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# Bilingualism effects at the syntax-semantic interface: Evidence from the Spanish present tense

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BILINGUALISM EFFECTS AT THE SYNTAX-SEMANTICS INTERFACE: EVIDENCE FROM THE SPANISH PRESENT TENSE

For the degree of Master of Arts

Is approved by the final examining committee:

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Date



BILINGUALISM EFFECTS AT THE SYNTAX-SEMANTIC INTERFACE:  
EVIDENCE FROM THE SPANISH PRESENT TENSE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

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Julio César López Otero

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of

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES .....	v
ABSTRACT .....	vii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Introduction and goals of the study .....	1
1.2 Outline of the thesis .....	5
CHAPTER 2 TENSE AND ASPECT .....	7
2.1 Introduction .....	7
2.2 Tense .....	7
2.3 Aspect .....	9
2.3.1 Lexical aspect .....	9
2.3.2 Grammatical aspect .....	11
2.3.3 Compositional aspect .....	12
2.4 Theoretical approaches to tense and aspect .....	14
2.4.1 Morphosyntactic approach .....	14
2.4.2 A Selectional approach .....	15
2.5 The semantics of the Spanish and English present tense .....	18
2.6 Conclusion .....	21

CHAPTER 3 THE ACQUISITION OF THE SEMANTIC VALUES OF THE SPANISH PRESENT TENSE .....	23
3.1 Introduction.....	23
3.2 Previous research .....	23
3.3 Research questions and hypotheses .....	29
CHAPTER 4 THE STUDY .....	34
4.1. Participants.....	34
4.2 Structures under analysis .....	38
4.3 Methods.....	40
4.3.1 Elicited Production Task.....	41
4.3.2 Acceptability Judgment Task.....	42
4.3.3 Forced Preference Task.....	43
4.4 Results.....	44
4.4.1 Elicited Production Task.....	44
4.4.2 Acceptability Judgment Task.....	46
4.4.3 Forced Preference Task.....	48
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS .....	51
5.1 Introduction.....	51
5.2 Discussion .....	51
5.3 Conclusions and future directions.....	58
LIST OF REFERENCES .....	61

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
Table 1: Present tense aspectual values in Spanish and English .....	2
Table 2: Semantic features of verbal aspectual classes (Vendler, 1967; Geeslin & Fafulas, 2012) .....	11
Table 3: Aspectual differences in English and Spanish .....	21
Table 4: Summary of participants' information.....	37



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
Figure 1: Arboreal representation of the AspP in the clause structure (Montrul, 2002) ..	14
Figure 2: Syntactic representation of the selectional properties of the simple present in English/Portuguese and Spanish (Schmitt, 2001) .....	18
Figure 3: Elicited Production Task: Mean results per condition and group .....	45
Figure 4: Acceptability Judgment Task: Mean results per condition and group .....	47
Figure 5: Forced Preference Task: Mean results per condition and group .....	49

## ABSTRACT

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The current study examines the acquisition of the semantic values of the Spanish present tense among English-speaking second language learners and Spanish heritage speakers. With a few exceptions (Cuza, 2008, 2010; Klein, 1980; Pérez-Cortés, 2012; Sánchez-Muñoz, 2004), it is an area of research still underexplored. The predictions for this study is that bilingualism effects will be evidenced in lower patterns of use, acceptance and preference of the simple present with an ongoing meaning in bilingual speakers, as well as preference for the progressive in ongoing contexts, as this is the pattern available in English. It is also predicted that the heritage speakers will outperform the L2 learners, confirming previous research (Cuza & Frank, 2015; Montrul, Foote & Perpiñan, 2008). In contrast to the predictions, the two experimental groups, crucially the group of second language learners, overextended the simple present to all ongoing situations, where the present progressive is sometimes preferred. On the other hand, the heritage speakers shower a more native-like pattern, which suggests age-related effects in their language development. I argue for morphosemantic convergence toward a less marked and less aspectually restrictive form, which is the Spanish simple present.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 Introduction and goals of the study**

The current study examines the extent to which English-speaking L2 learners of Spanish and Spanish heritage speakers have knowledge of the semantic values of the Spanish present tense, in particular of the ongoing semantic value of the Spanish simple present. Research on the acquisition of past tense aspectual distinctions is extensive. The acquisition of the aspectual differences existing between the preterite and the imperfect in Spanish and other Romance languages has received thorough attention from researchers (Cuza, 2010; Montrul, 2002; Montrul & Slabakova, 2003; Pérez-Leroux et al., 2008; Salaberry, 1999, 2002). Research on the acquisition of present tense aspectual distinctions, however, remains underexplored, with a few exceptions (Cuza, 2008, 2010; Klein, 1980; Pérez-Cortés, 2012; Sánchez-Muñoz, 2004), mostly focusing on the overuse of the Spanish present progressive and semantic transfer from English among Spanish-English bilinguals. This study, however, focuses on the Spanish simple present and the acquisition of its ongoing semantic value. Furthermore, it examines the acquisition of the Spanish simple present with a habitual meaning, as well as the Spanish present progressive with its two semantic values: ongoing and habitual.

The Spanish present tense is interesting to examine because, in contrast with English, Spanish allows the use of the simple present with either an ongoing or habitual

interpretation (1a, 1b) (Alarcos-Llorach, 1994; D’Introno, 2001; Yllera, 1999). English, on the other hand, does not allow the use of the simple present with an ongoing interpretation (1c), and the progressive must be used in order to convey an ongoing reading (2c) (Cowper, 1998; Schmitt, 2001). However, both languages behave similarly in that they allow the use of the simple present with a habitual meaning (1b, 1d), as well as of the present progressive with an ongoing (2a, 2c) and with a habitual meaning (2b, 2d). In summary, the only feature where both languages display differences is in the ongoing value of the Spanish simple present. This is represented in the table 1 below:

Table 1: Present tense aspectual values in Spanish and English

Simple Present	Spanish	English
Ongoing	(1a) Lisa conduce al trabajo en estos momentos	(1c) *Lisa drives to work right now.
Habitual	(1b) Lisa conduce al trabajo todos los días.	(1d) Lisa drives to work every day.
Present Progressive	Spanish	English
Ongoing	(2a) Lisa está conduciendo al trabajo en estos momentos.	(2c) Lisa is driving to work right now.
Habitual	(2b) Lisa está conduciendo al trabajo últimamente.	(2d) Lisa is driving to work lately.

As shown in Table 1 above, Spanish and English present progressive forms do not differ in their semantic values. It is important to note, however, that English also uses the present perfect continuous to express habitual/temporary actions along with the present

progressive (e.g., *Lisa has been driving to work lately*). These representational differences between the two languages might lead to differences in the production of the ongoing value of the Spanish present tense among English-speaking L2 learners of Spanish and Spanish heritage speakers due to cross-linguistic influence effects (Cuza, 2008; Gass, 1996; Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008; Martohardjono & Gabriele, 2005; Montrul, 2008; Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996). English-speaking L2 learners of Spanish and Spanish heritage speakers might, for instance, expand the scope of the Spanish present progressive in detriment of the simple present or overgeneralize the use of the Spanish simple present and use it across the board in contexts where the present progressive is preferred. These differences are also expected to happen in their preference and in their grammatical intuition, since both the simple present and the present progressive are semantically interchangeable when expressing an ongoing value (Westfal, 1995).

In addition to the ongoing interpretation of the simple present form, this study examines other aspectual values expressed by the Spanish present tense. These include the simple present form with a habitual meaning (i.e., *Normalmente, Lisa camina a la escuela*, ‘Lisa usually walks to school’), the present progressive form with an ongoing interpretation (*Lisa está cantando ahora*, ‘Lisa is singing right now’) and the present progressive form with a temporary-habitual interpretation (i.e., *Lisa está fumando mucho (últimamente)*, ‘Lisa is smoking too much lately’) (e.g., Schmitt, 2001; Yllera, 1999). However, I do not expect differences in the Spanish simple present with a habitual meaning, as both Spanish and English simple present forms allow for a habitual meaning, especially if this semantic value is reinforced with an aspectual operator, such as an adverbial phrase (e.g., *normalmente* ‘normally’). A similar prediction could be made for

the present progressive with a habitual meaning, especially if this semantic value of the Spanish present progressive is reinforced with an aspectual operator (e.g., *últimamente* ‘lately’). However, this structure is not common in day-to-day input in Spanish, which could lead to variability among bilingual speakers.

Moreover, besides the differences between the two languages and the potential bilingualism effects described above, another difficulty to face when acquiring the semantic values of the Spanish present tense is the fact that the use of the ongoing value of the Spanish simple present is not frequent in day-to-day input, where the progressive form is sometimes preferred. In addition, this structure is not typically taught or reinforced in language courses, leading to variability in L2 learners’ and heritage speakers’ grammars. Therefore, due to the facts that the ongoing value of the Spanish simple present is not very frequent in day-to-day input and the expression of ongoing eventualities is not typically covered in language courses, I predict L2 learners and heritage speakers to transfer the semantic values of the English simple present into Spanish, which may lead to a reduction of the selectional properties of the Spanish simple present in bilinguals.

On the other hand, it is expected that the two bilingual groups perform differently. Indeed, L2 learners and heritage speakers are expected to perform differently due to age-related effects, namely age of onset of acquisition. The age at which an individual starts acquiring a language has a direct impact on the amount of exposure and use of the language in the lifespan of the speaker, especially if this exposure occurs in a natural setting (Cuza & Frank, 2015; Montrul, 2010). Precisely, the main difference between the two experimental groups in this study is the age of onset of acquisition. Heritage speakers

are second or third-generation immigrants or early arrivals exposed to a minority language during early age in a natural context where a majority language is also spoken (Montrul, 2008; Valdés, 2001). On the other hand, L2 learners in the U.S. usually start acquiring their second language after puberty. If previous proposals on age-effects in L2 acquisition are correct (Coppieters, 1987; Jia, 1998; Jia & Aaronson, 1999; Tsimpli & Roussou, 1991), I would expect heritage speakers to outperform the L2 learners given their exposure to Spanish from birth, and subsequently more input and use of Spanish in a natural setting (Cuza & Frank, 2015; Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003; Jia, 1998; Johnson & Newport, 1989; Montrul, 2010).

## **1.2 Outline of the thesis**

The study is organized as follows. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical background on the constructs of tense and aspect, as well as the main theoretical approaches regarding aspectual selection. Furthermore, I discuss the semantic values of the present tense, both the simple present and the present progressive, in Spanish and in English. This chapter concludes with a summary of the similarities and divergences between the morphosemantic selectional properties of the present tense. Chapter 3 consists of a review of the literature that has previously examined the acquisition of the semantic values of the Spanish present tense in Spanish-English bilingual populations, namely L2 learners and heritage speakers of Spanish in the United States. This literature review is followed by the research questions for this study and the hypotheses. Chapter 4 presents the study. In this chapter, I discuss the methodology and the results of the study. The methodological section is focused on the participants and on the tasks that they

completed. This is followed by the results of each task. Finally, Chapter 5 provides the discussion of the results and the conclusions.



