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Berends, S.; Sleeman, P.; Hulk, A.; Schaeffer, J.

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Sanne Berends, Petra Sleeman, Aafke Hulk & Jeannette Schaeffer

The L2 acquisition of the referential semantics of Dutch partitive pronoun ER constructions

Studies of second-language acquisition have repeatedly addressed the role of the home language (L1) in the acquisition of the second language (L2). In these studies, the acquisition of syntactic properties has often prevailed over the acquisition of semantic properties (Gass 1984; Meisel 1997; Ionin & Montrul 2010). In this article, we examine L2 learners' ability to acquire certain semantic properties of the Dutch partitive pronoun construction. To do this, we identified two home languages that represent familiarity (French) and non-familiarity (English) with a partitive pronoun. Examining the behaviour of partitive constructions, we argue that there is variation in the representations of partitive constructions in all languages involved. We argue that Dutch has a partitive pronoun (ER) – also referred to as a 'quantitative' pronoun – that encodes the property [non-presupposition], French has a partitive pronoun (EN) that encodes the properties [non-presupposition / presupposition], whereas in English no partitive pronoun exists. We then investigate the role that the home language properties play in the L2 acquisition of semantic properties associated with Dutch partitive pronoun constructions. We present Grammaticality Judgement Task (GJT) data that reveal that signs of semantic influence of L1 are visible in the L2.

1 Introduction

For many years, the role of the first language and its relationship to a second one has been an important issue in the field of second language acquisition. As a result, it is well documented that the home language plays a central role in learning a second language in multiple linguistic subdomains (Odlin 2003;

Notes: The research for this paper was part of Sanne Berends' PhD project *Acquiring Dutch quantitative ER* (Berends 2019), which was supervised by Aafke Hulk, Petra Sleeman & Jeannette Schaeffer and carried out at the Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication (AACL) of the University of Amsterdam. We thank the reviewers of this paper for their valuable comments.

Isurin 2005; Hattori & Iverson 2009). The present study, however, focuses on L2 learners' ability to acquire semantic properties of a Dutch construction that has hardly been investigated before: the Dutch partitive pronoun construction, also often referred to as the quantitative pronoun construction.

A partitive pronoun construction in Dutch occurs when the NP is elided in the quantificational discourse. In object position, merely omitting the noun results in an ungrammatical sentence, see (1a); insertion of the partitive pronoun (ER) is required, see (1b).

- (1) a. *Marie bakt koekjes.* → **Zij eet drie.*
 Mary bakes biscuits she eats three
 'Mary bakes biscuits.' 'She eats three.'
- b. *Marie bakt koekjes.* → *Zij eet er drie.*
 Mary bakes biscuits she eats ER three
 'Mary bakes biscuits.' 'She eats three.'

The presence of the Dutch partitive pronoun ER is subject to semantic constraints on the quantifier. The semantic constraint included in this study is [presuppositionality], tested with the [+/-definite] and [+/-strong] distinctions of the quantifier. Both properties presuppose either existence or non-existence: the property [+definite] of the quantifier determines the existence of a specific referent in the preceding discourse, whereas the property [-definite] of the quantifier determines the non-existence of a specific referent in the preceding discourse (Strawson 1950; Barwise & Cooper 1981); the property [-strong] determines the non-existence of other potential referents besides the one that is referred to, whereas the property [+strong] determines the existence of other potential referents besides the one that is referred to, meaning a larger set (De Jong 1983; De Hoop 1992). Thus, [presuppositionality] can be considered the overarching characteristic that is converted into two properties: the [+/-definite] and the [+/-strong] distinction of the quantifier.

The Dutch partitive pronoun ER encodes the properties [-definite] and [-strong] and can only appear in sentences in which the quantifier encodes the same properties. Thus, when the referential properties of ER and those of the quantifier match, the elicitation of ER results in grammatical sentences, as in (2a) and (2b), whereas when the properties of ER and those of the quantifier clash, the elicitation of ER results in ungrammatical sentences, as in (3a) and (3b) (Haeseryn et al. 1997).

- (2) a. *Zij bakt er een heleboel.*
 she bakes ER a lot
 ‘She bakes a lot.’
 b. *Zij bakt er enkele.*
 she bakes ER some
 ‘She bakes some.’
- (3) a. **Zij bakt er de helft.*
 she bakes ER the half
 ‘She bakes half of them.’
 b. **Zij bakt er sommige.*
 she bakes ER some
 ‘She bakes some of them.’

