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The Use of Present Perfect in the Expression of Past Temporality in L2 Spanish and Catalan by Children of Moroccan Origin

Eulàlia Canals

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THE USE OF PRESENT PERFECT IN THE EXPRESSION OF PAST TEMPORALITY IN L₂ SPANISH AND CATALAN BY CHILDREN OF MOROCCAN ORIGIN

EULÀLIA CANALS

ABSTRACT

This study examines the acquisition of Catalan and Spanish past-tense verbs (Preterite, Present Perfect, and Imperfect) by children of Moroccan origin in three schools in the Barcelona metropolitan area. It presents data that allow us to study which of the three tenses poses the most problems for the second language (L₂) speakers as compared to the native speakers in a control group. The data were obtained using elicited story-retell tasks and oral narratives. The results show that in both languages acquiring the accurate functional use of verbs is more difficult than making the right lexical or morphological choices. The greatest functional difficulty lies in the acquisition of the Preterite vis-à-vis the Present Perfect. These results provide additional evidence that form precedes function. However, they challenge an established position on the acquisition of tense and aspect in Romance languages, which holds that the most difficult functional feature to acquire for L₂ learners of these languages is the difference between perfective and imperfective tenses.

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the acquisition of tense and aspect relations in Spanish and Catalan. Specifically, it focuses on the acquisition of three tenses: the Imperfect (e.g., "vivía"), the Preterite (e.g., "vaig viure"), and the Present Perfect (e.g., "he viscut"). Earlier research on the acquisition of tense and aspect, and especially studies that involve the acquisition of Romance languages, has generally focused either on the emergence of the Preterite versus Imperfect morphology (Andersen, "Desarrollo"; Bardovi-Harlig, "Narrative"; Comajoan, "Acquisition"; Salaberry) or on the acquisition of the functional differences between the imperfective and the perfective tenses (Montrul and Slabakova). This paper addresses the acquisition of the use of three tenses (Imperfect, Preterite or Present Perfect) in the L₂ Catalan and Spanish interlanguages of children of Moroccan origin in three schools located in the Barcelona metropolitan area. The main goal of the present research is to find out which of the three tenses (Imperfect, Preterite or Present Perfect) poses the most problems for the L₂ speakers, and

which dimension of the verb is most difficult to acquire: the lexical meaning of the verb, the verb's morphology, or the verb's function.

TENSE AND ASPECT IN SPANISH AND CATALAN

There are two ways to relate a situation to the timeline. In the first one, the location of the situation can be associated with a specific point or segment, and in the second, the internal temporal contour of the situation is represented as a point or a stretch on the timeline (Comrie, *Tense*). Comrie stated that aspect is concerned with situation-internal time (the second way), whereas tense is relative to situation-external time (the first way), and it is considered "a grammaticalized expression of location in time" (*Tense* 9). On the other hand, tense relates entities to a reference point, and thus it can be also considered a deictic category (whereas aspect cannot).

The three types of aspect addressed in the present investigation are imperfective, perfective, and perfect. Imperfective aspect presents the background of some event with no reference to the beginning or the end of that situation, and making explicit reference to the internal temporal structure of the situation from within (Comrie, *Aspect*). In contrast, perfective aspect presents the totality of the situation seen as a whole, with a beginning and an endpoint (bounded).

The term *perfect* is used to refer to a past situation that is connected to a present state or to a state with current relevance (e.g., 'I have been to New York twice'). There is a debate in the literature on whether perfect should be considered an aspect or a tense. Both Comrie (*Aspect*) and Dahl point out the problematic nature of viewing the perfect as an aspect (although the linguistic tradition has always placed it as such), because the so-called perfect aspect says nothing about the internal constituency of a situation but rather it informs us on the temporal one. Thus, the term *perfect* will be used henceforth to refer to the feature that characterizes the Present Perfect tense (past situation or state with current relevance), whereas the term *perfective* will be used to describe the Preterite tense (past situation that is temporally bounded).

Schwenter described five different types of perfect meanings. The perfect of *result* designates a present state that was brought about by an action in the past (e.g., 'John has left'). The *experiential* perfect implies that a situation has happened at least once during some time in the past leading up to the present, with some knowledge attributable to the agent (e.g., 'Maria has been to New York'). The perfect of *persistent situation* or *continuative* perfect indicates that a situation began in the past but continued up until the present time (e.g., 'I have

been waiting for him for a long time'). In the perfect of *recent past*, the present relevance of the situation of the past is due to temporal proximity (e.g., 'He has recently met his daughter'). In this type of perfect, the degree of closeness to or distance from the present moment that is allowed is quite arbitrary, and it takes different forms in different languages. Finally, the perfect of *current relevance* shows a past situation that is relevant to current concerns (e.g., 'I have met him before; so I can introduce him to you'). Both Catalan (Alturo "Registres", "Papel") and Spanish have all the types of perfect proposed by Schwenter except for the perfect of persistent situation.