## CHAPTER 2 TENSE AND ASPECT

### 2.1 Introduction

The current study examines the acquisition of the different semantic values of the Spanish present tense. This chapter in particular focuses on the concepts on which this thesis is built, which are tense and aspect, as well as some of their theoretical approaches.

For this purpose, I describe the concepts of tense and aspect. The concept of aspect, in particular, is described from different perspectives: lexical aspect (Vendler, 1967), grammatical aspect (Comrie, 1976), and compositional aspect (Verkuyl, 1972; Schmitt, 1996). Moreover, I examine two theoretical approaches in regard to the issue of tense and aspect: the morphosyntactic approach (Giorgi & Pianesi, 1997), and the selectional approach (de Swart, 1998). These concepts and theoretical approaches are the framework for this thesis. Ultimately, this chapter concludes with a discussion about the semantic values of the present tense in both Spanish and English. I discuss the semantic values of both the simple present and the present progressive in both languages. Finally, I focus on their semantic divergences.

### 2.2 Tense

Tense is a deictic category that refers to the location of an event in the axis of time, as established by the time of the utterance or speech time (Reichenbach, 1947). For

Comrie (1985), tense can be defined as a grammaticalized expression of location in time.

Comrie (1976) describes the Spanish basic tenses as three: present (3), past (4), and future (5). The conditional tense (6) can be described as the future in the past.

(3) *Roberto estudia.*

‘Roberto studies.’

(4) *Mi hermano compró un piso.*

‘My brother bought an apartment.’

(5) *Sara viajará a Londres.*

‘Sara will travel to London.’

(6) *Sara dijo que Roberto iría también.*

‘Sara said that Roberto would go too.’

The present tense expresses an event that is simultaneous to the time of the utterance or speech time. In Spanish, the present tense can be expressed with either the simple present (3) or the present progressive. The past tense, on the other hand, is used when the event is previous to the time of the utterance or speech time. It can be expressed with the preterite (4) or the imperfect in Spanish. When the event is to take place in some moment after the time of the utterance or speech time, it is placed with the future tense (5).

Finally, the conditional tense (6) places an event in the future when describing a situation in the past. For the purposes of this thesis, only the present tense, which includes both the simple present and present progressive, is relevant.

## 2.3 Aspect

In contrast with tense, aspect is not deictic, as it does not establish any relationship between points in time, but rather refers to the internal characterization of the situation (Colomé, 2014). Rather than establishing connections between events and the time of the utterance or speech time in the axis of time, aspect refers to the internal temporary constituency of a situation (Comrie, 1976). In other words, tense is deictic because it establishes relationships between events and the time of the utterance or speech time from an external perspective. However, aspect is not deictic, as it focuses on the manner that the event is regarded internally.

Because aspect is not deictic and refers to the internal temporal characterization of events, there have been several proposals on how to explain it: lexical aspect (Vendler, 1967), grammatical aspect (Comrie, 1976), and compositional aspect (Verkuyl, 1972; Schmitt, 1996). As this thesis focuses on the Spanish present tense and its aspect or readings, the different theoretical perspectives on aspect are judged to be crucial for this work.

### 2.3.1 Lexical aspect

Lexical aspect is defined as the aspectual information provided by the lexical properties of verbs and their predicates (Colomé, 2014), such as their internal arguments or adjuncts. Vendler (1967) classifies verbs into four categories according to their lexical aspect: states, activities, accomplishments, and achievements. These four categories are based on telicity, dynamicity, and punctuality. Telicity refers to events that have an inherent limit or endpoint. Therefore, an event can be telic if it has an inherent limit or

endpoint, as in (5). On the other hand, an event is categorized as atelic if it does not have an inherent limit or endpoint, as illustrated in (6). This difference in telicity serves to distinguish accomplishments, and achievements, which are telic, from states, and activities, which are atelic.

(7) *Rocío se despertó a las 8.*

‘Rocío woke up at 8.’

(8) *A Borja le gusta el flamenco.*

‘Borja likes flamenco.’

Punctuality refers to something that happens instantaneously and lacks duration. Only achievements are punctual, as shown in (9). Finally, dynamicity denotes lack of stativity. Dynamicity is present in verbs denoting activities (10), accomplishments (11) and achievements (9), but not in verbs referring to states (12) (Geeslin & Fafulas, 2012).

(9) *Fernando firmó el contrato.* Achievement

‘Fernando signed the contract.’

(10) *La chica nadó en el mar.* Activity

‘The girl swam in the sea.’

(11) *El atleta está corriendo la maratón.* Accomplishment

‘The athlete is running the marathon.’

(12) *La señora parece estar preocupada.* State

‘The lady seems to be worried.’

These three features shape the four categories in which verbs can be classified according to their lexical aspect. The four categories and the semantic features that define them are summarized in the following table:

Table 2: Semantic values of verbal aspectual classes (Vendler, 1967)

Features	States	Activities	Accomplishments	Achievements
Punctual	-	-	-	+
Telic	-	-	+	+
Dynamic	-	+	+	+

This perspective on aspectual differences focuses on the inherent lexical properties of verbs.

### 2.3.2 Grammatical aspect

The concept of grammatical aspect suggests that aspectual differences are part of the verbal morphology or periphrastic expressions that the speaker chooses to use in their utterances (Comrie, 1976). The speaker is free to use the verbal morphology or periphrastic expression of his/her choice in order to give their utterance a specific aspectual reading.

In Romance languages, the distinction between preterite and imperfect is a case of grammatical aspect. The former allows a delimited or bounded reading, as in (13), whereas the latter only allows an unbounded reading, as shown in (14).

(13) *David hizo los deberes ayer.*

‘David did his homework yesterday.’

(14) *David hacía los deberes todos los días.*

‘David was doing his homework every day.’

The Portuguese present tense is also an example of grammatical aspect, as the Portuguese simple present and the Portuguese present progressive convey different readings. The simple present (15) allows a habitual reading, while the present progressive (16) has an ongoing interpretation.

(15) *Não como carne.*

‘I do not eat meat’.

(16) *Não estou comendo carne.*

‘I am not eating meat’.

This perspective is grounded on the morphological approach to aspect and focuses on the verb morphology excessively without paying attention to other factors that may affect the aspectual readings, such as the predicates in the sentences.

### 2.3.3 Compositional aspect

Compositional aspect claims that the aspectual reading of an utterance does not depend merely on the tense head of the verb, in contrast to the grammatical aspect perspective. The aspect of a specific sentence will therefore be determined by the tense head of the verb, as well as by the predicates and by the adjuncts of the sentence. In other words, the whole VP is responsible for the aspect given to an utterance rather than only the tense head (Verkuyl, 1972).

This perspective is exemplified in Brazilian Portuguese with the contrast between bare nouns and noun phrases with determiners in predicates (Schmitt, 1996, p. 236):

- (17) *??Eu matei um coelho por três anos.*  
 ‘I killed a rabbit for three years.’ (iteration is pragmatically odd)
- (18) *Eu matei coelho por três anos.*  
 I killed rabbit for three years.  
 ‘I killed rabbits for three years.’ (durative reading is ok)

In the example above, the contrast between the presence and the absence of the Portuguese determiner *um* ‘a’ changes the whole aspectual reading of the utterance and even gives it a pragmatically odd reading in the case of (17).

Another example of compositional aspect can be found in the Spanish present tense. The Spanish simple present can have various readings depending on the predicate of the utterance, as shown in (19) and (20):

- (19) *Ana camina todos los días.*  
 ‘Ana walks everyday’
- (20) *Ana camina ahora.*  
 ‘Ana is walking now’

As illustrated above, the Spanish simple present allows both a habitual and an ongoing meaning. These are mainly coerced by the predicate of the utterance, which, in the examples above (19, 20), are adverbial phrases. These aspectual differences are a crucial part of the object of study of this thesis.

The compositional aspect perspective is compatible with Vendler’s categorization of verbs. However, rather than focusing merely on the inherent lexical properties of the verb, one should consider the VP as a whole.

## 2.4 Theoretical approaches to tense and aspect

### 2.4.1 Morphosyntactic approach

The morphosyntactic approach to aspectual differences by Giorgi and Pianesi (1997) argues that the semantics of the verbal head derive merely from the verbal morphology. Aspectual differences in languages are stored in a functional category called Aspectual Phrase (AspP), which accounts for the different aspectual readings that a verbal head can allow by developing a specific overt morphology.

This approach attempts to account for the contrast between the English past tense and the past tense in Romance languages. While Romance languages have a rich morphology that allows them to express perfective and imperfective aspects in the past, English morphology only has one form for the past. This perfective feature that English verbs present when conjugated in the past tense prevent them from allowing further aspectual features, namely [-perfective], unlike Romance languages.

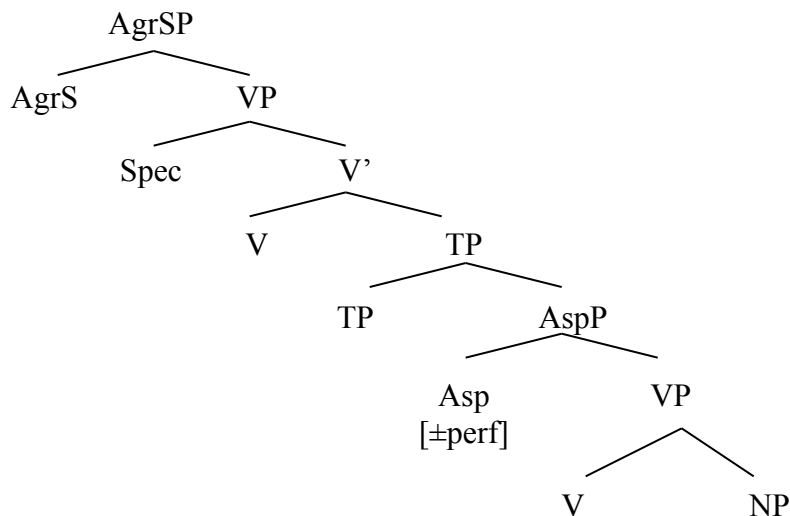


Figure 1: Arboreal representation of the AspP in the clause structure  
(Montrul, 2002)



In summary, languages display their aspectual differences through the presence or absence of overt morphology at the functional Aspectual Phrase. For example, Spanish has an overt morphology for the two aspects allowed in the Spanish past tense. English, on the other hand, only has one form for the past, as it allows only one aspectual reading. However, aspectual variation does not always match variation in morphology. Schmitt (2001) examines Brazilian Portuguese present tense, both simple present and present progressive, and compares them with their Spanish counterparts. Although both languages share similar morphology, the aspectual values in their present tenses do not follow the same distributional pattern: whereas the Spanish simple present allows both a habitual and an ongoing interpretation, Brazilian Portuguese assigns each interpretation to a different form.

