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## The gradual acquisition of clitic “se” in Spanish L2

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### Abstract

In this study, we analyse the nature of clitic “se” and low applicatives in Spanish L2 through the study of the non-native acquisition of this clitic by L1 English adult learners. In particular, we are going to discuss the question of how English adults acquire this clitic in the different syntactic configurations where it appears (anticausative inchoative verbs, inherent reflexive verbs, transitive verbs implying an inalienable possession relation, consumption verbs and non-anticausative inchoative verbs). Our main research hypothesis is that the acquisition of clitic “se” with some types of applicatives takes place in the later stages of the learning process, since it requires exposure to certain linguistic evidence to acquire a certain type of argument structure proper to applicatives. This study is going to be based on how our subjects perform using Grammaticality Judgment Tests (GJTs).

### Keywords

L1/L2 Spanish acquisition, Universal Grammar (UG), morphology-syntax interface, clitic “se”, applicatives, Grammaticality Judgment Test.

### Introduction

Many researchers assume that L2 learners never master a non-native grammar. Moreover, for L2 syntax acquisition, where learners can experience minimal exposure to the second language in the natural environment, and, where there is no explicit teaching of functional heads and syntactic configurations absent in the L1, the situation may be even more difficult. Crucially the study of how L2 learners acquire these non-native configurations is particularly interesting for research on whether morphological knowledge is dependent on the syntactic knowledge of the language as put forward in Prévost and White (2000), White (2003), Haznedar (2001; 2003), Lardiere (2000; 2008) and references there-in.

In the generativist tradition, two main positions are found as regards the discussion of how syntax and morphology

interact in L2. First of all, under the view that morphological knowledge is dependent on the syntactic knowledge exhibited in the L1, the inconsistent use of morphological features is explained as an impairment of the functional categories with which they are associated (Beck, 1998; Vainikka and Young-Scholten, 2009; Eubank et al., 1997; Meisel, 1997). The second view holds, on the other hand, that Universal Grammar (UG) constrains grammar construction during acquisition of L1 and L2, but remains unchanged during this process (Full Access). In other words, L2 grammars are not impaired, but instead L2 learners have an initial stage where the L2 morphology-syntax interface is not yet in place. In this paper, the latter hypothesis is supported. We argue that Universal Grammar (UG) constrains the acquisition of syntactic configurations in the L2, as much as it constraints L1 acquisition.

## 2. Clitic “se” in Spanish

The question we want to raise here is how L2 learners of Spanish acquire particular challenging syntactic configurations absent in their L1 (English): Spanish clitic “se”, which is sometimes an expletive without semantic content, while at other times it occurs within a phrase projected from a low applicative head (Pylkkänen, 2002; Cuervo, 2003; Teomiro, 2013). If we follow the Full Access hypothesis, we will expect to find a lot of transfer errors only in the initial stages of the acquisition of clitic “se”.

The use of clitic “se” in Spanish is pervasive and can be found with many types of verbs, as can be seen in examples (1) to (6) below:

1. *La ventana Se cerró.*  
The window CL closed.  
'The window closed.'
2. *La niña Se peinó.*  
The girl CL combed.  
'The girl combed (herself).'
3. *Juan se Lavó Las manos.*  
Juan CL washed The hands.  
'Juan washed his hands.'
4. *El niño (se) comió El sandwich.*  
The boy CL ate the sandwich.  
'The boy ate the sandwich.'
5. *El anciano (se) cayó.*  
The Elder CL fell.  
'The elder fell.'
6. *El pobre perro (se) murió.*  
The poor Dog CL died.  
'The poor dog died.'

Following Teomiro (in press), several types of clitic “se” can be distinguished in Spanish according to the syntactic configuration in which they appear, as summarized in (7):

### (7) Types of “se” in Spanish:

a. **Clitic “se” with anticausative inchoative verbs** such as *abrir* (open), *romper* (break), *congelar* (freeze), and *cerrar* (close) as in (1): the clitic is an expletive<sup>1</sup> that does not introduce any argument nor any further syntactic complexity (Teomiro, 2010).

b. **Clitic “se” with inherent reflexive verbs** such as *lavarse* (wash oneself), *afeitarse* (shave oneself), *vestirse* (get oneself dressed), and *peinarse* (comb oneself) as in (2): in this case too the clitic is an expletive nominal (Teomiro, 2011).

c. **Clitic “se” with transitive verbs that imply inalienable possession** such as *peinarse el pelo* (comb one’s hair), *cortarse el dedo* (cut one’s finger), and *lavarse las manos* (wash one’s hands) as in (3): the clitic is an argument in the specifier of the phrase projected from a low applicative head (Teomiro and Escobar, 2013).

d. **Clitic “se” with consumption verbs** such as *beberse* (drink), *tragarse* (swallow), and *comerse* (eat) as in (4): the clitic is an argument in the specifier of the phrase projected from a low applicative head. This kind of verb also requires a causative head that is not present in English consumption verbs (see Romero and Teomiro, 2012).

e. **Clitic “se” with non-anticausative intransitive verbs** such as *tropezarse* (stumble), *caerse* (fall) as in (5), and *morirse* (die) as in (6): the clitic is an argument in the specifier of the phrase projected from a low applicative head (Teomiro, 2013).