As is the case in other Romance languages, tense and aspect in Catalan and Spanish are expressed through verbal morphology, and the contrast between the Preterite and Imperfect holds only in the past tense. The same is true of the Present Perfect-Imperfect contrast. In addition, the difference between the Preterite-Present Perfect and the Imperfect is an aspectual rather than a temporal one. Regardless of whether the tense expresses a temporally bound past tense or a past tense with current relevance, in both cases the Imperfect can be used in the same contexts in order to provide some background information on the situation expressed by the other two tenses:

- | | | | |
|-----|----|--|-----------|
| (1) | a. | En Joan ha marxat perquè estava cansat. | (Catalan) |
| | b. | Juan se ha ido porque estaba cansado.
'John has left because he was tired.' | (Spanish) |
| (2) | a. | En Joan va marxar perquè estava cansat. | (Catalan) |
| | b. | Juan se fue porque estaba cansado.
'John left because he was tired.' | (Spanish) |

Both the Preterite and the Present Perfect in Spanish and Catalan express a bound past situation (Pérez Saldanya), although the Present Perfect has only a hodiernal scope. Rojo and Veiga point out that the reference point for the Preterite is anterior in relation to the moment of speech, whereas for the Present Perfect the moment of speech and the reference point coincide. Moreover, the anterior meaning is connected with the current present or the moment of speaking (Cartagena). Therefore, it is common to find temporal adverbs that indicate simultaneity in the context of a Present Perfect. In fact, the Present Perfect in most Spanish dialects and in Catalan is commonly used with temporal adverbs such as *today, this morning/year*, and so on. However, the Preterite is usually accompanied by adverbs such as *yesterday, last night/month*, and so on.

In most peninsular Spanish dialects and in Catalan, the Preterite has a bound past tense non-hodiernal meaning, and thus, clauses that combine adverbs that are usually expressed with the Preterite in a

Present Perfect clause (3a) would be rendered as ungrammatical by most Spanish-speakers across dialects.¹ The same would hold for Catalan (3b).

- | | | | |
|-----|----|---|-----------|
| (3) | a. | *Ayer he comprado un libro.
'Yesterday I have bought a book.' | (Spanish) |
| | b. | *Ahir he comprat un llibre.
'Yesterday I have bought a book.' | (Catalan) |
| (4) | a. | ?Esta mañana compré un libro.
'This morning I bought a book.' | (Spanish) |
| | b. | *Aquest matí vaig comprar un llibre.
'This morning I bought a book.' | (Catalan) |

The use of Present Perfect adverbs in Preterite clauses, although not common in Castilian Spanish, would not be considered ungrammatical, but odd, hence the question mark on (4a). In Catalan, however, the combination of Present Perfect adverbs and Preterite clauses is regarded as ungrammatical (4b). This difference between Catalan and Spanish is probably due to the fact that the sentence in example (4a) is perfectly grammatical and common in the vast majority of Spanish dialects (in Latin America, Galicia, most parts of Andalusia, and the Canary Islands), where the Present Perfect has a much more restricted use (Cartagena).²

Besides providing some background information on the situation expressed by the other two tenses, the Imperfect, as an unbound past tense, has three other meanings in Spanish and Catalan: it can convey progressive aspect (5a), habitual aspect (5b), and continuous aspect (5c) (Pérez Saldaña; Rojo and Veiga).

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|--|-----------|
| (5) | a. | Vaig veure en Joan quan <i>anava</i> cap a la feina. | (Catalan) |
| | a'. | Vi a Juan cuando <i>iba</i> al trabajo.
'I saw John on my way to work.' | (Spanish) |
| | b. | Quan era petita <i>dinava</i> sempre a l'escola. | (Catalan) |
| | b'. | De pequeña <i>comía</i> siempre en la escuela.
'When I was a child I always used to eat lunch at school.' | (Spanish) |

¹ It should be noted that in some parts of central Spain sentences such as (3a) would be considered grammatical, although this is not a widespread phenomenon (Serrano).

² The Present Perfect's meaning in most Latin American varieties (except in Santiago del Estero, Argentina, according to Kempas) and some Peninsular ones corresponds to the traditional pre-hodiernal (before *today*) meaning, and it includes mostly the experiential perfect type, whereas all other types of perfect are expressed using other tenses preferably.

- c. Aquell dia *feia* molta calor. (Catalan)
 c'. Ese día *hacía* mucho calor. (Spanish)
 'That day it was very hot.'

Previous research on the L2 acquisition of tense and aspect in Spanish and Catalan has focused either on the emergence of tense marking (Dietrich et al.; Von Stutterheim) or on the predominance of aspect marking in the first stages of acquisition (Andersen, "Desarrollo," "Developmental"; Camps, "Aspectual," "Emergence"; Comajoan, "Acquisition"; Salaberry). Research that focused on the emergence of tenses argued that past tense morphology first emerges in order to mark past tense, and that temporality can be conveyed using a variety of lexical means in addition to verbal morphology. Research that examined the predominance of aspect marking studied the so-called aspect hypothesis, which in its simplified version states that perfective morphology will first emerge in telic predicates (those with a verbal predicate with an endpoint) whereas imperfect morphology will first appear in atelic predicates (those without an endpoint). Research on the aspect hypothesis can account for the emergence of past-tense morphology, but not for the accuracy of use of that form in the correct context. As Comajoan ("Aspect") claimed, the question of how to incorporate appropriate use into the aspect hypothesis had not been fully developed, and thus, he incorporated appropriateness of use in his research and concluded that the rates of appropriate use also followed an aspectual pattern, which indicates that the aspect hypothesis can also account for appropriateness of use.

