Catalan Locative and Existential Constructions in Catalan-Spanish Bilingualism

Recent studies on second language acquisition in early childhood have tried to disentangle the role of input and age of onset of exposure in simultaneous and successive bilingualism (Genesee et al., 2004; Meisel, 2009, 2011; Unsworth, 2013; Tsimpli, 2014). The present study investigates the adult grammar of early Catalan-Spanish bilinguals (simultaneous and successive) in comparison with monolingual-like Catalan speakers, and contributes to the debate on the factors that impinge on the outcomes of early bilingualism later in life.

The linguistic phenomenon under investigation is locative and existential constructions in Catalan, a phenomenon largely under-researched in L2 acquisition. Although Catalan and Spanish share some characteristics in the expression of location, they also differ in many respects. We will focus on three (micro)parametric differences: 1- The distinctive use of the copulas *ser* and *estar*; 2- The obligatoriness of the locative clitic *hi* (inexistent in Spanish) in Catalan existential constructions *haver-hi* and *ser-hi*, and when pronominalizing locative arguments; 3- The use of the partitive clitic *en* (inexistent in Spanish) when pronominalizing the theme. Our main research question is whether these highly fluent bilinguals will use these constructions in a native-like fashion, or whether we will find selective differences.

Assuming Freeze's (1992) universal locative paradigm, adapted for Catalan by Rigau (1994, 1997), Catalan has two locative or existential verbs: *ser* 'to be', and *haver-hi* 'to have, there is/are', which form equivalent constructions with different syntax. The use of *estar* in locative constructions, unlike in Spanish, is not standard. This paradigm is sketched in (1-2). A further difference between the two Romance languages is the presence of the adverbial clitic pronouns. Catalan requires the locative *hi* not only in *haver-hi* constructions, as in (2), but also in *ser-hi* constructions in 2nd mention predicates, as in (3); notice that in this type of 2nd mention construction, *estar* is ungrammatical. Furthermore, when the theme is referred back to, it needs to be cliticized by the partitive *en* in bare (4) and quantified nominals (5).

Adult bilinguals (*N*=59) with different degrees of bilingualism completed an exhaustive Bilingualism Background Questionnaire (BBQ) and an elicited Oral Production Task (OPT). The BBQ classified the participants in three types of bilinguals, according to their onset of bilingualism, language dominance and use: 1-Catalan-dominant bilinguals (*n*=21); 2-Balanced (simultaneous) bilinguals (*n*=16); and 3-Spanish-dominant (successive) bilinguals (*n*=22). The OPT consisted of a 'Spot the Difference Task', with 5 pairs of very similar pictures that participants had to compare to localize the differences. This task produced a total of 1,589 locative predicates.

The results from the OPT showed that none of the groups employed *ser* as a locative verb in 1st mention predicates (1a), as the standard grammar would recommend, but all groups employed to some degree *estar*, particularly the Spanish-dominant group, indicating a steady extension of this verb in Catalan (Sanz & González, 1995; Solà, 1994). Thus, the use of *estar* was not considered an error, except for when used in 2nd mention clauses such as (3-5), mostly found in Spanish-dominant speakers. We propose that there are two different types of syntax-semantics changes with *estar*: the [+locative] one found in 1st mention clauses, internally motivated (Silva-Corvalán, 1994), and the one [-locative] found in 2nd mention clauses, which may be caused by language contact.

With respect to the use of clitic pronouns, the Spanish-dominant group either omitted or oddly doubled *en* in 64% of the contexts, and *hi* 30% of the time; in the bilingual group, there was a 39% of errors in the use of the partitive, and 26% of errors with locative clitic (vs. 1.3% or errors in the Catalan-dominant group).

Overall, these results point towards an asymmetry in the development of early bilingual grammars, showing convergence with the target grammar in the lexical selection, but with long-lasting problems in the use of functional categories not instantiated in the other language, such as the adverbial clitics. Finally, these results indicate that non-target acquisition can occur in highly proficient early bilinguals, and that onset of acquisition cannot be the only factor that has an effect on early acquisition, as Meisel (2009) proposed. On the other hand, we defend that quantity and quality of input play a crucial role in the acquisition process (Unsworth et al (2014).

Examples

Locative (1)

	THEME	COPULA	LOCATIVE	
a.	El cotxe	**és** /??**està**	allà.	*Standard Catalan*
b.	El coche	***es**/ **está**	ahí.	*Spanish*
c.	The car	**is**	there.	*English*

Existential (2)

	CL COPULA	THEME	LOCATIVE
a.	*(**Hi) ha**	un cotxe	allà.
b.	[e] **Hay**	un coche	ahí.
c.	**There is**	a car	there.

(3) a. Abans hi havia un cotxe al carrer, però ara no ***(hi) {és/*ha /*està}**.
b. Antes había un coche en la calle, pero ahora ya no está.
c. Before there was a car in the street, but now it is not there.

(4) a. Abans hi havia aigua però ara no **n'hi** {**ha** / ***és** / ***està**}.
b. Antes había agua pero ahora ya no hay.
c. There was water before but now there is not.

(5) a. Abans hi havia tres ocells, però ara ***(n)'hi** {**ha** / ***és** / ***està**} quatre.
b. Antes había tres pájaros, pero ahora hay cuatro.
c. Before there were three birds, but now there are four.

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