Teomiro (in press; 2010; 2011; 2013) argues that “se” is a nominal item underspecified for  $\Phi$ -features and which

any referent. Therefore, the expletive does not introduce any participant of the event, and thus it does not contribute to the argument structure of the predicate:

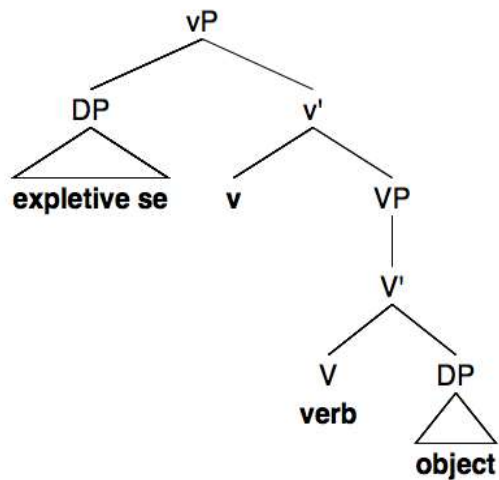
- (i) a. *It is raining here.*  
b. *It will snow tomorrow.*

<sup>1</sup> An expletive is a pleonastic nominal element inserted in certain syntactic positions due to formal reasons and without semantic interpretation. An example of an expletive in English is the nominal item “it” in English weather predicates in (i), where “it” does not have

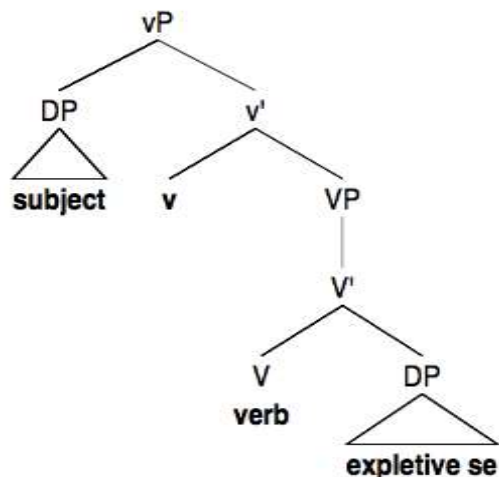
can occur in (at least) two different syntactic configurations:

- a) “Se” can be an expletive without any semantic interpretation that is inserted in the syntactic derivation due to formal reasons. This is attested with anticausative inchoative verbs (7a) (Teomirol 2010) and inherent reflexive verbs (7b) (Teomirol, 2011), as represented in (8) and (9) respectively.

(8) Expletive “se” with anticausative-inchoatives (based on Teomirol, 2010):



(9) Expletive “se” with inherent reflexive verbs (based on Teomirol, 2011):

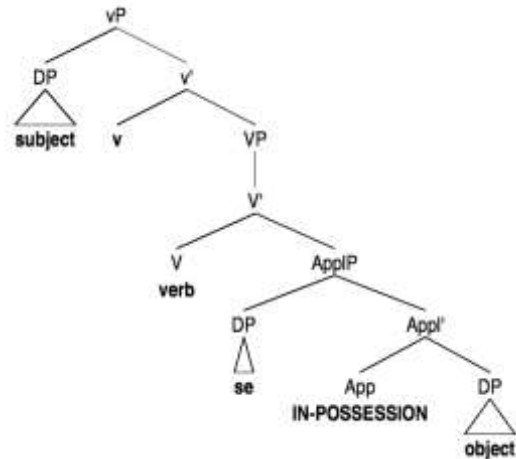


These syntactic configurations are also attested in English with the same types of verbs (anticausative inchoative and inherent reflexive verbs). The expletive (pronounced as “se” in Spanish) is not

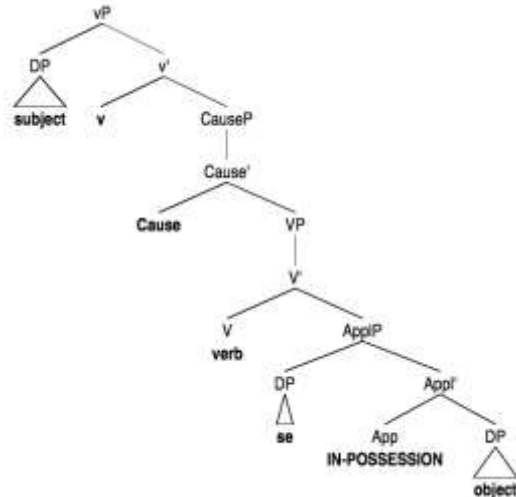
spelled-out in English, however (Teomirol, 2010; 2011).