TENSE AND ASPECT IN MOROCCAN ARABIC AND TAMAZIGHT (TARIFIT AND TACHELHIT VARIETIES)

There are two complementary explanations of how past tense is realized in Arabic and other related Afro-Asiatic languages, Tamazight among them. According to the traditional view (Lamuela; Sánchez; Shlonsky), the main difference between Catalan and Spanish, on the one hand, and Arabic and Tamazight, on the other, as far as tense and aspect are concerned, is that in the two Hamito-Semitic languages the information conveyed by the verb morphology is mainly aspectual, and informs mostly on the notions of perfectivity and imperfectivity. Temporal information (past, future, pluperfect, etc.), mood (subjunctive vs. indicative) and modality (possibility, conditionality, etc.) are secondary, and they are expressed through verb morphology in combination with other contextual temporal information in the

Perfect is a crucial point in order to understand the problems that Arabic-speakers can face learning languages which have both forms. Comrie (*Aspect*) contradicted this fact and claimed that Arabic has specific Perfect forms formed with the particle *qad* and the perfective form of the verb. However, he did not give any examples on how this tense worked, or which of the traditional perfect meanings the Arabic Present Perfect conveyed.

(8) Arabic

- a. Qaraaʔ arrajulu thelika al kitab hadithan.
 read-3masc.sg.[+perf] the man that the book recently
 'The man has recently read that book.'
- b. Thahabe arrjulu ila al wileyet almuttahida marratein.
 went-3masc.sg.[+perf] the man to the US twice
 'The man has been to the US twice.'

The sentences in (8) could be translated as 'The man recently read the book' and 'The man went twice to the US' because in both sentences the verb has the same [+perfective] form found in the examples in (7). Thus, the translation using the Present Perfect seems to be preferred in order to accommodate the Arabic examples into the English language.

An alternative explanation argues that inflected verbs in Arabic alternate the expression of tense and aspect (Fassi Fehri). In this view, Arabic (as well as Tamazight) has a binary inflectional system based on the opposition between two forms. For example, the form of the verb *katab* 'to read' expresses anteriority and perfectivity (9a, 10a) depending on the context of the sentence (expressing the Romance equivalents to Past Perfect or just Past tense), and the form of the verb *y-aktub* denotes [-perfective] meaning (9b, 10b, and 10c), or the equivalent to Present, Imperfect or Future tenses in Romance. Thus, Arabic verbal inflection encodes a [\pm anterior] dichotomy, which is temporal in nature, in addition to a [\pm perfective] distinction, which is aspectual (examples from Sánchez):

(9) Arabic

- a. Kataba risaalat-an
 write-3sg.[+perf] letter-accusative
 'He wrote a letter.'
- b. Yaktubu risaalat-an
 write-3sg.[-perf] letter-accusative
 'He is/was writing a letter' or 'He writes a letter.'

rest of Spain. The great majority of these children's socialization outside school happened in Spanish, and they only encountered Catalan when they first began to attend preschool (as early as age 3) or when they started the first year of compulsory education (at age 6).

Three different tasks were used to elicit narratives that would prompt the use of the three different verbal forms under investigation. In all tasks, the researcher interacted on a one-to-one basis with the child. The first task was an oral narrative that was obtained by asking the informants questions on their daily school life, with a different set of questions used to elicit the Catalan and the Spanish past tense narratives (see Appendix). This task applied the standard procedures that are followed in a sociolinguistic interview and encouraged the informants to expand their answers at will.

The second was a comic-strip story-telling task in which the informants were asked to look carefully at a comic strip of a famous TV character, and were then asked to tell what the story depicted in the comic strip without directly quoting what the characters were saying. There were two different comic strips for each language, one aimed at eliciting Present Perfect narratives, the other one at eliciting Preterite narratives.

The third task was a free story retelling task in which the informants were asked to tell a very detailed story that could be either from a book they had read or someone had read to them, a story they had written themselves or a film they had watched. The purpose of this task was to elicit past tense forms in a narrative that was not located in the immediate past. Unlike in the comic strip retelling task, the participants could not be looking at the story while telling it, and the fact that they had read/heard the story or watched the movie some time before the conversation made it easier for them to locate the story in the past and thus maintain their narratives in the past tense framework and avoid the use of the present tense.