To examine L2 learners’ ability to acquire these Dutch semantic constraints, we included two L1 languages in our study: French, which features a partitive pronoun (EN) whose use shows (partial) overlap with Dutch ER, and English, which does not feature a partitive pronoun.¹ The similarities and differences in the discourse situations with partitive pronouns between these L1 languages and Dutch make this construction an ideal test ground for second language acquisition research.

Our starting point is the Transfer Hypothesis, which claims that overlap between the L1 and the L2 facilitates the acquisition of the L2. An initial step to test this hypothesis was taken by Berends, Schaeffer & Sleeman (2017) with respect to the L2 acquisition of the syntactic properties of partitive ER. In contrast, the semantic properties constitute a relatively new territory (but see a preliminary study by Sleeman & Ihsane 2017, on the L2 acquisition of French EN). In this innovative and exploratory study we pose the following general question: Is successful acquisition of the semantics of L2 Dutch partitive pronoun ER constructions influenced by properties of the corresponding partitive constructions in L1 French versus L1 English?

This study is organised as follows. Section 2 outlines the linguistic background of this study: the similarities and differences among the three languages, and the existing literature on the acquisition of Dutch partitive ER. We also present the research question, together with the hypothesis and corresponding

¹ Although formally Dutch ER is a pronoun and French EN is a clitic, this syntactic difference has no consequence for its semantic properties and therefore falls outside the scope of this study. For an elaboration on syntactic differences between Dutch ER and French EN we refer the reader to Berends, Hulk & Sleeman (2016) and Berends, Schaeffer & Sleeman (2017).

general predictions. Section 3 presents the methodology of the study, including specific predictions. Section 4 presents the results and Section 5 discusses the results. Section 6 concludes this study.

2 Background

In the introduction we briefly mentioned that the occurrence of ER is constrained by the semantic property [non-presuppositionality]. We show this in more detail in Section 2.1. Then, to come to predictions about L2 learners' abilities, we explain in Sections 2.2 and 2.3 how French and English partitive discourses relate to Dutch. In Section 2.4 we will discuss relevant previous studies that have focused on the L1 and L2 acquisition of partitive pronouns.

2.1 Dutch (non-)presuppositional discourse

We have seen in (2) and (3) that since ER encodes [non-presuppositionality] properties, it cannot be combined with a quantifier that encodes [presuppositionality] properties. That is, the indefinite quantifier *een heleboel* 'a lot' in (2a) and the weak quantifier *enkele* 'some' do not presuppose the existence of (another/specific) set, while the definite quantifier *de helft* 'half of them' and the strong quantifier *sommige* 'some of them' imply the existence of *another half* and *some more of them*. Hence, these properties presuppose the existence of a larger set than the subset that is referred to, which makes the sentences carry a partitive interpretation.

The important difference between non-presuppositional and presuppositional quantifiers clarifies the grammaticality of the sentences in (2) and the ungrammaticality of those in (3). Nonetheless, Dutch has another pronoun that is partitive: ERvan. If the partitive pronoun ER in (3a/b) is replaced by the partitive pronoun ERvan, the sentences become grammatical, see (4):²

- (4) a. **Zij bakt ER de helft/sommige*
 b. *Zij bakt ER de helft/sommige [PP_{ec} van]*

² In (4b), ec, empty category, indicates the original position of ER, before movement of ER. This movement is not compulsory: The sentence *Zij bakt de helft ERvan / sommige ERvan* is also grammatical.

In (4a) the sentence is ungrammatical because the definite quantifier *de helft* ‘the half’ and the strong quantifier *sommige* ‘some of them’ carry presuppositional properties, while the pronoun ER carries a non-presuppositional property. In contrast, the pronoun ERvan in (4b) has a presuppositional property and therefore agrees with the properties of the quantifiers, thereby resulting in a grammatical sentence.

Henceforth, in the interpretation of (4a), ER refers to a non-specific set that expresses a **kind-denoting noun** (e.g., biscuits), whereas in the interpretation of (4b), the elided noun phrase refers to a subset of a presupposed **specific set** (e.g., those biscuits, the ten biscuits, the small biscuits) (De Hoop, Vanden Wyngaerd & Zwart 1990; Oosterhof 2005). In both readings there is reference to an antecedent in the discourse. This distinction between a non-presuppositional and a presuppositional interpretation becomes more visible when introductory sentences are added, see (5).