- b) “Se” can be in the specifier of a phrase projected from an applicative head (Pylkännel, 2002) as occurs with transitive verbs implying an inalienable possession relationship (7c) represented in (10), consumption verbs (7d) represented in (11), and non-anticausative intransitive verbs (7e) represented in (12).

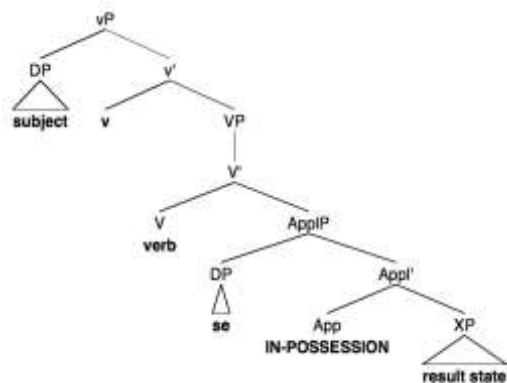
(10) “Se” with transitive verbs implying an inalienable possession relation (based on Teomirol and Escobar, 2013; and references there-in):



(11) “Se” with consumption verbs (based on Romero and Teomirol, 2012):



(12) “Se” with non-anticausative intransitive verbs (based on Teomirol, 2013):



English has a structure similar to (10): the so-called Double Object Construction with ditransitive verbs like those in (13) below (Pylkannen, 2002; Cuervo, 2003). However, the structure of Spanish consumption verbs (7d) represented in (11) is different from English consumption verbs since a causative head is present in Spanish but not in English, which triggers a causative semantics in this Spanish type of verb (Romero and Teomiro, 2012).

- (13) a. John gave Mary a book.  
 b. Ann sent him a present.  
 c. Mary bought Peter a book.

Finally, the structure of Spanish non-anticausative intransitive verbs (7e) represented in (12) is not attested in English (Teomiro, 2013).

According to the aforementioned different syntactic configurations where “se” appears, in addition to the availability of such syntactic configurations in English as L1, we can establish a level of “difficulty” (or timing of acquisition) for each syntactic configuration in the acquisition of Spanish as L2 by English L1 speakers:

- a) “Se” with anticausative (7a) and inherent reflexive verbs (7b) will be “easy” (i.e. early acquired) because this syntactic configuration is present both in English (where the expletive element is not spelled-out) and Spanish (where the expletive is spelled-out as “se”).
- b) “Se” with transitive verbs implying an inalienable possession (7c) will be “easy” or early acquired too because English has a low applicative head very similar to that of Spanish

(although there are some differences as pointed out by Cuervo, 2003).

- c) “Se” with consumption verbs in Spanish (7d) has a somewhat different syntactic structure (a causative head that is absent in English consumption verbs) and semantic interpretation (Romero and Teomiro, 2012), which makes this kind of “se” more difficult (or later) to acquire.
- d) “Se” with non-anticausative intransitive verbs (7e) occurs with a special kind of low applicative head and within a syntactic configuration that is not present in English (Teomiro, in press; 2013). Therefore, it will be more difficult to acquire (i.e. it will be acquired later).

Teomiro and Escobar (2013) carried out a CHILDES corpus study in order to see whether there are differences in the L1 acquisition of these types of “se”, as we hypothesize in this work. They found that clitic “se” with anticausative inchoatives and inherent reflexives was earlier acquired in L1 Spanish than with the other types of verbs. Clitic “se” with transitive verbs implying inalienable possession and with non-anticausative intransitives was later acquired but earlier than with consumption verbs. These differentiated stages of L1 acquisition are easily understood under the theoretical accounts presented above. That is, clitic “se” is earlier acquired when it is an expletive without introducing any argument or further syntactic structure, as in anticausative-inchoative and reflexive verbs, as in (7a) and (7b), respectively. Other types of verbs like transitive verbs implying inalienable possession, as in (7c), and non-anticausative intransitive verbs, as in (7e), require the activation or acquisition of the low applicative head. When this has been acquired or activated (they defended a revised version of the Weak Continuity Hypothesis of Functional Categories; see Clahsen, 1990; Clahsen et al. 1993; Meisel and Müller, 1992), clitic “se” is produced with transitive verbs implying inalienable possession and non-anticausative intransitive verbs. These latter configurations with consumption verbs as in (7d) require an extra causative functional

head and are later acquired presumably due to their intricate complexity (as argued by Romero and Teomiro, 2012).