After the narratives were transcribed, the target verbs in the study were tagged and coded for each one of the following variables.³ Three dependent variables were examined separately. These variables revealed different aspects of the accuracy of the verb produced: functional accuracy, morphological accuracy, and lexical accuracy. A verb was coded as functionally accurate if it was used in the context

³ This study is part of a larger study by Canals. The data and analyses displayed here are only a part of the whole study (see Canals, for data regarding other sociolinguistic variables, such as age, age of arrival, etc.). Verbs in the present or historical present were not included in the data analysis. Verbs that were the direct response to a question from the interviewer were also left out of the analysis. For instance, if the interviewer asked "Qué hiciste ayer?" and the child answered "Ayer no hice nada", the form *hice* was not included in the analysis.

where it was expected (e.g., a Preterite produced in a context requiring Preterite), and it was coded as functionally inaccurate if it was used in a context where it was not expected (e.g., Present Perfect in the context of Preterite). A verb was coded as morphologically accurate if the morphology of the verb was used target-like. Finally, a verb was coded as lexically accurate if it conveyed the meaning that the speaker intended in a particular context (Table 1). A fourth dependent variable measured overall accuracy based on the information conveyed by the three accuracy variables: a verb had to be accurate in all of the three categories in order to be counted as overall accurate.

TABLE 1
SAMPLE CODING FOR THE FOUR DEPENDENT VARIABLES (ACCURACY
OF FUNCTION, MORPHOLOGY, LEXICAL, AND OVERALL ACCURACY)

Sample verb	Accuracy			Overall Accuracy
	Functional	Morphological	Lexical	
I: ¿Y después?				
<i>He visto el Doraimon y...</i> "I watched Doraimon and..."	1	1	1	1
<i>Era domingo... Ayer hemos ido al cine y eso...</i>				
Expected: <i>Ayer fuimos</i> "Yesterday we have gone to the movies and stuff"	0	1	1	0
<i>He escrito, y después</i>				
Expected: <i>He escrito</i> "I wrote, and then..."	1	0	1	0
<i>He quitado el pijama</i>				
Expected: <i>He quitado</i> "I took off my pyjamas"	1	1	0	0

Notes. The three accuracy variables are binary: 1 = correct, 0 = incorrect. The English translation does not necessarily reflect the inaccuracy of the examples. I = Interviewer.

The coding was done by the author of the study, and it was checked by another native Spanish-speaker trained in linguistics. The cases in

which discrepancies between the coders existed were discussed and were left out of the analysis if the two coders did not reach an agreement.

A total of 16 hours of video-recorded data were collected, which yielded 6,313 verbs. The target group produced 2,606 Spanish verbs and 2,468 Catalan verbs. The informants in the control group produced a total number of 610 verbs in Spanish and 629 verbs in Catalan.

RESULTS

Functional, morphological, and lexical accuracy

Accuracy proportions for all participants for each of the dependent variables were calculated: functional accuracy of Imperfect, functional accuracy of Preterite, functional accuracy of Present Perfect, overall functional accuracy, morphological accuracy, and accuracy of lexical selection. In the following sections, each dependent variable is examined separately for Catalan and Spanish.

Figures 1 and 2 provide an overview of the amounts of accurate responses that the control (10 informants) and target (32 informants) groups produced. The figures display accuracy levels for each of the three verb tenses in the study (Imperfect, Preterite, and Present Perfect), as well as accuracy levels according to the function, the lexical selection, and the morphology of the verb. Overall, the control group (Figure 1) was always more accurate than the target group (Figure 2).

FIGURE 1

MEAN PROPORTION OF ACCURATE RESPONSES AS MEASURED BY ACCURACY OF LEXICAL SELECTION, MORPHOLOGY, AND FUNCTION IN CATALAN AND SPANISH FOR THE THREE VERB TENSES (IMPERFECT, PRETERITE, PRESENT PERFECT) FOR PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONTROL GROUP

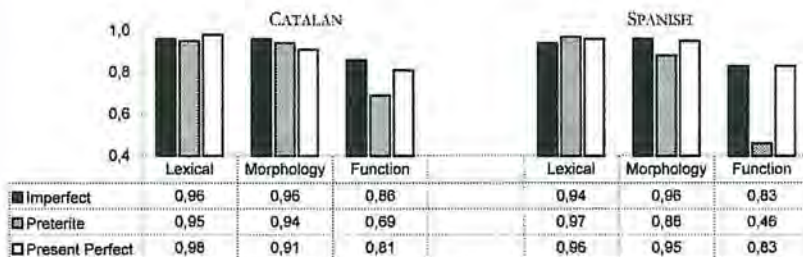
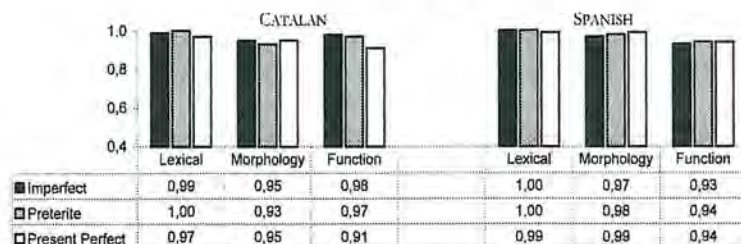
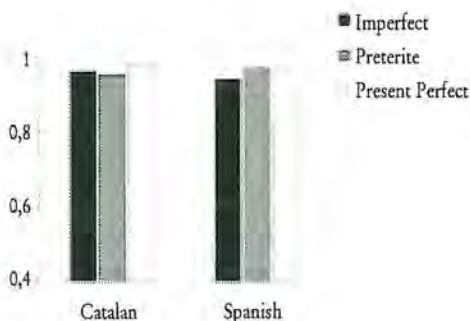