Furthermore, after examining the concepts of lexical and compositional aspect, this work needs to consider broader theoretical approaches rather than restricting the study to the semantics of morphology. The theoretical approach to aspectual differences discussed in the following section, established by de Swart (1998), expands on compositional aspect to account for aspectual differences in languages.

#### **2.4.2 A selectional approach**

De Swart (1998) proposes a selectional approach to aspectual differences, following Kamp and Reyle's (1993) *Discourse Representation Theory*. The author argues that aspectual differences are determined by the semantic patterns of tense morphemes in semantic composition with other elements in the phrase (e.g., adverbs), namely aspectual or temporal operators. These operators can shift and coerce the semantic values of the

tense morphemes. She examines the contrast between preterite versus imperfect aspectual differences in French and other Romance languages and the English past tense, as well as the progressive forms in English, Romance languages such as Spanish and Portuguese and in Slavic languages, particularly Bulgarian. She concludes that aspectual differences are compositionally formed and layered. She follows Verkuyl's (1972) compositional perspective on aspectual differences, which argues that aspectual values are the result of the compositional relation between the verb and other elements in the phrase.

De Swart's conclusion that aspectual differences are compositionally formed and layered is grounded on the idea that aspect is composed by the predicate-argument structure, denominated *eventuality description*. At the lower layer, the verb along with other elements in the phrase determines the eventuality description. It is therefore closely related to lexical aspect. Eventualities can be events, states or processes. Events, which are achievement and accomplishment predicates, have an inherent endpoint and are categorized as *heterogeneous*. On the other hand, states and processes do not have an inherent endpoint and are considered *homogeneous*. At the upper layer, tense and aspectual operators can reinforce or modify the aspect of the eventuality description. Aspectual operators are very diverse; they can be adverbs, direct objects, prepositional phrases, etc. There may be one or more aspectual operators in a sentence. Tense operators can modify the eventuality description if there is a clash between the tense operators (e.g. preterite and imperfect morphemes in Spanish) and their respective aspectual notions (perfective versus imperfective). In contrast with Romance languages, de Swart (1998) argues that English simple past does not have selectional restrictions. Its tense head is neutral; it applies to either a homogeneous or a heterogeneous event. This analysis differs

from other proposals within a morphosyntactic perspective, which are argued that aspectual features are determined by the instantiation of [ $\pm$  perfective] features.

Schematically, de Swart (1998) summarizes the syntactic structure of tense/aspect in a sentence as [*Tense [Aspect\* [eventuality description]]*].

Schmitt (2001) follows de Swart's selectional approach to explain the aspectual differences between English and Brazilian Portuguese present tense. Portuguese verbs are morphologically similar to Spanish in the fact that their verb stems are always attached to bound morphology. However, in relation to the selectional properties of their present tenses, both languages differ. In contrast with Spanish, the Brazilian Portuguese simple present does not select an ongoing interpretation with eventive predicates (e.g., \**O Tiago lê neste momento*, 'Tiago reads right now'). As in English, Brazilian Portuguese uses the present progressive when expressing ongoing events. Schmitt (2001) claims that these aspectual differences are determined by the aspectual selectional restrictions established by tense heads and their sub-categorization frames. In other words, tense morphemes can select for specific types of eventuality descriptions. For instance, the Spanish simple present selects homogeneous predicates (states and processes), whereas English and Brazilian Portuguese simple presents select states only. This significant aspectual difference between Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese present tenses is used to explain that aspectual variation is not linked to specific morphological paradigms, not even in such morphologically similar languages.

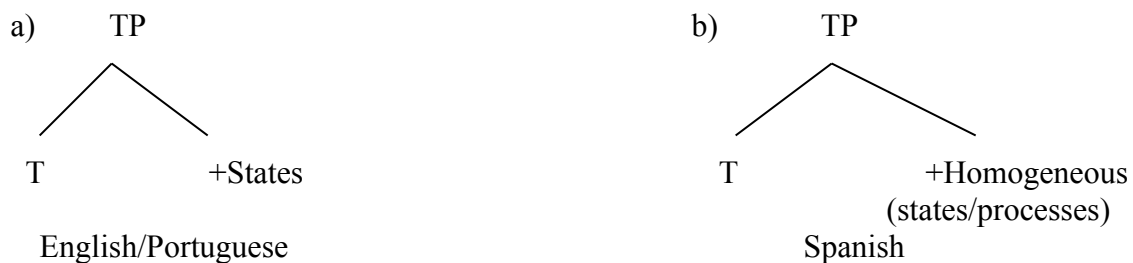


Figure 2: Syntactic representation of the selectional properties of the simple present in English/Portuguese and Spanish (Schmitt, 2001).

The selectional approach to aspectual differences by de Swart (1998) can adequately account for the semantic differences between Spanish and English present tense forms that are discussed in the next section.

### 2.5 The semantics of the Spanish and English present tense

Spanish and English show significant differences in regard to the semantic values of the simple present. In Spanish, the simple present has a wider spectrum of situational values. These values may precede or follow the speech act (Alarcos-Llorach, 1994; Alcina & Blecua, 1975; Yllera, 1999). The Spanish simple present has several semantic values: a habitual meaning (21), an ongoing interpretation (22), a futurate interpretation (23), a historical present interpretation (24), and a reportive interpretation (25) (e.g., Schmitt, 2001; Torres-Cacoullous, 2000). This is represented in (21-25) below:

- (21) *Roberto cocina todos los días.* [habitual]  
 ‘Roberto cooks everyday.’

- (22) *Lisa cena con sus padres ahora.* [ongoing]  
 ‘Lisa is having dinner with her parents now.’
- (23) *El tren llega mañana por la mañana.* [futate]  
 ‘The train arrives tomorrow morning.’
- (24) *Neil Armstrong pisa la luna en 1969.* [historical present]  
 ‘Neil Armstrong walks on the moon in 1969.’
- (25) *Ernesto se acerca a su hermana y la abraza.*[reportive present]  
 ‘Ernesto approaches her sister and hugs her.’

In (21), the simple present refers to a habitual or generic event, while in (22), the simple present refers to an ongoing or continuous event in the present. On the other hand, in (23), it refers to an event that will take place in the near future. In (24), the historical present describes a past event in a more tangible and lively manner, and in (25), the reportive present conveys an event that is occurring at the same moment as the speech act. Although it is also possible to use the progressive for ongoing events, both the simple present and the present progressive can refer to an ongoing event simultaneous to the speech act (e.g., Alarcos Llorach, 1994; Comrie, 1976; Schmitt, 2001; Yllera, 1999).

In regard to the present progressive, besides its traditional ongoing meaning, its aspectual values have extended. They also include an iterative meaning (i.e., *Están saliendo muchos jóvenes de España*, ‘Many young people are leaving Spain’), a habitual interpretation restricted to a specific period (i.e., *Antonio está estudiando mucho últimamente*, ‘Antonio is studying a lot lately’), and, in some Latin American Spanish varieties, immediate future readings (*Estamos llegando mañana* ‘We are arriving tomorrow’) (e.g., Aponte Alequín & Ortiz López, 2010; Cortés-Torres, 2005; Torres-

Cacoullos, 2000). The temporary-habitual meaning of the progressive allows a ‘lately’ or ‘recently’ interpretation in both Spanish (Fernández Ramírez, 1957; Schmitt, 2001; Yllera, 1999) and English (i.e., Laura is taking piano lessons) (De Swart, 1998; Slabakova, 2003).

In contrast with Spanish, the English simple present does not allow an ongoing reading. For ongoing readings, only the progressive can be used (Mateo is dancing/\*dances right now). As in Spanish, the English simple present has several semantic values: a habitual meaning (i.e., Mateo works out everyday), a futurate value (i.e., My flight departs tomorrow), a historical present interpretation (i.e., Ohio was granted statehood in 1803), and a reportive value (i.e., Juana turns around and notices she is alone). On the other hand, the English present progressive, as in Spanish, also allows a temporary-habitual interpretation (i.e. Marisa is playing too much on her phone) (e.g., Cowper, 1998; De Swart, 1998; Giorgi & Pianesi, 1997; Schmitt, 2001; Slabakova, 2003). It has been claimed that this notion of progressiveness is related to the lexical aspect of the verb or to the predicate type. For instance, stative verbs (i.e., to know, to see) do not normally accept a progressive form (\*I am knowing the answer). Nevertheless, this rule presents exceptions: some stative verbs may take a non-stative interpretation when the meaning of the specific message conveyed is non-stative (i.e., I’m being silly) (Comrie, 1976). Table 3 below summarizes the aspectual values of Spanish and English simple present and present progressive forms that are examined in the current study:

Table 3: Aspectual differences in English and Spanish

Aspectual values		Spanish	English
Simple present	[+ongoing]	Ana baila ahora.	∅
	[+habitual]	Ana baila todos los días.	Ana dances everyday.
Present progressive	[+ongoing]	Ana está bailando ahora.	Ana is dancing now.
	[+temporary-habitual]	Ana está bailando últimamente.	Ana is dancing lately.

In summary, as shown in the table above, both Spanish and English present progressive forms can allow an ongoing or a temporary-habitual reading. In relation to the simple present form, it can select for either an ongoing or a habitual interpretation in Spanish, but only for a habitual interpretation in English.

## 2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the concepts of tense and aspect. The former is deictic, as it is anchored in the axis of time, while the latter is not deictic and is subject to the internal temporal structure of an event. The concept of aspect has been viewed from different perspectives, which have been also explained in this chapter. The first being discussed is Vendler's (1967) lexical aspect and its four verbal aspectual classes. Vendler (1967) based aspect on the inherent lexical component of verbs and on whether or not they have three specific semantic features (punctuality, telicity, and dynamicity). In

opposition to lexical aspect, Comrie (1976) introduced the concept of grammatical aspect, which suggests that aspect is expressed in the verbal morphology rather than in the lexical components of verbs. Finally, Verkuyl's (1972) compositional approach encompasses previous approaches and defends that morphology does not suffice in determining aspect, as it is often combined with predicates in order to delimit the aspectual reading of an utterance.

The discussion on the definition of aspect led to further theoretical approaches on the topic. Giorgi and Pianesi's (1997) morphosyntactic approach is consistent with the notion of grammatical aspect, as it argues that aspectual differences depend on the Aspectual Phrase (AspP), which is a morphosyntactic element. In response to this approach, de Swart (1998) introduces the selectional view approach. This approach is consistent with the concept of compositional aspect in the sense that it also defends that aspect is a combination of the semantic properties of the tense head and the predicate of an utterance. De Swart (1998) describes that phenomenon as aspectual coercion or shift.

The last section of this chapter has described the semantic values that the Spanish and English present tenses can adopt: both the simple present and the present progressive. This section has established the similarities and discrepancies between the Spanish and the English present tenses, which might account for a possible cross-linguistic transfer in Spanish-English bilinguals. In the next chapter, I will review the literature that has previously covered cross-linguistic transfer in the present tense in Spanish-English bilinguals.