If we take into consideration the aforementioned theoretical analysis and the data presented in Teomiro and Escobar (2013), we can conclude that a non-unitary analysis of Spanish “se” is required to account for its gradual acquisition in L1 Spanish. Our results, presented in this paper, point towards a similar conclusion as regards the gradual acquisition of “se” in L2 Spanish. These similar results are predicted by the Full Access Hypothesis in L2 acquisition.

### 3. The present study

#### 3.1 Preliminaries

Advanced learners show development and successful performance in their L2 according to the literature. Yet, it is not well understood how L2 acquisition takes place and whether it is similar or not to the L1 process, regardless of the fact that a second language is acquired by subjects who are already speakers of a different language. Furthermore, most research done in the past focused on morphosyntactic phenomena, whereas more innovative studies highlight the semantic-syntax interface showing that the acquisition of argument structure is a promising line of enquiry.

Our main goal in this study is to analyse variation with respect to changes in argument structure in the presence of clitic “se”. As previously discussed, Spanish examples of alternation can be found in the consumption verbs such as “comer(se)”, anticausative-inchoative verbs such as “cerrar(se)”, and non-anticausative intransitive verbs such as “caer(se)” and “mori(se)”. Crucially, such an alternation does not exist for the equivalent verbs in English.

Previous research on L1 acquisition of clitic “se” with complex events in Spanish has shown that even children in late stages have difficulty with this type of predicate (cf. Escobar and Torrens, 2010 and Teomiro and Escobar, 2013). In the case of L2 acquisition we also predict that only higher proficiency learners will behave similarly to native speakers of Spanish in their acceptance of clitic “se” with the complex events under study, on the assumption that there will be a stage of

interlanguage development when this type of construction is represented but again only in later stages.

#### 3.2 Hypotheses

Given the classification of the types of syntactic configurations in which clitic “se” appears in Spanish sorted by complexity (expletive < Low Applicative head < Low Applicative head + causative head), the Full Access and the Full Transfer hypotheses make different predictions respectively:

- a) On the one hand, if the learner has access to UG and all the different parametric values as well as the different functional categories that can be instantiated in human languages, the English learners of L2 Spanish are expected to be able to acquire clitic “se” in all the aforementioned syntactic configurations over time.
- b) On the other hand, if learners have access to UG only through her L1, they are not expected to acquire clitic “se” in the syntactic configurations that are not present in their native language. So, clitic “se” will be acquired in anticausative inchoative and inherent reflexive verbs because English also has an expletive with these types of verbs according to Teomiro (2010; 2011) respectively. As for clitic “se” with transitive verbs implying inalienable possession and non-anticausative verbs, it will be acquired over time because English also has a low applicative head. Finally, clitic “se” with consumption verbs will very probably not be acquired because these verbs require a low applicative head and a causative head that does not seem to be present in English, as Romero and Teomiro (2012) argue.

#### 3.3 Methodology

In order to conduct our research we designed one Grammaticality Judgment Test (GJT) which included all variables concerning the different status of clitic “se” in the different configurations discussed above (expletive, Low Applicative head, Low Applicative head + causative head). In our study, the GJ test was presented as an

optional exercise to revise their grammar. In order to motivate them to do it, they were offered the opportunity to have a certificate for participation. The GJ test contained 41 items divided as follows:

- 7 practice items.
- 34 experimental items with a sentence (17 ungrammatical sentences and 17 grammatical sentences) corresponding to 8 types of “se” plus verb (some of which will not be discussed in this work and are preceded by an asterisk [\*]):
  - “Se” with anticausative verbs (7a) (4 items).
  - “Se” with inherent reflexive verbs (7b) (4 items).
  - “Se” with transitive verbs that imply inalienable possession (7c) (4 items).
  - “Se” with consumption verbs (7d) (4 items).
  - “Se” with non-anticausative intransitive verbs (7e) (4 items).
  - Dative “se” (4 items).
  - \*Ethical (high applicatives) “se” (see Pylkkänen, 2002) (4 items).
  - \*Indirect causation (middle applicatives) “se” (see Fernández Soriano and Mendikoetxea, 2011) (4 items).