FIGURE 2
 MEAN PROPORTION OF ACCURATE RESPONSES AS MEASURED BY ACCURACY OF LEXICAL SELECTION, MORPHOLOGY, AND FUNCTION IN CATALAN AND SPANISH FOR THE THREE VERB TENSES (IMPERFECT, PRETERITE, PRESENT PERFECT) FOR PARTICIPANTS IN THE TARGET GROUP



The informants in the target group performed equally well in Catalan and in Spanish with respect to accuracy of lexical selection, that is, there was not a significant difference between the languages (see the percentages in Figure 2). The target group informants also performed equally well across the three verb tenses. The type of task did not play an important role in the level of accuracy of the use of each of the three tenses (for further details, see Canals).

FIGURE 3
 MEAN PROPORTION OF ACCURATE RESPONSES AS MEASURED BY ACCURACY OF LEXICAL SELECTION OF THE VERB IN CATALAN AND SPANISH FOR THE THREE VERB TENSES (IMPERFECT, PRETERITE, PRESENT PERFECT) FOR PARTICIPANTS IN THE TARGET GROUP

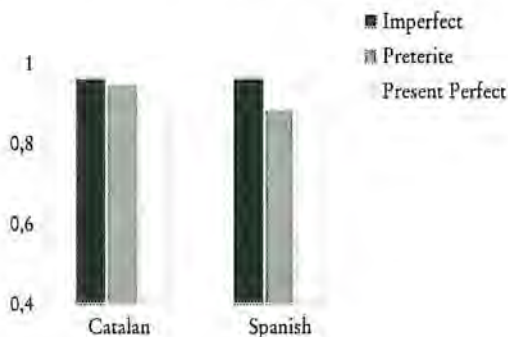


These results indicate that the target group did equally well in choosing the lexical meaning of the verb across the three verb tenses, and in both languages. In other words, the different mean accuracy rates of .95 for the Imperfect, .96 for the Preterite, and .98 for the Present Perfect did not yield a main effect of the different tenses according to the ANOVAs performed ($F(2, 62) = 1.09, p > .3$). An interaction between language and verb tenses was also absent ($F(2, 62) = 1.41, p > .3$).

Figure 4 displays data provided by the target group when the evaluating measure was accuracy of verb morphology. Again, the mean proportion of accurate responses in Catalan (.94) was not significantly different from those in Spanish (.93). However, in this data set, the informants in the target group performed better with some verb tenses than with others (the ANOVAs show a verb tense main effect $F(2, 62) = 3.49, p < .04$, an effect that is modulated by language (language and verb tense interaction $F(2, 62) = 3.79, p < .03$). In Catalan, the informants' performance in the use of Present Perfect morphology was less accurate than in the other two tenses, whereas in Spanish it was the morphology of the Preterite that posed more problems.

FIGURE 4

MEAN PROPORTION OF ACCURATE RESPONSES AS MEASURED BY ACCURACY OF VERB MORPHOLOGY IN CATALAN AND SPANISH FOR THE THREE VERB TENSES (IMPERFECT, PRETERITE, PRESENT PERFECT) FOR PARTICIPANTS IN THE TARGET GROUP



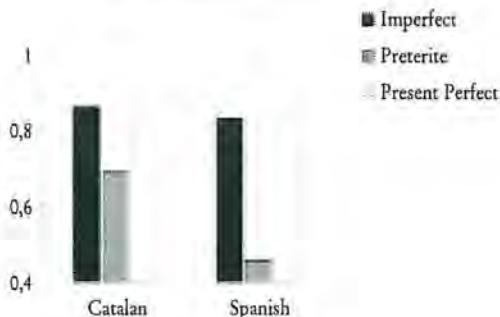
In Catalan, the target-group children performed much better in the Imperfect (.96) than in the Present Perfect (.91) ($F(1, 31) = 7.03, p < .02$). Accuracy of verbs in the Preterite, however, was not statistically

different from accuracy in the Imperfect (.96) or from accuracy in the Present Perfect (.91, $F(1, 31) = 2.70, p < .10$).

In Spanish, the informants performed equally well in the Imperfect (.96) and in the Present Perfect (.95), but they performed significantly worse in the Preterite (.88) than in both the Present Perfect ($F(1, 31) = 3.33, p < .08$) and the Imperfect ($F(1, 31) = 4.62, p < .04$).

Figure 5 shows that the target-group informants had greater difficulty in selecting the right tense than in selecting the right lexical item and the right morphology. The statistical analyses showed that functional accuracy in the Preterite was much lower (in both languages) than in the other two tenses; and, overall, the participants had greater difficulty using the Spanish verb tenses in the study, but especially the Spanish Preterite.