## CHAPTER 3 THE ACQUISITION OF THE SEMANTIC VALUES OF THE SPANISH PRESENT TENSE

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the acquisition of the semantic values of the Spanish present tense by reviewing previous research and its findings. This review includes original and seminal works, such as Klein (1980), as well as more recent and innovative research (Cuza, 2008, 2010; Geeslin & Fafulas, 2012; Pérez-Cortés, 2012; Sánchez-Muñoz, 2004). The next section of this chapter is focused on the research questions elaborated for the study. Finally, building on the findings of previous research, this chapter concludes with the hypotheses of the results that I expect to find.

### **3.2 Previous research**

In the last decades, several studies have examined the acquisition of the semantic values of the Spanish present tense by focusing on different populations: L2 learners, heritage speakers and long-term immigrants in the U.S. (Cuza, 2008, 2010; Geeslin & Fafulas, 2012; Klein, 1980; Pérez-Cortés, 2012). The first study examining this linguistic issue is Klein (1980). In the article, the author explained that the semantic values of the English simple present and progressive are categorical: the former allows only a habitual interpretation while the latter is used when expressing ongoing eventualities. On the other hand, the aspectual differences between Spanish simple present and present progressive

are not as clear, as an ongoing eventuality can be expressed with either simple present or present progressive forms. The author investigated the cross-linguistic influence from English into Spanish in the usage of the Spanish simple present and progressive in Spanish-English bilinguals. Klein selected two groups of participants: an experimental group formed by heritage speakers (born in the U.S. or who arrived before the age of 8;0) and a control group composed by late bilinguals (who arrived before the age of 16;0). All of the participants were of Puerto Rican background and lived in New York City. They all spoke English and had not received formal education in Spanish beyond high school. The author collected the data via two elicitation tasks: a semi-spontaneous conversation ranging from about 15 to 20 minutes in length, and a picture description elicitation task. The results of the study show that the heritage speakers used the simple present with an ongoing meaning significantly less than the control group; they preferred the progressive. Klein claimed that the heritage speaker group has undergone a process of semantic change due to cross-linguistic influence from English. That would account for the syntactic and pragmatic differences observed in their usage of the present tense in comparison with the control group.

More recently, Sánchez-Muñoz (2004) carried out a similar study with a different population. Sánchez-Muñoz studied the cross-linguistic interference in features of the Spanish progressive constructions in Los Angeles area, where both English and Spanish are spoken by a large part of the population. Sánchez-Muñoz argued that such interference adds strong features to the Spanish progressive from the English progressive and makes both the simple present and the present progressive share the same semantic values in both languages. To that end, Sánchez-Muñoz selected 5 different groups: three

control groups (Spanish monolinguals from Mexico, a Spanish monolinguals from Spain, and English monolinguals), and two experimental groups (heritage speakers and late bilinguals). The author interviewed participants from each group and elicited data through a picture description task. As in Klein (1980), Sánchez-Muñoz concluded that the bilingual populations, especially heritage speakers, overuse the Spanish progressive in contexts where monolinguals from both Mexico and Spain would use the simple present. In addition to the overextension of the progressive, the author noticed an extension of meaning in the direction of English, as some Spanish-English bilinguals use the Spanish progressive to refer to a future action, which is a feature of the English present progressive (*Estoy yendo a Chicago la próxima semana* 'I am going to Chicago next week').

In relation with second language acquisition and language attrition, Cuza (2008, 2010) is the first study to investigate the knowledge that English-speaking L2 learners and long-term immigrants have of the selectional properties of the Spanish simple present. The author followed de Swart's (1998) selectional approach to aspectual variation to account for the differences in L2 learners' selectional values. Cuza examined four linguistic structures: the ongoing and habitual values of both the simple present and the present progressive. Cuza selected three groups: a long-term immigrant group, a L2 learner group, and a control group. The long-term immigrant group was composed by Spanish speakers who immigrated to the U.S. or Canada in their early adulthood, whereas the L2 learner groups includes advanced English-speaking L2 learners of Spanish. Both the long-term immigrant group and the control group were composed exclusively by Caribbean Spanish speakers in order to avoid dialectal variations. The author

implemented a written acceptability judgment task, a truth-value judgment task and an oral narrative based on the wordless book *Frog Story*. In regard to L2 learners, the results of this study showed low levels of acceptance, interpretation and production of the simple present with an ongoing meaning in the bilingual groups, especially among the long-term immigrants. L2 learners only showed significant differences from the control group in the tokens aiming at the simple present with an ongoing meaning in the written acceptability judgment task. The author concluded that the interference of the English selectional values [+generic, -ongoing] had reduced the monolingual Spanish selectional values [+generic, +ongoing] in Spanish-English bilinguals. These results are consistent with previous research (Klein, 1980; Sánchez-Muñoz, 2004). Finally, Cuza noted that this reduction in selectional properties might not be due only to the influence of the selectional values of the English simple present, but also to the contact with other varieties of Spanish in contact with English (Spanish long-term immigrants or heritage speakers), which show a higher use of the progressive (Klein, 1980; Sánchez-Muñoz, 2004).

Geeslin and Fafulas (2012) followed a functional approach to research the frequency of the simple present and the present progressive in both native and non-native speakers of Spanish, as well as the linguistic variables that constrain the use of these tenses, such as lexical aspect, type of adverb, animacy of the subject and clause type. Thirteen ( $n = 13$ ) native speakers from many different Spanish-speaking countries and thirteen ( $n = 13$ ) proficient non-native speakers participated in the study. The study consisted of three tasks: a background questionnaire, a multiple-choice grammar test and a video-narration activity. The results of the study indicate that native speakers and non-native speakers

employ these tenses in very similar ways: they are affected by the same constraints. The constraints that the authors found to increase the use of the progressive forms are the presence of animate subjects, dynamic predicates and subordinate clauses among others. In terms of quantity, the two groups differ in their use of the present progressive: the present progressive is more common in non-native speakers than in native speakers. However, both groups used the simple present nearly 80% of the time. The authors conclude that L2 learners can acquire the semantic constraints of the use of the simple present versus the present progressive. However, these findings are limited by the fact that the main elicitation task that was used was an oral narrative. Spontaneous production has a bias toward the use of the simple present. Therefore, other elicitation methods might have been used in order to provide more categorical results.

Pérez-Cortés (2012) examines two aspects of the Spanish progressive in Spanish-English bilinguals: the transfer of the feature [ $\pm$ future] in the Spanish progressive and the role of lexical aspect. The author tested advanced L2 learners, heritage speakers and Spanish native-speakers from Latin America and Spain. The tasks employed in this study consisted in a background questionnaire and a grammaticality judgment test where the participants had to choose an interpretation for a specific sentence including a verb conjugated in the present progressive. The findings of the study indicate that both L2 learners and heritage speakers have a tendency to generalize the transfer of the feature [ $+$ future], 23% for the heritage speakers and 36% in the case of the L2 learners. Also, the author notes the importance of the lexical aspect of the target verbs in the findings, namely in activity verbs. This study sheds some light on the permeability of the Spanish progressive and other verb tenses when it comes to aspectual features. However, in some

Caribbean varieties of Spanish, the progressive tense can have a futurate reading (*En una semana estás exponiendo la defensa de tu tesis* ‘You are defending your thesis in one week’) (Aponte-Alequín & Ortiz-López, 2010; Torres-Cacoullos, 2010). Pérez-Cortés (2012) does not account for this futurate reading. If the participants were exposed to these varieties of Spanish, it would be possible that the findings might not be derived directly from a transfer from English. They might have acquired the acceptable futurate reading of the progressive in Caribbean Spanish.

To summarize, results show an overextension of the progressive in most ongoing situations, whereas the simple present with an ongoing meaning is much less common in bilingual groups than in the controls (Cuza, 2008; Geeslin & Fafulas, 2012; Klein, 1980; Sánchez-Muñoz, 2004). On the other hand, the Spanish simple present with a habitual meaning does not seem to represent any difficulty for Spanish-English bilinguals (Cuza, 2008), as both English and Spanish simple presents share the same habitual feature. These cues lead us to believe that there is a degree of cross-linguistic influence: it is arguable that Spanish-English bilingual groups may have reduced their range of aspectual selection of the Spanish simple present due to transfer from the English simple present values, which are more restrictive (Cuza, 2010). The monolingual Spanish simple present values [+generic, +ongoing] appear to be narrowed to the features [+generic, -ongoing], the same as those in the English simple present.

This reduction of the simple present values toward the feature [+generic] and of the progressive toward an ongoing meaning appears in all bilingual groups: L2 learners, heritage speakers and long-term immigrants (Klein, 1980; Sánchez-Muñoz, 2004; Cuza, 2008, 2010). However, Pérez-Cortés (2012) investigates the amplification of the

selectional properties of the Spanish progressive in Spanish-English bilinguals and concludes that the Spanish progressive may have obtained a futurate reading due to cross-linguistic influence from English, although it might be due to dialectal variation.

### **3.3 Research questions and hypotheses**

Following previous research on the semantic differences in English and Spanish simple present, I examine the acquisition of the semantic values of the Spanish simple present in advanced L2 speakers of Spanish and Spanish heritage speakers. As previous research shows, these bilingual groups do not show the same distribution of the Spanish simple present and progressive as native speakers. Therefore, I investigate to which extent these groups have acquired the values of these tenses, concretely the [+ongoing] value of the Spanish simple present, due to English influence. To that end, instead of focusing mostly on semi-spontaneous data, this study is the first to be based on three controlled elicitation tasks: an Elicited Production Task, an Acceptability Judgment Task, and a Forced Preference Task, along with a language history questionnaire and a proficiency exam in Spanish. Furthermore, previous research has mostly examined the reduction of the semantic of the Spanish simple present and the overextension of the present progressive in bilinguals. This study also examines the habitual values of both the simple present and the present progressive.

In addition to that, I examine two different groups to find out whether the acquisition of the semantic values of the Spanish simple present may be influenced by age-related factors, as heritage speakers have been exposed to Spanish input since birth in a natural setting while L2 learners have started to study Spanish after puberty. Age of onset of

bilingualism and linguistic experience are closely related to the acquisition of morphosyntactic patterns in the L2 not present in the L1 (Coppieters, 1987; Cuza & Frank, 2015; Montrul, Foote & Perpiñán, 2008). Cuza and Frank (2015) compared the extent to which advanced L2 learners of Spanish and Spanish heritage speakers have acquired the syntactic and semantic properties of the Spanish double complementizer questions. To that end, the authors implemented a sentence completion task, an acceptability judgment task and a preference task. The results showed that the heritage speakers group outperformed the L2 learners, which suggests that age of onset of acquisition and, therefore, earlier exposure and use of Spanish during childhood is crucial in the acquisition process. Montrul, Foote and Perpiñán (2008) also compared advanced L2 learners with heritage speakers in their Spanish gender agreement. The authors implemented three tasks: oral production, written production, and written recognition of Spanish gender agreement. The results showed that the heritage speakers outperformed the L2 learners in the oral task, while in the written tasks the L2 learners outperformed the heritage speakers. The authors argue that this difference in metalinguistic knowledge among the heritage speakers may stem from their lack of instruction in Spanish, which is the L2 learners' strength.