(5) a. non-presuppositional

Zij houdt van koekjes. Zij bakt er een heleboel/enkele.
 she likes of biscuits she bakes ER a lot /some
 ‘She likes biscuits. She bakes a lot/some.’

b. presuppositional

Zij koopt tien koekjes. Zij eet ER de helft/sommige [van_{ec}]
 she buys ten biscuits she eats ER the half/some of
 ‘She buys ten biscuits. She eats half of them / some of them.’

In (5a) no specific presupposed set is given; rather, only the kind-denoting noun – biscuits – is mentioned. This leads to a non-presuppositional interpretation with the partitive pronoun ER. In (5b) a specific presupposed set is given – ten biscuits – which leads to a presuppositional interpretation with the partitive pronoun ERvan.

2.2 French (non-)presuppositional discourse

French has a partitive pronoun too. This means that in French, as well, quantificational discourses in which the NP is elided require the insertion of the partitive pronoun, EN. A very important difference with Dutch is that at first glance French EN does not seem to be constrained by a presuppositionality constraint on the

quantifier, as shown in (6), the French parallels to (5a) and (5b), in which the antecedent is still ‘biscuits’.

- (6) a. non-presuppositional
Elle en a fait un grand nombre/quelques-uns.
 she EN has made a large number/some
 ‘She baked a lot/some.’
- b. presuppositional
Elle en a fait la moitié/certains.
 she EN has made the half /some
 ‘She baked half/some.’

Both (6a) and (6b) are grammatical sentences. This raises the question as to whether French EN possesses different semantic properties as compared to Dutch ER. This is indeed the case: French partitive EN encodes both non-presuppositional properties and presuppositional properties. This means that EN is an equivalent not only of Dutch ER, but also of Dutch ERvan. This makes EN polysemous between the non-presuppositional interpretation and the presuppositional interpretation (Milner 1978; Hulk 1982). As a result of this polyfunctionality, the French surface structures in (6) do not immediately force a non-presuppositional or presuppositional interpretation. Nevertheless, the interpretative distinction is undeniably present below the surface of these sentences. To illustrate this, we add right-dislocated phrases after an intonational pause in (7).

- (7) a. non-presuppositional
Elle en a fait un grand nombre/quelques-uns, de biscuits.
 she EN has made a large number/some of biscuits
 ‘She baked a lot/some (biscuits).’
- b. presuppositional
Elle en a fait la moitié/certains, de ces dix biscuits.
 she EN has made the half /some of these ten biscuits
 ‘She baked half/some, of these ten biscuits.’

In (7a) we added a **kind-denoting noun** (*de biscuits*, ‘biscuits’), which renders a non-presuppositional interpretation, whereas in (7b) we added a **specific set** (*ces dix biscuits*, ‘these ten biscuits’), which results in a presuppositional interpretation.³

³ The non-presuppositional or presuppositional interpretation of EN sometimes follows from lexical properties of the verb in the preceding discourse. In the French sentences *Hier ils ont*

To summarise, we conclude that Dutch ER evokes a non-presuppositional interpretation and ERvan evokes a presuppositional interpretation, while in French, EN can evoke either a non-presuppositional or a presuppositional interpretation, depending on the context. We summarise this in Table 1.

Table 1: Non-presuppositional and presuppositional interpretations in Dutch and French.

	indefinite/weak quantifier = non-presuppositional interpretation	definite/strong quantifier = presuppositional interpretation
Dutch	ER	ERvan
French	EN	EN

2.3 English (non-)presuppositional discourse

Unlike Dutch and French, English does not have a linguistic marker that expresses partitivity pronominally. To distinguish between a non-presuppositional interpretation and a presuppositional interpretation in English, the prepositional phrase *PP of them* can be used, see (8).

- (8) a. <biscuits> She bakes a lot/a few in the oven.
 b. <biscuits> She bakes half [_{PP} of them] / some [_{PP} of them] in the oven.