FIGURE 5
MEAN PROPORTION OF ACCURATE RESPONSES AS MEASURED BY ACCURACY OF VERB FUNCTION IN CATALAN AND SPANISH FOR THE THREE VERB TENSES (IMPERFECT, PRETERITE, PRESENT PERFECT) FOR PARTICIPANTS IN THE TARGET GROUP



ANOVA results (verb tense and language as factors) showed that there was a significant main effect for verb tense ($F(2, 62) = 15.69, p < .001$), as well as significant main effects of language ($F(1, 31) = 16.34, p < .001$) and verb tense (Imperfect, Preterite, and Present Perfect) by language interaction ($F(2, 62) = 6.37, p < .005$).

Overall, the target group was much less accurate in Spanish than in Catalan, but this was only because of the difference in accuracy between the two languages for one particular verb tense: the Preterite. The target-group informants used the Imperfect equally well in the

two languages ($F(1, 31) = 1.23, p > .5$), and the Present Perfect as well. However, they used the Preterite significantly less accurately than the Imperfect, both in Catalan (Preterite .69, Imperfect .86; $F(1, 31) = 7.34, p < .02$) and in Spanish (Preterite .43, Imperfect .83; $F(1, 31) = 21.62, p < .001$). The difference between Preterite and Present Perfect use in Catalan (.69 and .81 respectively) failed to reach significance ($F(1, 31) = 2.54, p > .10$), but the numerical trend was in the same direction as for Spanish, in which there was a significant difference between the Preterite and the Present Perfect rates.

In sum, the results showed that the function of the Preterite posed the greatest degree of difficulty to L2 learners, in both Catalan and Spanish. In other words, the greatest number of errors occurred when the children should have been using a Preterite but used something else instead. This observation led to the question regarding which tense the participants used when they should have been using the Preterite.

Overuse and underuse of verbal forms

Previous studies have examined the tenses that learners use in their interlanguage instead of the target-like required tenses. Research in the acquisition of Romance languages has showed that learners have a difficult time distinguishing the Preterite from the Imperfect especially at an early stage when the acquisition of a new form (e.g., the Imperfect) has a negative impact on the functional use of another tense (e.g., the Preterite) (Camps, "Aspectual," "Preterit"; Bardovi-Harlig, "Another"). The current study is cross-sectional and does not allow for the examination of the emergence of tense forms along time, but it does allow us to examine what tenses learners used instead of the required ones.

Table 2 displays the discrepancy between the produced forms and expected (target-like) ones. When the figures for the produced form and the expected form are similar (e.g., in the case of the Imperfect) we expect to find fewer functional errors. On the other hand, the imbalance between the figures of the produced forms vis-à-vis the expected forms indicates that the number of functional errors increases. The fact that the Present Perfect was produced more than expected (on 384 occasions), whereas the Preterite was expected (on 411 occasions) more than produced indicates precisely that the function of the Preterite posed the greatest difficulty to the target-group informants, especially when trying to discern the functional difference between the Preterite and the Present Perfect.

TABLE 2
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PRODUCED FORM AND EXPECTED FORM
IN CATALAN AND SPANISH IN THE TARGET GROUP

	Produced form	Expected form
Imperfect	1287	1260
Preterite	1790	2201
Present Perfect	1330	946

Table 3 shows the errors the informants made when each type of morphology was produced.⁴ If the produced form was correct, the produced form and the expected form are the same. If the produced form was not correct, there is a discrepancy between the produced form and the expected form. In general, the tense used was the expected one in almost all of the three tenses (97.5% for the Imperfect, 94.3% for the Preterite, and 63.1% for the Present Perfect).

TABLE 3
REQUIRED FORMS WHEN EACH VERB FORM (IMPERFECT, PRETERITE,
PRESENT PERFECT) IS PRODUCED IN CATALAN AND SPANISH BY CHILDREN
IN THE TARGET GROUP

Produced forms	Imperfect			Preterite			Present Perfect		
	Pres.			Pres.			Pres.		
Expected forms	Imp.	Pret.	Perf.	Perf.	Imp.	Pret.	Imp.	Pret.	Perf.
Number of tokens	1254	28	5	2	1687	101	4	486	840
Percentage	97.5	2.1	0.4	0.1	94.3	5.6	0.3	36.6	63.1

Regarding the Imperfect, it was used correctly in 97.5 percent of the cases. However, in 2.1 percent of cases the Imperfect was used incorrectly and the Preterite was expected instead; and in 0.4 percent of cases the Imperfect was used incorrectly and the Present Perfect was expected to be used instead. When the Preterite was produced, it was used correctly 94% of the times, but it was expected in many other instances in which the Present Perfect was used (incorrectly) instead of the Preterite (36% of the uses of the Present Perfect should have been

⁴ Since the Catalan and the Spanish data showed the same trend, the table combines data in both languages.

in the Preterite). Where the Present Perfect was used, it was only called for in 63% of the cases. In 36% of the instances, the Present Perfect was used incorrectly and the Preterite was expected to be used instead (486 out of 490 incorrect uses of the Present Perfect should have been in the Preterite).