Thanks to the comparison between L2 learners and heritage speakers, it is possible to determine the role of age of onset of bilingualism and as well as linguistic experience. The two groups are expected to behave differently because of their age of onset of bilingualism and their linguistic experience, which favor the heritage speakers group. However, as both groups share the fact that they are bilingual and have the same primary language, they are expected to show patterns of cross-linguistic influence. However,



these patterns are likely to differ from one group to another (Cuza & Frank, 2015; Montrul, Foote & Perpiñán, 2008). Due to the differences in age of onset of bilingualism and, therefore, in amount of exposure during lifespan and particularly during childhood, I consider that it is imperative that both groups are compared and, according to the previous research reviewed above, I expect heritage speakers to outperform L2 learners.

I pose the following research questions:

**RQ1:** To what extent English-speaking L2 learners of Spanish and Spanish heritage speakers have knowledge of the morphosemantic values of the Spanish simple present and present progressive? Particularly:

i) What is their knowledge of the ongoing and habitual meaning of the Spanish simple present?

ii) What are their patterns of use and preference regarding the ongoing and habitual meaning of the Spanish present progressive?

**RQ2:** Is the acquisition of the semantic values of the present tense in Spanish subject to age-related effects? And if so, will heritage speakers of Spanish outperform L2 learners given their exposure to the language since birth and therefore more extended input and use?

Building on previous research, I expect both L2 learners and heritage speakers to perform differently from the native speakers group in relation to the semantic values of the Spanish present tense. This difference in the bilingual groups' performance is expected because of the divergent morphosemantic selectional properties existing in the two languages, particularly in the use of the simple present with an ongoing meaning, as this option is not available in English. Concretely, L2 learners of Spanish and Spanish

heritage speakers may transfer the selectional properties of the English simple present, which are [+habitual, -ongoing]. This more restrictive semantic scope of the English simple present in comparison with the Spanish simple present might lead to a narrowing of the selectional properties of the Spanish simple present in the direction of the habitual semantic value due to cross-linguistic influence from the English simple present and morphosemantic convergence. This would be confirmed if both bilingual groups show low levels of use, acceptance and preference of the simple present with an ongoing value. Moreover, the differences in performance between the bilingual groups and the native speakers might be found in the use of the progressive, as bilinguals might overextend it to contexts where the native speakers would use the simple present. However, as both the Spanish and the English simple present share a habitual semantic value, I expect that none of the experimental groups will face difficulties in this case.

Finally, on the basis of age-related factors mentioned above, namely age of onset of bilingualism and, therefore, earlier exposure to the language and consequently more extensive language input and use, it is foreseeable that heritage speakers' performance is closer to that of the control group than the L2 learners'. Specifically, I hypothesize the following:

**H1:** L2 learners and heritage speakers will show lower levels of use, intuition and preference of the simple present with an ongoing meaning. Given the existing differences between English and Spanish, they might overextend the progressive to contexts where the simple present is often preferred.

**H2:** L2 learners and heritage speakers will show no differences *vis a vis* native speakers in their use, intuition or acceptance of the simple present with a habitual

meaning. This is a core semantic value available in both languages and quite frequent in day-to-day input.

**H3:** L2 learners and heritage speakers will behave differently from native speakers in regard to their use and preference of the present progressive with an ongoing and a habitual/temporary meaning. The fact that both the simple present and the progressive allow for ongoing and habitual meanings in Spanish might cause bilingual speakers to overextend the present to these contexts as they converge into a less aspectually sensitive form.

**H4:** If maturational factors play a role in L2 and heritage language development as previously argued, we expect heritage speakers to outperform the L2 learners. The heritage speakers were exposed to Spanish from early age and have, consequently, being exposed to more language input and use in the life span (Montrul, 2008). I do not expect age-related effects among these two populations to stem necessarily from maturational constraints but rather from sociocultural factors and language experience, as has been argued by Jia (1998) and others.

In the next section, I discuss the study, including the participants, structures under analysis, tasks, and the results.

## CHAPTER 4 THE STUDY

### 4.1. Participants

A total of thirty-five ( $n = 35$ ) participants took part in the study: Thirteen ( $n = 13$ ) English-speaking L2 learners of Spanish (Mean age at testing, 21 years old; age range, 19–27) and thirteen ( $n = 13$ ) Spanish heritage speakers (Mean age at testing, 19 years old; age range, 18–22) participated in the study. Furthermore, I compared their results with nine ( $n = 9$ ) native speakers of Spanish participating as control baseline (Mean age at testing, 25 years old; age range, 20–34). All of the participants completed a language history questionnaire (Cuza, 2013; Cuza & Frank, 2015), which elicited information on the participants' linguistic background, patterns of language use and their self-assessment of Spanish and English skills. Furthermore, the participants completed a modified version of the DELE language proficiency test adapted to Latin American Spanish (Cuza, Pérez-Leroux & Sánchez, 2013). Following previous research, scores between 40 to 50 points were considered as 'advanced' proficiency level, scores between 30 to 39 points were considered as 'intermediate' proficiency and scores between 0 to 29 points were considered as 'low' proficiency (Montrul & Slabakova, 2003).

The L2 learner group was formed by intermediate and advanced English-speaking L2 learners of Spanish (Mean DELE score, 35/50). Out of the 13 L2 speakers that participated in the study, 38.5% (5/13) were considered as 'advanced', 23% (3/13) as

‘intermediate’, and 38.5% (5/13) as ‘low’. Their age range was 19-27 ( $M=22$ ,  $SD=2.56$ ). Most participants reported to speak ‘English’ or ‘mostly English’ at home and work (77% respectively), while 23% reported speaking ‘mostly Spanish’, ‘slightly more Spanish’ or ‘equal English and Spanish’. In social situations, again 77% indicated to speak ‘English’ or ‘mostly English’, and 23% reported speaking ‘mostly Spanish’, ‘slightly more Spanish’ or ‘equal English and Spanish’. Only 15% of the participants (2/13) indicated feeling equally comfortable in both languages, while 85% indicated feeling more comfortable in English. They reported to have native-like proficiency in English (3.9/4) and adequate/good proficiency in Spanish (2.7/4).

The heritage speakers’ group consisted of intermediate and advanced learners of Spanish born and raised in the U.S. (Mean DELE score 41/50), except two: one participant was born in Mexico and came to the U.S. before the age of one, and another participant was born in Argentina and immigrated to the U.S. at the age of ten. The parents of the heritage speakers’ group were born in Mexico, Argentina, the U.S., and Peru. Out of the 13 heritage speakers that participated in the study, 69% (9/13) were considered as ‘advanced’, and 23% (3/13) as ‘intermediate’. Their age range was 18-22 ( $M=19$ ,  $SD=1.29$ ). In regard to patterns of language use, 46% (6/13) of them reported speaking ‘Spanish’ or ‘mostly Spanish’ at home, 31% (4/13) reported speaking ‘equal English and Spanish’ and 23% (3/13) reported speaking ‘mostly English’ or ‘slightly more English’. The majority of the participants reported to use more English at school, work, and social situations and 77% indicated feeling comfortable in both English and Spanish; the other 23% indicated feeling more comfortable in English. Their reported

self-proficiency was almost native-like (3.7/4) in English and almost good/fluent (3.1/4) in Spanish.

The native speakers group was composed of native Spanish speakers from Spain, Colombia and Argentina, who have recently arrived to the U.S. (Mean length of residence, 5 months; range 2-13 months), and their age range was 20-34 ( $M=25$ ,  $SD=5.33$ ). In regard to patterns of language use, 33% (3/9) of them reported speaking 'Spanish' at home, 56% (5/9) of them reported speaking 'slightly more English', 'equal English and Spanish' or 'slightly more Spanish', and 11% (1/9) spoke 'English'. At school, 56% (5/9) reported speaking 'English' or 'mostly English', 11% (1/9) spoke 'slightly more English', 11% (1/9) spoke 'slightly more Spanish', and 11% (1/9) reported speaking 'Spanish'. At work, 56% (5/9) of them reported speaking 'English' or 'mostly English', while 44% (4/9) of them spoke 'slightly more Spanish' or 'mostly Spanish'. In social situations, 11% (1/9) reported speaking 'mostly English', 78% (7/9) reported speaking 'slightly more English', 'equal English and Spanish' or 'slightly more Spanish', while 11% (1/9) reported speaking 'mostly Spanish'. All of the participants in this group reported feeling more comfortable using Spanish. They reported to have adequate knowledge of English (2.7/4) and excellent knowledge of Spanish (3.9/4). Since they have all arrived recently to the U.S., they did not have to complete the DELE test.

Table 4: Summary of participants' information

	L2 learners (n=13)		Heritage speakers (n=13)		Controls (n=9)	
Age range	19-27 ( $M=22$ , $SD=2.56$ )		18-22 ( $M=19$ , $SD=1.29$ )		20-34 ( $M=25$ , $SD=5.33$ )	
DELE score	35/50		41/50		N/A	
Advanced	5/13		9/13			
Intermediate	3/13		3/13			
Low	5/13					
Self-reported proficiency in Spanish	2.7/4		3.1/4		3.9/4	
Self-reported proficiency in English	3.9/4		3.7/4		2.7/4	
First language of mother	English	13/13	English	0/13	English	0/9
	Spanish	0/13	Spanish	13/13	Spanish	9/9
First language of father	English	13/13	English	1/13	English	0/9
	Spanish	0/13	Spanish	12/13	Spanish	9/9
Patterns of language use:						
At home	English	77%	English	8%	English	56%
	Spanish	8%	Spanish	46%	Spanish	11%
	Both	15%	Both	46%	Both	22%
At school	English	46%	English	61%	English	11%
	Spanish	15%	Spanish	8%	Spanish	33%
	Both	39%	Both	31%	Both	56%
At work	English	77%	English	61%	English	56%
	Spanish	8%	Spanish	8%	Spanish	22%
	Both	8%	Both	8%	Both	11%
In social situations	English	77%	English	38%	English	11%
	Spanish	8%	Spanish	0%	Spanish	11%
	Both	15%	Both	46%	Both	78%

The table above summarizes the participants' information as well as their patterns of language use. It is important to note that the self-reported proficiency scores are a compound of self-reported scores on speaking, writing, reading, and comprehension skills. In regard to the patterns of language use, L2 learners use English much more than

Spanish in most contexts, whereas heritage speakers use their two languages in different contexts, namely Spanish at home and English at school. Finally, the controls also show a balanced pattern.

#### 4.2 Structures under analysis

This study has examined four structures in order to analyze if L2 learners and heritage speakers have acquired the semantic values of the Spanish present tense, which includes the simple present and the present progressive. The four conditions that have been studied are the following:

- i. Simple present with ongoing meaning:

(26) *Papá, ¿por qué manejas tan despacio?*

‘Dad, why are you driving so slowly?’

