been the result of presenting the participants with an ambiguous construction. The sentence given was the following:

14. *Estoy viendo* al doctor  
 Am<sub>[1psg]</sub> seeing the doctor  
 “I am seeing the doctor”

Given the polysemic nature of the verb “*ver*”, participants could have interpreted “seeing” as “catching a glimpse of someone” or as “having an appointment”. This would have affected the way in which L2 Spanish learners and heritage speakers accepted an elongation of the event, thus facilitating a [+future] reading. This analysis would also explain why even native speakers exhibited a non-target like behavior when interpreting this verb, and it would also confirm the hypothesis that the lexical aspect of a verb does have an influence on the way progressive features are interpreted.

## FUTURE STUDIES

Although this project has shown that both Spanish L2 learners and heritage speakers transfer features from their L1/dominant language to the target language, the high proficiency of the participants lessened the impact of unsuccessful feature reassembly. It would be interesting to open this study to students with lower proficiency levels in order to observe when the reassembling and reanalysis of the linguistic features start. This cross-sectional

study would also entail the involvement of a larger number of participants and the inclusion of a wider variety of linguistic structures in the experimental task. Also, in order to analyze whether or not the lexical aspect of the verbs influenced the way features were reassembled, the experiment should include other type of events such as accomplishments and achievements so that the Aspect Hypothesis could be confirmed or discarded.

On another note, if expanded, the data obtained in this project could shed light on the issue of bidirectional transfer. If all the groups were simultaneously tested in their L1 and their L2, we would be able to see whether or not there was any evidence of bidirectional transfer while reanalyzing and interpreting certain linguistic features.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my adviser Luiz Amaral and my colleague Covadonga Sanchez without whom this project would have never become a reality. I would also like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers that pointed me to the right direction and to Sara Bachleinter and Elaine Teng for their help.

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**APPENDIX 1**

***Language Background Questionnaire***

1.- What is your native language? (If you think you may have more than one, please also include them in the space provided below).

2.- How long have you been studying Spanish?

3.- If you had to rate your knowledge of Spanish, what number would you give to your overall performance? (1 beginner to 5 native / near-native)

1            2            3            4            5

4.- Please, indicate any other languages you know (besides the ones listed in **Question 1**) and rate your overall performance from 1 (beginner) to 5 (native / near-native).

<b>Language</b>	1	2	3	4	5

## APPENDIX 2

***¿En qué contextos podrías utilizar las siguientes frases? Marca las opciones posibles. Piensa que las dos pueden ser correctas.***

1.- Mi hermana jugaba a la Wii en la tele mientras mi madre la miraba A) Mi madre miraba a mi hermana b) Mi madre estaba mirando la tele
2.- María está viajando a México A) María está de camino a México b) María tiene planeado ir a México
3.- Es importante que los alumnos estudien para el examen. A) Normalmente, los alumnos no estudian. Yo creo que es importante que lo hagan. b) Normalmente, los alumnos estudian. Creo que es importante el hecho de que lo hacen.
4.- Me estaba duchando cuando Julia llamó. a) Julia llamó pero no pude contestar b) Cuando salí de la ducha vi su llamada.
5.- Estoy viendo al doctor A) Lo veo tomar un café. B) Mañana tengo una cita con él.
6.- La profesora Méndez está leyendo para su clase. a) Estoy en clase y la puedo escuchar. b) La profesora leerá el libro pronto.
7.- A María le dio Juan los caramelos de menta. a) María dio a Juan los caramelos. B) Los caramelos eran de Juan.
8.- Este niño era muy triste. a) Ayer su madre le prohibió mirar la televisión y por eso se sentía mal. b) Siempre estaba llorando.
9.- Mi hermana pequeña está cantando en el coro. a) Mi madre y yo estamos en el concierto. B) Actuará el domingo delante de mucha gente.
10.- Busco a una secretaria que habla japonés. a) Conozco a una secretaria que habla ese idioma. B) Necesito una secretaria.
11.- Estamos viviendo en Madrid. Era una de nuestras ilusiones desde pequeños. a) El semestre que viene estaremos en esta ciudad. b) Nos mudamos hace tres días, ya estamos allí.
12.- ¡No puedo creerlo! Juan está corriendo la maratón. A) Juan corre la maratón ahora mismo b) Juan va a participar en la maratón.
13.- La puerta se cerró cuando Pedrito entraba. a) Pedrito estaba en proceso de entrar cuando la puerta se cerró.

B) Pedrito tuvo que abrir la puerta para poder entrar.
14.- Los futbolistas de los Patriots están jugando un partido muy importante. a) Los jugadores están en este momento en el estadio. b) Juegan las semifinales el próximo lunes.

### NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Telicity refers to actions that have a natural or intrinsic time of development.  
<sup>2</sup> Duration applies to those actions that need a period a time to be developed.  
<sup>3</sup> Dynamicity is related to the fact that an action can be in progress at the time of the utterance.  
<sup>4</sup> The value of p in the one-way Anova test was 0.001.