An analysis of the proportions and direction (overuse or underuse) of mistakes for each verb shows the following: a) the percentage of mistakes in the Imperfect was quite low (2.5% overall), b) the mistakes in the Preterite were a bit higher (5.7%), and c) the Present Perfect was used incorrectly almost 40% of the times. Moreover, the incorrect uses of the Present Perfect corresponded in their great majority to expected uses of the Preterite.

These results provide evidence for a main finding: the target-group children experienced difficulties figuring out the semantic or functional differences between the Preterite and the Present Perfect in both languages (though much more so in Spanish), but had almost no problem in understanding the distinction between perfective and imperfective.

DISCUSSION

The findings reported in the previous section point to three crucial issues in the acquisition of the past tenses under investigation. First, morphological accuracy was higher than functional accuracy, which indicates that form precedes function, an observation that previous studies have also reported (Dietrich et al.). Second, there is evidence for greater difficulty of the morphology of the Present Perfect in Catalan and of the Preterite in Spanish than for the other tenses. Third, and most importantly, the greatest difficulty was in the acquisition of the functional use of the Preterite in both Catalan and Spanish.

Regarding the last of the findings, previous studies have focused on the acquisition between perfective and imperfective aspects, that is, on telling apart the contexts for the Preterite vis-à-vis the Imperfect (Andersen, "Developmental"; Bardovi-Harlig, "Narrative"; Comajoan, "Acquisition"; Montrul and Slabakova). In this study, however, due to the fact that it included the Present Perfect, it was possible to observe that in both languages the participants used the Present Perfect (rather than the Imperfect) instead of the Preterite. This means that instead of expressing perfective aspect with the Preterite, the participants resorted not to Imperfective forms but to Present Perfect ones, and thus, they generalized the use of the Present Perfect in order to encode temporally bound past tense. This finding confirms the results from two of the Moroccan-Arabic informants learning Spanish in a previous study (López-Ortega).

The explanation for the overuse of Present Perfect by participants of Moroccan origin is related to the input to which they are exposed, interlanguage development (one-to-one principle), and the role of the first language. First of all, the usage of the Present Perfect is highly variable in Spain (Cartagena; Schwenter; Serrano). For example, in Galicia and Asturias, the Preterite is overwhelmingly used instead of the Present Perfect due to the influence of Galician over the Spanish spoken in the region (Alarcos Llorach). Asturian and Galician varieties of Spanish allow for uses such as *¿Comiste ya?* 'Did you eat yet?' instead of the preferred Peninsular standard with the Present Perfect *¿Has comido ya?* 'Have you eaten yet?' Alarcos Llorach also noted that in some areas of Castile and Madrid the opposite situation occurred, namely, the Present Perfect takes over some contexts that traditionally belong to the Preterite. The use of the Present Perfect in pre-hodiernal contexts is illustrated by the use of *Ayer he visto a Juan* 'I have seen Juan yesterday' instead of the preferred Peninsular *Ayer vi a Juan* 'I saw Juan yesterday.' In the Canary Islands and in the rest of Spain, the Present Perfect has not yet taken over Preterite contexts (Serrano). This suggests that whereas in the standard variety of Peninsular Spanish the default tense is still the Preterite (as well as in Latin American Spanish varieties), in some varieties of Peninsular Spanish the Present Perfect is acting as the default tense when the past reference point is unknown.

In sum, according to the descriptions of Peninsular Spanish (Alarcos Llorach; Hernández Alonso; Rojo and Veiga), the Present Perfect is used in standard Spanish either to connect some temporally unspecified event in the past with the moment of speaking, or to denote some event that happened in the past but that is related physically or psychologically with the moment of speaking. Such variability of the Present Perfect leaves room for language users to have different understandings of what might mean to be related physically or psychologically with the moment of speaking, thus creating some misalignment between the scope of the Present Perfect and the scope of the Preterite.

In addition, the participants for the current study may have been exposed to varieties of Latin American Spanish because many of their neighbors may come from those areas. However, Present Perfect usage in Latin America is quite stable and homogeneous except in northwest Argentina (Alarcos Llorach; Kempas).

The linguistic situation in today's Spain faced by the participants for this study with regard to the Present Perfect is not at all uncommon. Historically, it is not rare that a perfective tense takes over the traditional meaning of a perfective one (Dahl), as was the case in France and Germany, where the *Passé Composé* or the Present Perfect

took over the simple past form in modern French and spoken German, respectively. Thus, before the change from the simple past to the *Passé Composé* in French, there was a period characterized by the unstable and variable use of the two forms (Schwenter; Cartagena).

Second, the fact that the usage of the Spanish Present Perfect is variable in Peninsular Spanish varieties does not suffice to account for the difficulties that the participants in this study had telling apart the different contexts for Preterite and Present Perfect. If the variability of the system were the main contributing factor, the informants' behavior in Catalan could not be accounted for, because even though the Catalan system is quite stable distinguishing Preterite and Present Perfect, the informants in this study had almost the same problems in Catalan as in Spanish in distinguishing Preterite and Present Perfect contexts.