The PP in (8b) implies the existence of *another half* and *some more of them*. Hence, the presuppositional properties of the quantifier determine the existence of a bigger set than the subset that is referred to. This part-whole relation always results in a partitive interpretation (Radden & Dirven 2007). Despite the clear partitive interpretation of sentence (8b), sentence (8a) does not necessarily result in a presuppositional interpretation. It depends on the context whether the quantifier

tué beaucoup de lions. Aujourd'hui ils EN ont tué quelques-uns 'Yesterday they killed many lions. Today they killed some', the verb *tuer* 'to kill' in the second sentence, automatically receives a non-presuppositional interpretation because the consequence of this verb in the first sentence is irreversible: It is impossible to kill the same living thing a second time. In contrast, in the sentence *Hier ils ont attrapé six lions. Aujourd'hui ils EN ont tué la moitié/certains* 'Yesterday they captured six lions. Today they killed half/some of them', the verb *tuer* 'to kill', yields a presuppositional interpretation because killing is most naturally interpreted as an action performed on the lions that had been *attrapés* 'captured' (Milner 1978).

refers to a specific presupposed set or to a kind-denoting noun. To illustrate this, we add left-dislocated phrases; see (9a-b).

- (9) a. non-presuppositional As for biscuits (as opposed to muffins), I have put a few in the oven.
 b. presuppositional As for those biscuits (you decorated), I have put a few in the oven.

In summary, according to the literature, the Dutch pronoun ER is used with indefinite or weak quantifiers to yield a non-presuppositional interpretation, whereas the pronoun ERvan is used with definite or strong quantifiers to yield a presuppositional interpretation. In French, the pronoun EN can be interpreted in either a non-presuppositional or a presuppositional manner determined by the type of quantifier or context. In English, an overt partitive pronoun is absent altogether, but the discourse containing the elided noun can refer to either a kind (non-presuppositional interpretation) or to a specific/presupposed subset (presuppositional interpretation). Thus, the non-presuppositional and presuppositional interpretations are expressed differently in all three languages, with English having no relevant pronouns, French having one relevant pronoun (EN), and Dutch having two relevant pronouns (ER and ERvan).

2.4 Previous studies on L1/L2 acquisition of partitive pronouns

A limited number of studies have focused on the L1 and L2 acquisition of partitive pronouns. We will discuss these in order to describe our current understanding and how this study attempts to add to our knowledge regarding the (L2) acquisition of the Dutch partitive pronoun ER.

Almost none of the previous acquisition studies that addressed the Dutch partitive pronoun ER focused on the acquisition of semantic properties, but instead they focused on the L1 emergence of the pronoun or on the L2 acquisition of its syntactic properties. The only study that did look at the acquisition of semantic properties did not focus on Dutch ER but on L2 French EN.

Production of the partitive pronoun in early Dutch child language has been found to appear relatively late. This holds not only intra-linguistically when compared to the emergence of either regular nominal ellipsis (Sleeman & Hulk 2013) or other homophonous types of ER (Van Dijk & Coopmans 2013; Berends, Hulk & Sleeman 2016), but also cross-linguistically when compared to the emergence of

its French counterpart EN (Gavarró et al. 2011; Van Hout et al. 2011; Berends, Hulk & Sleeman 2016).

One study has been specifically devoted to the L2 acquisition of partitive pronoun ER syntax (Berends, Schaeffer & Sleeman 2017). Berends et al. examined the cross-linguistic effect of (semantically similar but) syntactically different L1 sentence constructions on L2 acquisition. They did this on the basis of the Transfer Hypothesis, which states that the influence of L1 on L2 is enhanced when similar linguistic elements are present in both the native and the target language (also known as positive transfer), but that a difference between L1 and L2 will create difficulties in learning the target language (also known as negative transfer). As a testing method, a Grammaticality Judgement Task (GJT) was used in three different conditions – ‘presence of ER’, ‘position of ER’, ‘ER with an adjective’ – on three different groups: adult L1 French speakers (N=25), adult L1 English speakers (N=25), and adult L1 Dutch speakers (N=25) as a control group. The results show that the predictions anticipating negative transfer were all borne out, but that predictions anticipating positive transfer were not.

A study by Sleeman & Ihsane (2017) focused, among other things, on the L2 acquisition of semantic properties of the French partitive pronoun EN by L1 speakers of Dutch. The investigators started out with hypotheses similar to the ones in our previous and current study: positive transfer is expected in constructions that are similar in L1 and L2, and negative transfer is expected in constructions that are different in L1 and L2. One of the findings of this study strengthens the conclusion from the syntactically oriented Berends, Schaeffer & Sleeman (2017) study, namely an L1 with different properties may hinder L2 acquisition. However, Sleeman & Ihsane (2017) also found (partial) evidence (Sleeman & Ihsane 2021, this volume) that strengthens the idea that shared properties between L1 and L2 facilitate L2 acquisition, which was less convincingly supported by Berends, Schaeffer & Sleeman (2017).