The 55 adults that participated in this study had an age range of 27 years. All of them were English-speaking students taking Spanish L2 in a formal learning context at university. They were split into two groups: The first group consisted of a total of 30 students who were taking a summer Spanish L2 Course at the Complutense University of Madrid. The second group consisted of a total of 22 students who were regular students enrolled in a Spanish L2 course at the Official School of Languages (“Escuela Oficial de Idiomas”) in Madrid (Spain). The GJ test materials (experimental items + placement test) were exactly the same for both groups.

### 3.3.1 Group 1

Not all of the students taking the Spanish course at the Complutense University had

followed previous courses in Spanish as a foreign language, and therefore the 30 students that participated in this first group were split into two other subgroups according to their level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages:

- a) Low level students group (N=11): those who reported to be at a level below B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (i.e. A1, A2 or B1).
- b) Intermediate level students group (N=19): those who reported to be at B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages or above (B2, or C1).

### 3.3.2 Group 2

The 22 students that participated in Group 2 were also divided into other subgroups according to their level of L2 Spanish in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, as follows:

- a) Low level students group (N=11): those who were at a level below B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (i.e. A1, A2 or B1).
- b) Intermediate level students group (N=10): those who were at B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages or above (B2, or C1).

## 3.4 Results

### 3.4.1 Group 1

We measured the number of correct responses (from 0 to 4) per subject and category. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA-A) was run on the data in order to see whether the difference of means between groups (low and intermediate level students) was significant or not. The random subject effect has not been taken into consideration, which makes this study exploratory. Table 1 shows the means of each sample (Low vs. Intermediate) along with their statistical significance (significant differences of means are shadowed), which are graphically represented in Figure 1.

	Low	Intermediate	Significance
<b>Se+anticausatives</b>	1.7273	2.4737	.023
<b>Se+reflexives</b>	2.6340	3.1000	.116
<b>Se+transitive (possession)</b>	2.0000	3.3158	.000
<b>Se+consumption</b>	2.3636	2.4737	.676
<b>Se+non-antic.intransitives</b>	2.3636	3.3158	.007
<b>Se+datives</b>	2.8182	3.4737	.023

Table 1: Means and significance (Group 1)

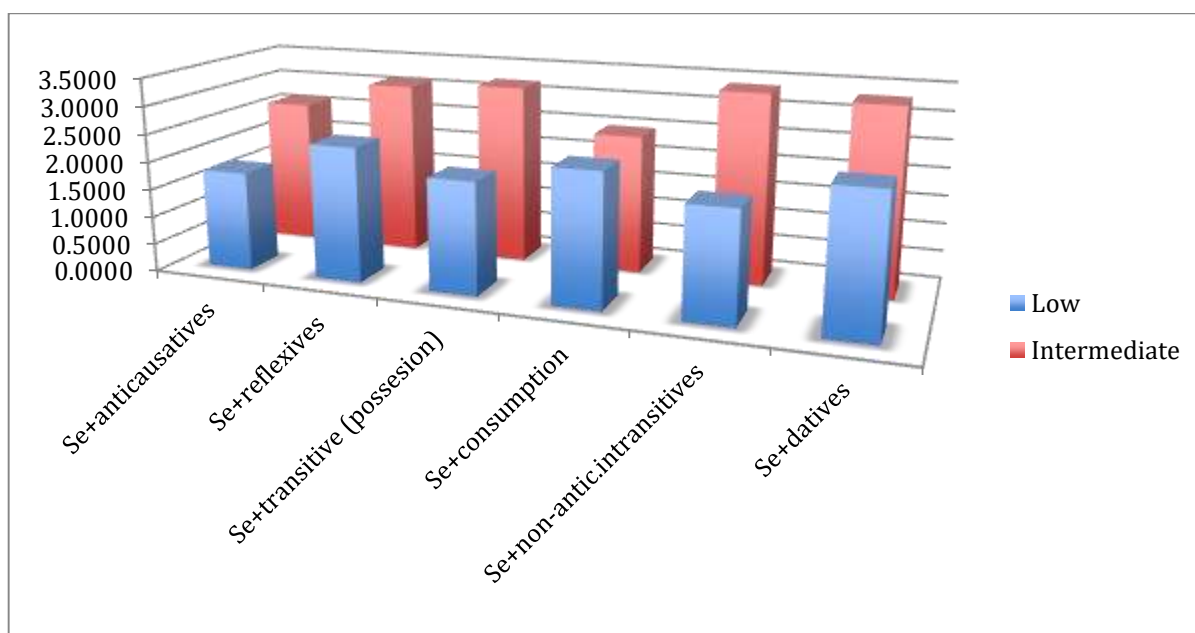


Figure 1: Means (Group 1)

### 3.4.2 Group 2

We measured the number of correct responses (from 0 to 4) per subject and category. A one-way factor analysis of variance (ANOVA-A) was run on the data in order to see whether the difference of means between groups (low and intermediate level students) was significant

or not. The random subject effect has not been taken into consideration, which makes this study exploratory. Table 2 shows the means of each sample (Low vs. Intermediate) along with their statistical significance (significant differences of means are shadowed). The means are graphically represented in Figure 2.