Another explanation might be that our informants encounter a situation in which there are two verb forms per language (Catalan and Spanish Preterite, Catalan and Spanish Present Perfect), and three out of these four forms are similar to each other (Table 4).

TABLE 4
CATALAN AND SPANISH VERB FORMS
IN THE PRETERITE AND PRESENT PERFECT

	Catalan	Spanish
Preterite	Vaig treballar 'I worked'	Trabajé 'I worked'
Present Perfect	He treballat 'I have worked'	He trabajado 'I have worked'

Three of the forms have an analytical or periphrastic form (Spanish and Catalan Present Perfect and Catalan Preterite); and out of the three analytical forms, two resemble each other, that is, the Present Perfect is quite similar in Catalan and Spanish. Thus, the informants may be trying to simplify this four-way system by choosing just one tense in order to convey both past tense perfective and perfect, and, in doing so they choose the tense that has a similar form in the two languages, the Present Perfect. The learners may be trying to build an interlanguage system following the one-to-one principle, whereby one form corresponds only to one function (Andersen, "Four"). The introduction of two past forms to convey past tense (Preterite and Present Perfect) may lead to the specialization of one of the forms (Present Perfect) for all the contexts of perfectivity until the learner finds a new form-function correlate for the Preterite form.

Finally, another contributing factor that can explain the findings of this study could be that Arabic and Tamazight lack the perfect versus perfective aspectual distinction (Dahl). In contrast, the perfective-imperfective distinction is widely used in Arabic and Tamazight, where the imperfective aspect extends even to the present tense as the default tense. This may be another one of the reasons for which the informants in the present study did not have problems differentiating the Preterite versus the Imperfect uses in either of the two languages, contrary to the findings from other studies that focused on the L2 acquisition of Spanish and Catalan by learners whose first languages did not contrast perfective and imperfective forms.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The results of this study have provided evidence for the tempo-aspectual system of Moroccan Arabic and Tamazight young speakers learning L2 Catalan and Spanish in the Barcelona area. One of the main findings has been that the learners had difficulty establishing the functional differences between tenses, more specifically between the Preterite and Present Perfect.

Further research should move beyond the study of the contrast between perfective and imperfective and incorporate the Present Perfect within the tempo-aspectual structure of the learners' interlanguage. In order to provide an answer to the issue regarding the differences between the scopes of the Preterite and the Present Perfect, studies on the acquisition of these differences should be carried out in different parts of Spain where different Spanish varieties are spoken. Thus, a similar study conducted with children of Moroccan origin in Galicia, Madrid, Andalusia, the Canary Islands, and Catalonia simultaneously would allow one to address whether in Galicia, some parts of Andalusia, and the Canary Islands the children of Moroccan origin overuse the Preterite instead of the Present Perfect in order to express past tense because of the influence of the Spanish spoken in these areas.

EULÀLIA CANALS
UNIVERSITAT POMPEU FABRA

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APPENDIX

ELICITED ORAL NARRATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

Catalan Oral narrative. Task 1

Greetings

The interviewer should introduce him/herself quickly and then ask the interviewee how (s)he is.

To elicit Present Perfect and Imperfect. What have you done today in class? Did you like any specific class today? If so: What class? What did you do? Why did you like it?

To elicit Preterite and Imperfect.

What did you do yesterday in school? Did you like any specific class? If so: What class? What did you do? Why did you like it?

When is your birthday? Do you remember how you celebrated your last birthday? What gifts did you get? Did you have a party? Where? Or Where did you go? How was the place? Who was there? Why did you like it?

Who is your best friend in school? What's his/her name? Do you remember when you first met him/her? How was it? Did you ever have a fight with him/her? If so: What happened? Why? If not: Did you ever have a fight with someone else in the class / any of your siblings?

Did your teacher ever punish you? What happened? Do you think it was fair? If not: why? How did you feel about it?

Did you go to a field trip this year? Where? Did you like it? What fun things did you do? What school activities did you like? How was the place you stayed in? How did you go there (train, bus, coach)? How was the trip journey?

Spanish Oral narrative. Task 1

Greetings

The interviewer should introduce him/herself quickly and then ask the interviewee how (s)he is.

To elicit Present Perfect and Imperfect. Do you usually eat in school? Have you eaten there today? If so: What have you eaten? Did you like it? Have you eaten anything this week that you especially liked? If child does not eat in school ask the same questions about his/her mother food.

To elicit Preterite and Imperfect.

Did you celebrate Sant Jordi's day this year? What did you do? Did you buy any roses or books? Did you like that day in school? What did you like the most? What other celebrations did you have this year in school? Which one did you like the most? Why? What did you do that day?

What games do you play in school? What games were you playing last year that you are not playing anymore? Why did you like them before but you don't anymore?

What TV programs do you watch? What TV programs were you watching last year that you don't watch anymore? Why did you like them before but you don't anymore?

What video-games do you play in school? What video-games were you playing last year that you are not playing anymore? Why did you like them before but you don't anymore?