2.5 Research question, hypothesis and general predictions

The research question of this study is: Is successful acquisition of L2 Dutch partitive pronoun ER constructions influenced by the expression of properties of L1 partitive constructions? Following the Transfer Hypothesis, we predict that similar properties facilitate L2 acquisition (positive transfer), while different properties hinder L2 acquisition (negative transfer).

3 Method

In this section we explain the specifics of the study. In Section 3.1 we will describe in detail the characteristics of the participants who took part in our experiment. Then in Section 3.2 we will describe what tasks they underwent. Subsequently we will tell more about the procedure and the analyses in, respectively, Section 3.3 and Section 3.4. In Section 3.5 we will formulate specific predictions.

3.1 Participants

The experiment described in this paper was conducted with two experimental groups: adult native speakers of French and adult native speakers of English. Both groups had reached an advanced level of Dutch as an L2. Advanced being B2 or higher, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). We purposely looked for advanced speakers of L2 Dutch since the acquisition of ER has proven to be rather complex and late in previous (L1) studies and we did not want participants to have insufficient (subconscious) knowledge regarding this pronoun. An L1 Dutch speaking group was added as a control group. All three groups were recruited in and around the cities of Amsterdam, The Hague, and Groningen through advertisements posted in several educational institutes, publishing companies, supermarkets, and social media websites, as well as through networks of relatives and friends. All participants were financially compensated. The experiment was carried out with 81 participants. All participants consented to take part. The data obtained from six participants were excluded from analysis because these individuals had either an auditory impairment or an insufficient command of Dutch. The final sample, after exclusions, included 75 adults. These were equally divided over the three language groups: L1 French (N=25), L1 English (N=25), and L1 Dutch (N=25).

3.2 Materials

All groups of participants took part in the same battery of tests consisting of three tasks: a questionnaire specifically designed for this study; a Dutch proficiency task, the Test of Dutch Vocabulary (TDV); and a Grammaticality Judgement Task (GJT). The latter task is considered the core linguistic task for this experimental study. The design of the experiment was approved by the Ethical Committee of the University of Amsterdam.

Through the questionnaire we collected (i) general information about the participant, such as age, gender, highest level of education, and current occupation; (ii) linguistic information about the use of, exposure to, and knowledge about the participants' native language and potential other languages; and (iii) a self-assessment proficiency task, which in addition to the TDV was administered before the actual experiment started in order to ensure a minimum level of proficiency in Dutch.

We used the TDV as one of the measures of language proficiency in Dutch in order to ensure that the L1 French and the L1 English groups had acquired the minimum level of proficiency in Dutch that we requested: >B2 according to the CEFR. The TDV is a standardized, computer-administered, receptive multiple-choice test that measures passive knowledge of vocabulary. Target vocabulary words (N=60) were presented in a carrier sentence from which the meaning of the target word could not be deduced. Participants had five options to choose from: four potential synonyms and the fifth option being 'I really don't know'. The target words were selected on the basis of frequency information from CELEX (Baayen et al. 1995), and they gradually decreased in frequency. We administered this task in E-Prime so that accuracy on each trial was automatically recorded.

Through a computer-based GJT specifically designed for this study, we measured the participants' judgement skills regarding the semantic characteristic [presuppositionality] of Dutch partitive ER constructions by manipulating the presuppositionality properties of the quantifiers. All of the pre-recorded audio sentence pairs were constructed with the partitive pronoun ER; no test sentences without ER were included in this study. For each of the four quantifiers there were five test sentences, based on successful items from a pilot study. Since the combination of a presuppositional quantifier and ER is not allowed according to the literature, this means that there were ten ungrammatical test sentences. All of the twenty sentence pairs started with an appropriate preamble sentence that carried the antecedent and a certain quantity. It was followed by the target sentence, such as the ones in (10).

- (10) a. ER [non-presuppositional] quantifier
Vrijdag heb jij er een heleboel / enkele geplukt.
 Friday have you ER a lot / some picked
 'Friday you picked a lot.'
- b. ER [*presuppositional] quantifier
 **Vrijdag heb jij er de helft / sommige geplukt.*
 Friday have you ER the half / some picked
 'Friday you picked half of them.'