	Low	Intermediate	Significance
Se+anticausatives	1.8182	2.9000	.007
Se+reflexives	2.1818	3.1000	.018
Se+transitive (possession)	2.000	3.000	.015
Se+consumption	2.4545	2.500	.894
Se+non-antic.intransitives	1.5455	3.500	.000
Se+datives	2.0909	3.000	.073 (tendency)

Table 2: Means and significance (Group 2)

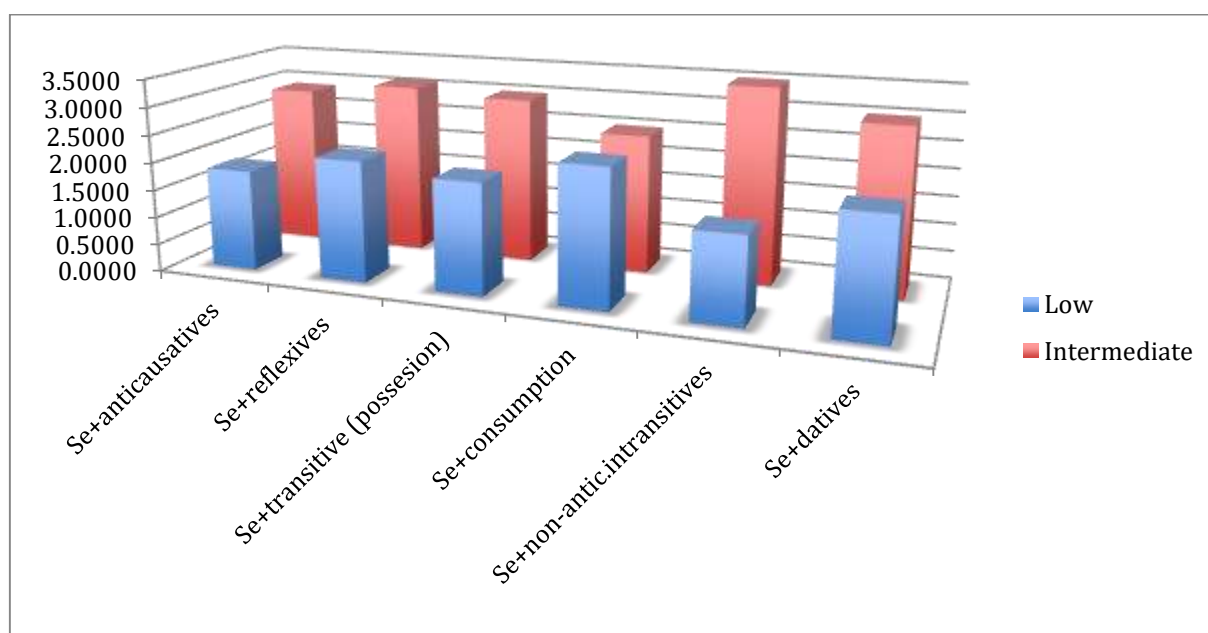


Figure 2: Means (Group 2)

### 3.4.3 Data analysis

A two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA-AB) was run on the data in order to see whether results were different in the two different groups (Group 1 vs. Group 2) and “level of L2 Spanish” (low vs. intermediate) had a significant effect on the

performance of the subjects with the different types of syntactic configurations (see [7]). Table 3 shows the values of the factors along with the size of the samples. Table 4 shows the final results of the analysis.

Type of GJ test	Group 1	N=30
	Group 2	N=21
Level of L2 Spanish	Low	N=22
	Intermediate	N=29

Table 3: Values of the factors and size of the samples



		Value	F	Significance
<b>Type of GJ test</b>	Pillai's trace	.312	1.722	.111
	Wilk's lambda	.688	1.722	.111
	Hotelling's trace	.453	1.722	.111
	Roy's greatest root	.453	1.722	.111
<b>Level of L2 Spanish</b>	Pillai's trace	.747	11.231	.000
	Wilk's lambda	.253	11.231	.000
	Hotelling's trace	2.955	11.231	.000
	Roy's greatest root	2.955	11.231	.000
<b>Type of GJ test * Level of L2 Spanish</b>	Pillai's trace	.372	2.252	.035
	Wilk's lambda	.628	2.252	.035
	Hotelling's trace	.593	2.252	.035
	Roy's greatest root	.593	2.252	.035

**Table 4: MANOVA-AB results**

The results of the MANOVA-AB indicate that the results with respect to Groups (Group 1 vs. Group 2) do not have a significant effect ( $p > 0.1$ ) on the subjects' performance with the different types of syntactic configurations (see [7]), whereas the factor "Level of L2 Spanish" ( $p < 0.001$ ) and the interaction of the two factors ( $p < 0.05$ ) have a significant effect on the subjects' performance with the different types of syntactic configurations (see [7]).