- ii. Simple present with habitual meaning:

(27) *Usualmente, Lisa camina a la escuela.*

‘Usually, Lisa walks to school.’

- iii. Present progressive with ongoing meaning:

(28) *En estos momentos, Lisa está cenando con sus padres.*

‘Lisa is having dinner with her parents right now.’

- iv. Present progressive with habitual meaning:

(29) *Últimamente, Lisa está fumando mucho.*

‘Lisa is smoking a lot lately.’

There were a total of 20 tokens plus 19 distractors. There were five tokens for each of the four conditions, which were coerced by different aspectual operators (*usualmente*



‘usually’, *generalmente* ‘generally’, *en estos momentos* ‘right now’, *últimamente* ‘lately’, etc.). The distractors were part of another study that examined the use of pronominal subjects with inanimate objects among Spanish heritage speakers.

Provided that both the simple present and the present progressive can select an ongoing meaning, the five tokens meant to elicit the simple present with an ongoing meaning were carefully selected in order to guarantee that this would be the form to be used in this context. They were initially selected based on the author’s native intuition of the language, and later piloted among native speakers. The five test tokens for this condition were:

(30)

a. *Lisa, ¿qué melodía tocas?*

‘Lisa, what melody are you playing?’

b. *Lisa, ¿qué te pasa?*

‘Lisa, what is happening to you?’

c. *Hermanito, ¿por qué caminas tan despacio?*

‘Little brother, why are you walking so slowly?’

d. *Lisa, ¿qué bebes?*

‘Lisa, what are you drinking?’

e. *Papá, ¿por qué manejas tan despacio?*

‘Dad, why are you driving so slowly?’

All test tokens were accompanied by a context and a picture depicting the action. In addition, all the test tokens in this condition were matrix *wh*-questions. The reason for this is that it is in these specific questions where Spanish speakers seem to use the simple

present with an ongoing meaning over the present progressive. The typical questions in Spanish *¿Qué pasa?* ('What's going on?') or *¿Qué haces?* ('What are you doing?') are consistent with this view. The use of the present progressive in these questions is somewhat odd. This view was supported by the piloting with native speakers and by the implementation of the tasks with native speakers.

### 4.3 Methods

The participants were asked to complete an Elicited Production Task, a written/aural Acceptability Judgment Task, and a Forced Preference Task (e.g., Crain & Thornton, 1998; Cuza & Frank, 2015; Montrul, 2004). All these tasks were complemented aurally with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation and a laptop. Each context and test token was read aloud to the participant, and their responses were digitally recorded for further analysis. One of the authors (a native speaker of Spanish) conducted the experiment in a private room. As in previous work, the Elicited Production Task was conducted first, followed by the Acceptability Judgment Task and finally the Forced Preference Task. The Forced Preference Task was the last one to be implemented in order to prevent any sort of priming effect on the other two tasks. The tasks were randomized and counterbalanced across the participants to avoid any potential presentation order effects. For the Elicited Production Task and the Forced Preference Task, responses were coded following a binary pattern where 1 was an expected answer and 0 was an unexpected answer. In the Elicited Production Task, only responses in simple present and present progressive were coded and other responses were not taken into consideration. However, only 28 out of 700 responses were coded as 'other'.

### 4.3.1 Elicited Production Task

The goal of the Elicited Production Task is to elicit the oral production of the ongoing value of the simple present as well as the other semantic interpretations of the present tense described in the previous section. An Elicited Production Task is a controlled task meant to lead the participant to produce a series of grammatical structures in a way that they do not need to heavily depend on their metalinguistic knowledge. The participants were presented the tokens of the task, which included a context and a picture; they were then asked to complete a sentence on the basis of the story and the picture, as shown below:

#### Elicited Production Task

**Condition:** *Simple Present with an ongoing meaning*

(Picture of Lisa weeping by her mom)

**Context:** *Hoy Lisa está muy molesta. En este momento su mamá llega a casa y le pregunta...*

‘Lisa is very upset today. Her mother arrives home now and asks Lisa...’

**Prompt:** *¿qué \_\_\_\_\_?*

(*pasarte* ‘to happen, you’)

‘What’s \_\_\_\_\_?’

**Expected response:** *¿qué te pasa?* ‘What’s happening to you?’ (coded as 1)

**Unexpected response:** *¿qué te está pasando?* ‘What’s happening to you?’ (coded as 0)

The participants were asked to complete the sentence using the verb provided in parenthesis, which was given in its infinitive form.

### 4.3.2 The Acceptability Judgment Task

The goal of the Acceptability Judgment Task in this study is to elicit the grammatical intuition of the participants. This task allows the researcher to know the grammatical intuition of the participants in relation to the specific grammatical structures under examination. In this specific task, participants were asked to assess the grammaticality of the two semantic values of the simple present and the present progressive on which this thesis focuses. First, they were presented with a short context followed by a sentence. Then, the researcher read both the context and the sentence aloud. Finally, the participant asked to indicate whether the sentence sounded *completely odd*, *odd*, *neither odd nor good*, *good* or *completely good* in Spanish according to the context. If the participant thought the sentence was *completely odd* or *odd*, they were asked to explain why. This is shown below:

#### Acceptability Judgment Task

**Condition:** *Present progressive with an ongoing meaning*

(Picture of Lisa having dinner with her family.)

**Context:** *A Lisa le gusta cenar con sus amigas, pero hoy no puede. ¿Por qué no puede?*

‘Lisa likes to have dinner with her friends but she can’t today. Why can’t she today?’

**Target:** *Porque en estos momentos Lisa está cenando con su padres*

‘Because Lisa is having dinner with her parents right now’

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

completely odd    odd            neither good nor bad            **good**    **completely good**

**Expected response:** *good or completely good*

If the participant judged the sentence as *completely odd* or *odd* and the reason that they provided to do so was not related to the use of the simple present or the present progressive, the response was not considered for quantitative analysis. As in the Elicited Production Task, this task had a total of 20 test tokens and 19 distractors.

### 4.3.3 The Forced Preference Task

The last task to be implemented in this study was a Forced Preference Task. The goal of task is to assess the internal interpretation that bilingual speakers have about certain structures and has been used successfully in previous research with heritage speakers of Spanish and L2 learners (Cuza & Frank, 2014, 2015; Montrul & Ionin, 2010). The participants were asked to choose between the Spanish simple present and the present progressive after being presented with the same tokens as in the previous tasks. The researcher read the context and the two options aloud for the participant, who was asked to decide which of the two sentences was preferable to him. This is presented below:

#### **Forced Preference Task**

**Condition:** *Simple Present with an ongoing meaning*

(Picture of Lisa walking with her brother.)

**Context:** *El hermano de Lisa es muy lento y Lisa está apresurada por regresar a casa. Ella le pregunta...*

‘Lisa’s brother walks very slowly and Lisa is in a hurry to go back home. She asks him...’

(a) \_\_\_\_ *Hermanito, ¿por qué estás caminando tan despacio?*

‘Little brother, why are you walking so slowly?’

(b) \_\_\_\_ *Hermanito, ¿por qué caminas tan despacio?*

‘Little brother, why are you walking so slowly?’

**Expected response:** (b) (1 point awarded)

In the Forced Preference Task, as in the previous tasks, all tokens were randomized and counterbalanced in order to prevent any presentation effect.

## 4.4 Results

### 4.4.1 Elicited Production Task

In contrast to what was expected and stated in hypothesis 1, the results from the Elicited Production Task showed higher levels of use of the simple present form with an ongoing meaning among the L2 learners and the heritage speakers. The simple present with a habitual meaning did not show any difference among groups, as predicted in hypothesis 2. In regard to the use of the present progressive with an ongoing meaning, the two bilingual groups behaved differently from the native speakers, which confirms hypothesis 3 (HS=29%; L2=69%, NNS= 89%). Finally, all groups, including the controls, preferred the simple present in temporary-habitual contexts where the present progressive was expected. These results are represented in Figure 3 below:

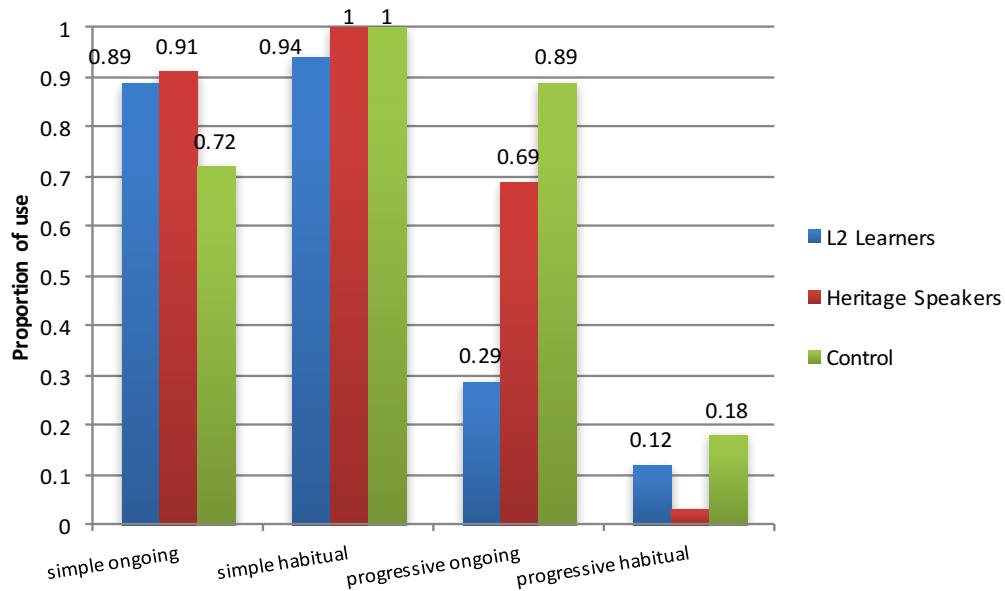


Figure 3: Results of Elicited Production Task: Mean results per condition and group

In order to examine the differences per group and condition, an analysis of variance (ANOVAS) with repeated measures was conducted with group (L2 learners, heritage speakers and controls) as the between subject factor (independent variable) and with form (present, progressive) and situation type (habitual, ongoing) as the within subject factor (dependent factor). The proportions 1 or 0 for expected and non-expected responses respectively were transformed into arcsine values before conducting the parametric tests. Results showed a significant effect per group ( $F(2, 32) = 5.76, p < .007$ ), and a significant interaction between tense and situation type ( $F(1.63) = 73.45, p < .0001$ ). Tukey post-hoc tests measuring where the differences lie between groups showed significant differences between the L2 learners and the controls ( $p < .014$ ) and the heritage speakers and the L2 learners ( $p < .025$ ). There were no significant differences between heritage speakers and controls ( $p < .871$ ).