We measured the number of correct responses for grammatical and ungrammatical items for each syntactic configuration (see [7]) in order to get

information about the learners' implicit and explicit knowledge. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA-A) was run on the data in order to see whether the difference of means between groups (low and intermediate level students) was significant or not. The random subject effect has not been taken into consideration, which makes this study exploratory. The means of each group (Low vs. Intermediate) along with their statistical significance (significant differences of means are shadowed) are shown in Table 5 for Group 1 and in Table 6 for Group 2.

	Type of sentence	Low	Intermediate	Significance
<b>Se+anticausatives</b>	Grammatical	1.5455	1.7358	.365
<b>Se+reflexives</b>	Grammatical	1.8182	1.9474	.271
<b>Se+transitive (possession)</b>	Grammatical	1.7273	1.9474	.093 (Tendency)
<b>Se+consumption</b>	Grammatical	.9091	.8481	.824
<b>Se+non-antic.intransitives</b>	Grammatical	1.3636	1.7895	.067 (Tendency)
<b>Se+datives</b>	Grammatical	1.5455	1.8947	.106
<b>Se+anticausatives</b>	Ungrammatical	.1818	.7368	.029
<b>Se+reflexives</b>	Ungrammatical	.8182	1.1579	.218
<b>Se+transitive (possession)</b>	Ungrammatical	.2727	1.3684	.000
<b>Se+consumption</b>	Ungrammatical	1.4545	1.6316	.421
<b>Se+non-antic.intransitives</b>	Ungrammatical	1.000	1.5263	.049
<b>Se+datives</b>	Ungrammatical	1.2727	1.5789	.242

**Table 5: Means and significance (Group 1)**

	Type of sentence	Low	Intermediate	Significance
<b>Se+anticausatives</b>	Grammatical	.7273	1.800	.001
<b>Se+reflexives</b>	Grammatical	.8182	2.000	.000
<b>Se+transitive (possession)</b>	Grammatical	.5455	1.700	.000
<b>Se+consumption</b>	Grammatical	1.000	.7000	.156
<b>Se+non-antic.intransitives</b>	Grammatical	.7273	1.900	.001
<b>Se+datives</b>	Grammatical	1.0909	1.6000	.112
<b>Se+anticausatives</b>	Ungrammatical	1.0909	1.1000	.974
<b>Se+reflexives</b>	Ungrammatical	1.3636	1.1000	.347
<b>Se+transitive (possession)</b>	Ungrammatical	1.4545	1.3000	.645
<b>Se+consumption</b>	Ungrammatical	1.4545	1.8000	.247
<b>Se+non-antic.intransitives</b>	Ungrammatical	.8182	1.6000	.024
<b>Se+datives</b>	Ungrammatical	1.000	1.4000	.271

**Table 6: Means and significance (Group 2)**

### 3.5 Discussion

The Full Access to UG hypothesizes that all the syntactic configurations where “se” occurs should be learnt by L2 Spanish learners over time regardless of their L1. In contrast, the Full Transfer hypothesis predicts that “se” will be learnt correctly only in those configurations that are present in the L1 (English in this case).

If we focus on Group 1 students’ results:

- The data indicate that dative configurations are learnt over time since the difference of means between the low and intermediate level students is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Also “se” in configurations that involve low applicatives seems to be learnt: “se” with transitive verbs implying inalienable possession (see [7c],  $p < 0.001$ ) and “se” with non-anticausative intransitives (see [7e],  $p < 0.05$ ).
- The difference of means between low and intermediate level students with “se” with inherent reflexive verbs (see [7b]) is non-significant ( $p < 0.116$ ). However, the means of both groups (low and intermediate level students) are above the mean (2.6340 and 3.100 respectively).
- The difference of means between low and intermediate level students with “se” with consumption verbs (see [7d]) is clearly non-significant ( $p < 0.676$ ), which indicates that both

low level and intermediate level students perform the same when judging such sentences.