Independent samples t-tests looking at each conditions showed significant differences in the simple present with an ongoing meaning condition between the L2 learners and the controls ( $M= 1.39$  vs.  $M= 1.07$ ,  $t(20) = 2.21$ ,  $p <.039$ ) and between the heritage speakers and the controls ( $M= 1.41$  vs.  $M= 1.07$ ,  $t(20) = 2.56$ ,  $p <.019$ ). In contrast to what was predicted in hypothesis 1, the L2 learners and the heritage speakers showed a higher level of use of the simple present in ongoing contexts. Furthermore, independent samples t-test showed significant differences between the L2 learners and the native speakers with the present progressive with an ongoing meaning condition ( $M= .44$  vs.  $M= 1.34$ ,  $t(20) = -3.87$ ,  $p <.001$ ). In regard to the heritage speakers, they showed similar patterns, but their performance was not significantly different from the controls. On the other hand, the L2 learners did perform significantly differently from the controls. Finally, in relation to the present progressive with a habitual meaning condition, most participants, including the control group, use the simple present. Even though the heritage speakers group outperformed the L2 learners in ongoing contexts, overall both experimental groups behaved similarly on this task. This disconfirms hypothesis 4.

#### **4.4.2 Acceptability Judgment Task**

A repeated measures ANOVAS on the proportion of responses in the Acceptability Judgment Task was conducted in order to examine the differences between groups. Results revealed no significant differences among groups ( $F(2, 32) = 2.44$ ,  $p = .102$ ), in contrast to what was predicted. The two experimental groups showed knowledge of the simple present with ongoing meaning, as it was largely accepted as grammatical. However, the two experimental groups differed in that the L2 learners showed lower



levels of acceptance of the present progressive with a habitual meaning condition, in comparison to heritage speakers and controls ( $M= 3.7$  vs.  $M= 4.5$ ). There was a significant interaction between tense and situation type ( $F(1.44)=12.34$ ,  $p <.0001$ ), which stems from the differences found between the present progressive with a habitual meaning condition and the rest of the conditions. This is shown in Figure 4 below:

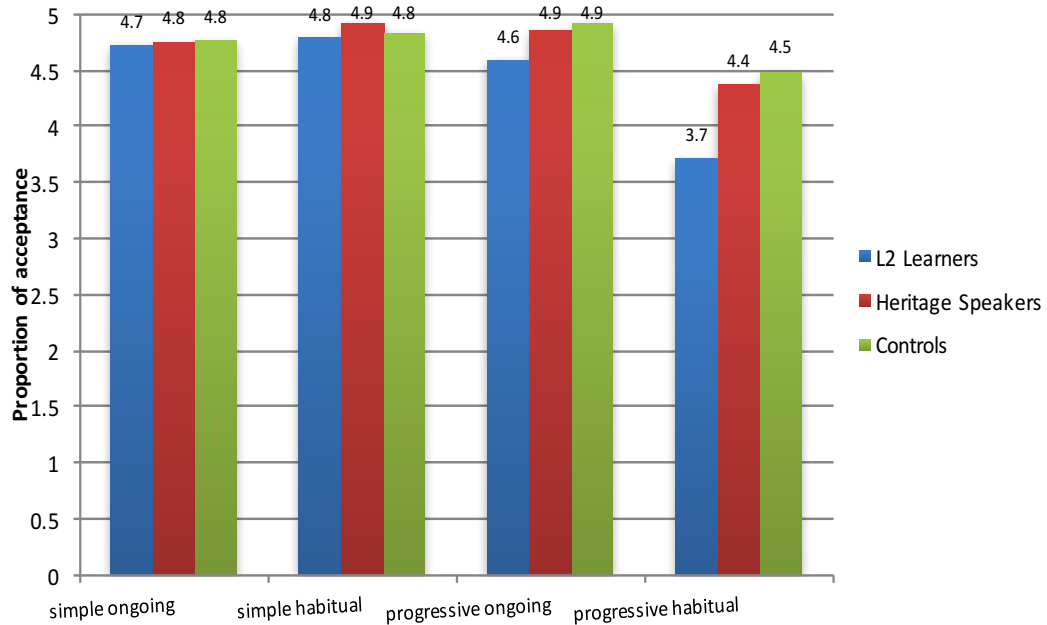


Figure 4: Results of Acceptability Judgment Task. Mean results per condition and group

Although the results of this task were not consistent with what was predicted before, they were not surprising provided that both the simple present and the present progressive are grammatical in the contexts examined. In regard to the tokens that were judged as completely odd or odd, only 3 out of 700 were judged as completely odd. These were forms of the present progressive with a habitual meaning. On the other hand, 29 out of 700 tokens were judged as odd. Most of them were tokens of the present progressive with

a habitual meaning. The participants reported that they would rather use the simple present for those contexts.

#### 4.4.3 Forced Preference Task

Results from the Forced Preference Task showed a lower preference rate of the simple present form with an ongoing meaning among the L2 learners (58%) and the heritage speakers (52%). In regard to the preference for the simple present with a habitual meaning, there were no differences among groups, as predicted in hypothesis 2. As in the Elicited Production Task, the L2 learners showed lower levels of preference for the present progressive in present progressive ongoing contexts (75%), in contrast with the heritage speakers (86%) and the controls (100%). The L2 learners are overextending the simple present form to these contexts. This is not ungrammatical, but is less preferred than the use of the simple present. This view is supported by the results provided by the controls. On the other hand, the heritage speakers' performance was closer to the controls'. Finally, regarding the preference for the present progressive with a temporary-habitual meaning, the L2 learners and the heritage speakers showed higher levels of sensitivity than in the Elicited Production Task ( $M=17\%$  vs.  $M=29\%$ ), but still behaved differently from the controls ( $M=60\%$ ). This is shown in Figure 5:

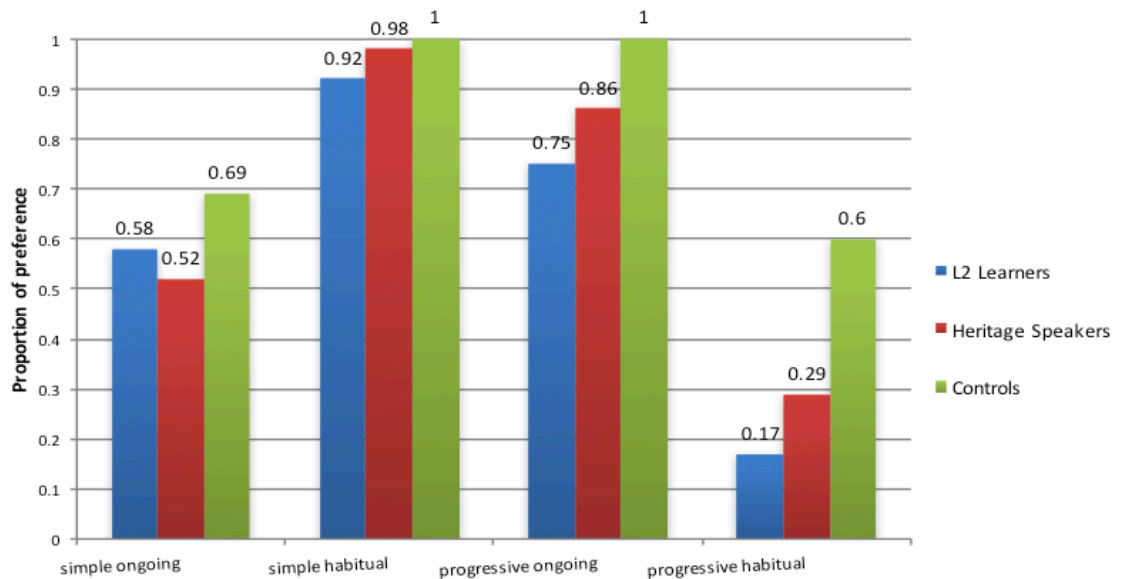


Figure 5: Results of Forced Preference Task. Mean results per condition and group

In order to determine if there were significant differences among groups, a repeated measures ANOVAS on the proportion of responses was conducted. It revealed significant differences among groups ( $F(2, 32) = 6.63, p < .004$ ). The results also showed a significant interaction between tense and situation type ( $F(2.47) = 35.79, p < .0001$ ). Tukey post-hoc tests showed significant differences between the heritage speakers and the controls ( $p < .021$ ) and the L2 learners and the controls ( $p < .004$ ).

Independent samples t-tests showed no significant differences between the two experimental groups and the controls with the simple present with an ongoing meaning (HS-Control,  $p = .214$ ; L2-Control,  $p = .645$ ), in contrast to what was predicted in hypothesis 1. All of the participants preferred the use of the simple present form over 50% of the time. Regarding the present progressive with an ongoing meaning conditions, the results showed significant differences between the L2 learners and the controls ( $M=$

1.19 vs.  $M= 1.57$ ,  $t(20) = -2.026$ ,  $p <.05$ ). The L2 learners significantly preferred the present form rather than the progressive. This suggests that the distribution of the simple present and present progressive forms has not been fully acquired, in contrast to the heritage speakers, and especially, in contrast to the control group. In regard to the heritage speakers, they did not behave significantly different from the controls in the use of the present progressive in ongoing situations ( $M= .486$  vs.  $M= .917$   $t(20) = -1.822$ ,  $p =.084$ ). This confirms hypothesis 3 partially, and confirms hypothesis 4. Regarding the present progressive with a habitual meaning conditions, the L2 learners also overextended the simple present to these contexts and differed significantly from the controls ( $M= .316$  vs.  $M= .917$ ,  $t(20) = -2.653$ ,  $p <.015$ ). This was also the case of the heritage speakers when compared to the controls ( $M= 1.32$  vs.  $M= 1.57$ ,  $t(20) = -2.087$ ,  $p <.05$ ).

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Introduction

The current study has examined the extent to which L2 learners and heritage speakers of Spanish get to acquire the semantic values of the Spanish present tense, and crucially, the ongoing meaning of the Spanish simple present. This semantic interpretation is not present in English and is not typically taught in language classrooms. Furthermore, I examine the use, intuition and representation of four semantic values related to the Spanish simple present and present progressive. In addition, the results of the English-speaking L2 learners and the heritage speakers were compared.

### 5.2 Discussion

The research questions and hypotheses formulated in Chapter 3 are reiterated below:

**RQ1:** To what extent English-speaking L2 learners of Spanish and Spanish heritage speakers have knowledge of the morphosemantic values of the Spanish simple present and present progressive? Particularly:

i) What is their knowledge of the ongoing and habitual meaning of the Spanish simple present?

**H1:** L2 learners and heritage speakers will show lower levels of use, intuition and preference of the simple present with an ongoing meaning. Given the existing differences

between English and Spanish, they might overextend the progressive to contexts where the simple present is often preferred.

**H2:** L2 learners and heritage speakers will show no differences *vis a vis* native speakers in their use, intuition or acceptance of the simple present with a habitual meaning. This is a core semantic value available in both languages and quite frequent in day-to-day input.

ii) What are their patterns of use and preference regarding the ongoing and habitual meaning of the Spanish present progressive?

**H3:** L2 learners and heritage speakers will behave differently from native speakers in regard to their use and preference of the present progressive with an ongoing and a habitual/temporary meaning. The fact that both the simple present and the progressive allow for ongoing and habitual meanings in Spanish might cause bilingual speakers to overextend the present to these contexts as they converge into a less aspectually sensitive form.

**RQ2:** Is the acquisition of the semantic values of the present tense in Spanish subject to age-related effects? And if so, will heritage speakers of Spanish outperform L2 learners given their exposure to the language since birth and therefore more extended input and use?

**H4:** If maturational factors play a role in L2 and heritage language development as previously argued, we expect heritage speakers to outperform the L2 learners. The heritage speakers were exposed to Spanish from early age and have, consequently, being exposed to more language input and use in the life span (Montrul, 2008). I do not expect age-related effects among these two populations to stem necessarily from

maturational constraints but rather from sociocultural factors and language experience, as has been argued by Jia (1998) and others.

The results obtained from the Elicited Production Task show a high use of the Spanish simple present in ongoing situations among the two experimental groups in comparison to the controls. The L2 learners and the heritage speakers showed ceiling performance (89% and 91%), whereas the controls' performance was more balanced in their use of the simple present versus the present progressive with an ongoing meaning condition (72%). This disconfirms hypothesis 1.

A prima facie, it seems as if the L2 learners and the Spanish heritage speakers have acquired the ongoing semantic value of the simple present in Spanish, in contrast with previous research (Cuza, 2008; Klein, 1980; Sánchez-Muñoz, 2004). However, these results need to be carefully examined, as the bilinguals overextended the simple present to contexts where the present progressive was expected. The controls, on the other hand, largely used and preferred the present progressive where it was expected. This overextension was more crucial in the L2 learners group. In the present progressive with an ongoing meaning, the L2 learners used the simple present 71% of the time, whereas the heritage speakers used it 31% of the time. On the other hand, the controls only used it 11% of the time. Even though the use of the simple present in these contexts is not ungrammatical, the five tokens in this condition were introduced by the adverbial phrase *en estos momentos* ('right now'), which primes the use of the present progressive. It is clear that the L2 learners are overextending the simple present to contexts where the present progressive is largely preferred among native speakers, and even among the

heritage speakers. This overextension across the board questions whether the L2 learners have really acquired the semantic values of the simple present.

Furthermore, regarding the present progressive with a habitual meaning condition, both the L2 learners and the heritage speakers showed a high level of the use of the simple present rather than the present progressive, which was the expected form to be used (e.g., *Últimamente, Lisa nada mucho* ‘Lisa is swimming too much lately’) (simple present use: L2= 88%; HS=98%; Control=82%). However, the controls also showed high levels of use of the simple present in this specific condition. Therefore, as the controls also used the simple present in this condition, it cannot be concluded that the experimental groups overextended the simple present to this condition. It can be argued that it might be the result of a task effect or even a lexical issue. If we take a closer look to the results of this condition, 44% (4/9) of the controls used the present progressive with the test token *Lisa está fumando mucho últimamente* (‘Lisa is smoking too much lately’). On the other hand, it was not so frequent with other items. This suggests that it might be an item effect in this task. However, in this specific item, only 2/13 L2 learners and 1/13 of the heritage speakers used the present progressive. Again, this questions whether the experimental groups have acquired the sensitivity to the subtle differences in the use of the simple present and the present progressive.

The results of the Forced Preference Task differ slightly from those from the Elicited Production Task. First, the L2 learners and the heritage speakers seem to be indecisive in their choice between the simple present and the present progressive in the simple present with an ongoing meaning condition. L2 learners preferred the simple present 58% of the time, while the heritage speakers chose it 53% of the time, in comparison to the controls,



who preferred it 69% of the time. This is consistent with the predictions stated in hypothesis 1. As in the Elicited Production Task, the L2 learners showed higher levels of preference for the simple present in present progressive with an ongoing meaning contexts (25%) than the Spanish heritage speakers (14%) and than the controls (0%). Even though preferring the simple present 25% of the time is not much, what these data shows is that the L2 learners' performance is again lower compared to the heritage speakers and the controls. This suggests an advantage for the Spanish heritage speakers over the L2 learners, which is consistent with previous research. It seems like the L2 learners are indecisive when having to prefer one form between the simple present and the present progressive. This perspective is supported by the results of the present progressive with a habitual meaning condition. In these contexts, the L2 learners preferred the simple present 83% of the time, while the heritage speakers chose it 71% of the time. On the other hand, the controls also used the simple present in this context, but it was only 40% of the time.

Finally, the goal of the Acceptability Judgment Task was to examine the grammatical intuition of the participants in regard to the aspectual properties of the Spanish present tense. Nonetheless, this task was expected to offer meaningful insights from the grammatical intuition of the use of the simple present with an ongoing meaning, a semantic value available in Spanish, but not in English. However, the results obtained from this task did not show differences among groups, which is not surprising provided that all tokens were grammatical.

Overall, considering the results of all the tasks, the findings of the current study indicate that English-speaking L2 learners of Spanish and Spanish heritage speakers

show different levels of use and preference of the semantic values of the Spanish present tense, which includes both the simple present and the present progressive, in comparison to native speakers of Spanish. This can be observed in their inconsistent patterns of use and preference of the simple present with an ongoing meaning. Moreover, this can be evidenced in their preference and use of the simple present in ongoing and habitual contexts where the present progressive is usually preferred. The overextension across the board in oral production and in their preference suggests that the bilingual groups may have undergone a process of morphosemantic convergence toward a less marked form, the simple present, which also happens to be a less sensitive form in terms of aspect. In other words, the experimental groups are overextending the simple present, which is less restrictive and simpler in terms of morphology than the present progressive, to contexts where the progressive is overwhelmingly preferred by the native controls. This process of morphosemantic convergence has also been found with distinctions between the Spanish preterite and imperfect by Pérez-Leroux et al. (2008). I argue for the simple present being less marked than the present progressive, as it is morphologically simpler and semantically broader than the present progressive. Therefore, the present progressive would be the more peripheral and marked form and, therefore, the simple present would be the first form to be acquired. The relationship between markedness and second language acquisition has been largely discussed (Liceras, 1983; White, 1987) and applied to second language acquisition of diverse linguistic structures (Pérez-Leroux et al., 2011).

The results of this study differ significantly from those found by previous research (Cuza, 2008, 2010; Klein, 1980; Pérez-Cortés, 2012; Sánchez-Muñoz, 2004). The main difference between the current study and previous research is the overextension of the

simple present instead of the previously documented overextension of the present progressive in most ongoing contexts. This difference may be accounted by the new methodological approach on the topic: instead of restricting this study to semi-spontaneous data, this study has looked at controlled elicited data from production, intuition, and preference tasks. In regard to the examined structure, the current study is the first to have looked at the Spanish simple present and the present progressive with both of their semantic values: ongoing and habitual. Also, in terms of participants, this study has examined both L2 learners and heritage speakers.

Finally, if the results from the Elicited Production Task and the Forced Preference Task are taken into consideration altogether, their data indicate that there is an advantage for the heritage speakers group. This is consistent with previous research (Cuza & Frank, 2015; Jia, 1998; Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003; Montrul, Foote & Perpiñan, 2008). Specifically, the L2 learners overextended the simple present significantly more than the heritage speakers. In other words, the L2 learners group showed much lower levels of use and preference of the present progressive with an ongoing meaning, when compared to the heritage speakers in contexts where the native speakers largely preferred the use of the progressive. This perspective is also supported by the data from the Forced Preference Task with the contexts testing the present progressive with a habitual meaning. In these contexts, the heritage speakers' performance was slightly closer to the controls' in their use of the present progressive ( $M=17%$ ;  $M=29%$ ). The bilingual groups, particularly the L2 learners, have come up with a new organization of their semantic space that is different from that of native speakers. The advantage of the heritage speakers group over the L2 learners described above may derive from age-related effects, particularly from

the early exposure to Spanish that the heritage speakers have experienced from birth. The fact that the heritage speakers have received more input and have used Spanish significantly more than L2 learners may account for a representation of the morphosemantic properties of the Spanish simple present and present progressive that is closer to that of native speakers.

In regard to the participants' information, the proficiency levels reported by the DELE exam were not statistically significant when confronted to the results of the tasks. Individually, only one L2 learner, whose DELE score was 45/50, displayed a native-like distributional pattern of the present tense forms. This might be the case because the DELE is a metalinguistically constrained task that favors L2 learners, as they have more metalinguistic knowledge from classroom instruction. However, this might not translate into native-like production in online speech or preference. Although L2 learners may have different proficiency levels, their production and preference in this structure does not show differences maybe due to performance issues. This is supported by the results of the Acceptability Judgment Task, which show no differences between the groups. On the other hand, the patterns of language use do not translate into differences in proficiency levels or significant differences within groups.

### **5.3 Conclusions and future directions**

To conclude, this study has documented significant difficulties among heritage speakers and L2 learners in regard to the representation of the semantic values of the Spanish present tense, an area of research thus far underexplored. I have argued that the difficulties found stem from bilingualism effects from English, which lead to a lack of

sensitivity in the distribution and use of the simple present versus the present progressive, as well as age-related effects and limited exposure and use of the language. Bilingualism effects are a result of the interactions between the two languages of a bilingual that differ with regard to a specific grammatical property. They can derive from the grammatical differences or from different exposure to the languages (Pirvulescu et al., 2014).

This study departs from previous research examining bilingualism effects in tense and aspect, namely the preterite/imperfect aspectual differences and their acquisition by bilingual speakers of English and a Romance language. A theory of semantic transfer and bilingualism effects similar to those used in previous research focusing on the past tense has contributed to the scarce studies examining bilingualism effects in the present tense.

Finally, future research studying semantic transfer in the present tense can follow different paths. For instance, future research could focus on whether new semantic values could transfer from one language into the other in bilingual groups. For example, Pérez-Cortés (2012) is the first study to examine the semantic transfer of the [+future] semantic value of the English present progressive in Spanish-English bilinguals. On the other hand, future research could also examine different language pairs where the aspects of the present tense do not overlap. A theory of semantic transfer could be applied in Spanish-Portuguese and Spanish-French bilinguals, as both Brazilian Portuguese and French present tense aspects differ from those in Spanish. Although these three are Romance languages and do not display any significant aspectual difference in the past tense, their present tenses are completely different in terms of aspect. Brazilian Portuguese simple present selects only states, whereas the present progressive is reserved for processes (Schmitt, 2001). On the other hand, French lacks a present progressive form and its

simple present is homogeneous, as the Spanish simple present, selecting both states and processes. The study of languages with similar morphosyntactic paradigms but different selectional properties, namely in the language pairs mentioned above, could lead to meaningful insights for the theories of semantic transfer.

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