If we look at the data from Group 2 students’ results (Table 2 and Figure 2), we find similar results except for inherent reflexive verbs (see [7b]):

- The difference of means between the low level and intermediate level students with dative configurations is non-significant ( $p > 0.05$ ) but there is a tendency ( $p < 0.1$ ), which indicates that low level students judge these sentences worse than intermediate level students.
- The differences of means with “se” in configurations where low applicatives are involved are significant too: “se” with transitive verbs implying inalienable possession (see [7c]) ( $p < 0.05$ ) and “se” with non-anticausative intransitive verbs (see [7e],  $p < 0.001$ ).
- Also the differences of means with “se” with anticausative verbs (see [7a]) and inherent reflexive verbs (see [7b]) are significant ( $p < 0.001$  and  $p < 0.05$  respectively).
- However, the difference of means of both groups with “se” with consumption verbs (see [7d]) is non-significant ( $p < 0.89$ ).

The multivariate analysis of variance shows that the correct response found in each group (Group 1 vs. Group 2) is however non-significant ( $p > 0.1$ ), i.e. the learners' performance seems not to be influenced by the type of course (summer course or winter regular course) they were enrolled in. In other words, the results of both groups are not significantly different. On the other hand, the factor "level of L2 Spanish" in both groups (Group 1 and Group 2) has a significant effect ( $p < 0.001$ ), i.e. the learners' level of Spanish (low vs. intermediate) seems to influence their performance.

If we compare the means of the learners in Group 1 with respect to the grammatical sentences, only the differences of means of low vs. intermediate learners with "se" with transitive verbs implying inalienable possession (see [7c],  $p = 0.093$ ), and "se" with non-anticausative intransitive verbs (see [7e],  $p = 0.067$ ) show a tendency ( $p < 0.1$ ) although they are non-significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). This indicates that their implicit knowledge increased only with "se" in these types of syntactic configurations. If the means in the ungrammatical sentences are compared, the differences of means that are significant between the low and the intermediate learners belong to "se" with anticausative verbs (see [7a],  $p < 0.05$ ), "se" with transitive verbs implying inalienable possession (see [7c],  $p < 0.001$ ), and "se" with non-anticausative intransitive verbs (see [7e],  $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that their explicit knowledge improved with "se" in these three types of syntactic configurations.

If we compare the means of the learners in Group 2 with respect to the grammatical sentences, the differences in means of low vs. intermediate learners that are significant are those with "se" with anticausative verbs (see [7a],  $p < 0.001$ ), "se" with inherent reflexive verbs (see [7b],  $p < 0.001$ ), "se" with transitive verbs implying inalienable possession (see [7c],  $p < 0.001$ ), and "se" with non-anticausative intransitive verbs (see [7e],  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that their implicit knowledge increased with "se" in all these types of syntactic configurations. If we look at the performance with ungrammatical sentences, only the difference in means between low and intermediate learners with "se" with non-anticausative intransitive

verbs (see [7e]) is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that the explicit knowledge of these learners only improves with "se" with this type of syntactic configuration.

To summarize, the students in Group 1 improved their performance with "se" in the following syntactic configurations: anticausative verbs (7a), transitive verbs that imply inalienable possession (7c), non-anticausative intransitive verbs (7e), and datives. They did not improve with "se" with inherent reflexive verbs (7b) or with consumption verbs (7d). The students in Group 2 improved their performance with "se" with anticausative verbs (7a), inherent reflexive verbs (7b), transitive verbs implying possession (7c), non-anticausative intransitive verb (7e), and datives. They did not improve their performance with "se" with consumption verbs (7d).

Our findings indicate that L1 transfer errors were obtained only at the early stages whereas non L1 transfer errors were found at all levels, indicating that the learners are making use of their implicit knowledge, which is gradually developing over time in both groups.

#### 4. Conclusions

The study reported in this paper points to interesting conclusions as to the acquisition of clitic "se" in different syntactic configurations in L2 Spanish. However, the random subject effect has not been taken into consideration, which makes this study exploratory and therefore, future research is needed in order to achieve robust conclusions. The data indicate a gradual acquisition of clitic "se" in L2 Spanish as happens in L1 acquisition (Teomiro and Escobar, 2013), and suggest that L1 English interferes with L2 Spanish acquisition at the early stages, since there is full transfer of the structures present in their L1 English at the beginning – clitic "se" with non-anticausative verbs as in (7e) and transitive verbs as in (7c) – whereas the structures that are different in L1 English and L2 Spanish are acquired in a different way over time (i.e. at higher proficiency levels of L2 Spanish). We believe this means that they also have access to UG (not only to their L1 grammar) and are able to acquire intricate grammar complexity not predicted from their L1, which supports the Full Access Hypothesis.

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