In addition to the 20 experimental sentences, 12 pre-recorded sentence pairs that were structurally similar to the experimental items were added as distractor items. These were either correctly or erroneously modified with respect to the conjugation of the verb (N=6) or with respect to verb-second word order (N=6). The total of 32 sentence pairs were divided into two experimental versions.

3.3 Procedure

The participants were tested individually in a quiet room. They sat in front of a 15.6" computer screen and made use of a keyboard to indicate their judgements. This was done with a 5-point Likert scale with '1' indicating sentences that the participants thought native speakers of Dutch would never say and '5' indicating sentences that the participants thought native speakers of Dutch would produce. The subsequent sentence pair was initiated automatically after a judgement was given. Before participants began evaluating actual test sentences, two unrelated practice trials with feedback were presented, one being grammatically correct and one being erroneous. The experimenter initiated these practice trials by pressing the space bar. Only if participants would have answered both practice trials incorrectly, we would not have proceeded with the experimental items. All of our participants gave a satisfying response to at least one of the practice trials. The test was programmed and run via E-Prime in order to automatically record response accuracy. Visual stimuli were not provided, only audio recordings.

3.4 Statistical analysis

All the data gathered in this study were coded and entered into the software programme R (R Core Team 2016) to run statistical analyses on. The two semantic properties, [+/-definite] and [+/-strong] of the quantifier, were taken together and encapsulated in the denominator [presuppositionality]. The variables from the questionnaire entered into the model against which the Grammaticality Judgement Task scores were compared are: L1, L2, gender, age, years of exposure to L2 Dutch, percentage of L1 exposure, percentage of L2 exposure on a weekly basis, highest degree obtained, acquisition method (formal or informal learning), and Test of Dutch Vocabulary scores. The Test of Dutch Vocabulary resulted in an individual score, theoretically lying between 0 and 60. For each correct answer one point was given, and the test contained a total of sixty items. The answers to the Grammaticality Judgement Task varied on a 1 to 5-point scale.

3.5 Predictions

The Transfer Hypothesis that states that similar properties facilitate L2 acquisition, while different properties hinder L2 acquisition, leads to a number of predictions regarding the experiment described above. We will specify these predictions below, starting with the general group predictions for all three language groups included, followed by the within-group and between-group predictions.

3.5.1 General group predictions

L1 Dutch speakers are expected to accept sentences with ER and a non-presuppositional quantifier and reject sentences with ER and a presuppositional quantifier (cf. De Jong 1983). French learners of L2 Dutch are expected to accept both these types of sentences because French has a single pronoun (EN) for both the non-presuppositional and the presuppositional interpretation. Lastly, English learners of L2 Dutch are expected to guess (score at chance level) because there is no partitive pronoun in English. This leads to predictions 1 and 2:

	L1 Dutch	L1 French	L1 English
1. ER with non-presupp. quantifier	accept	accept	guess
2. ER with presuppositional quantifier	reject	accept	guess

An accepted cut-off point for acceptance is a score above 80% (e.g., Muftah & Wong 2011; Muftah & Rafik-Galea 2013; Spinner & Jung 2017). From this number we set the cut-off point for rejection at a score below 20%, and the chance level between 40% and 60%.

Since we have two predictions per language group, for grammatical and ungrammatical sentences, we also are able to construct within-group predictions.

3.5.2 Within-group predictions

In the general group predictions we made a distinction between grammatical and ungrammatical sentences, allowing us to predict that L1 Dutch speakers will be sensitive to the semantic properties of partitive ER constructions, whereas L1 French and L1 English speakers of Dutch will not. Thus, we predict that L1 Dutch speakers will make a clear distinction between the grammatical non-presuppositional experimental items and the ungrammatical presuppositional experimental items, unlike L1 French learners of Dutch and L1 English learners of Dutch, who, accord-

ing to our Transfer Hypothesis, will not make this distinction, as laid out in predictions 3–5:

3. The L1 Dutch group will make a significant distinction between the grammatical and the ungrammatical test items.
4. The L1 French group will not make a significant distinction between the grammatical and the ungrammatical test items.
5. The L1 English group will not make a significant distinction between the grammatical and the ungrammatical test items.

Besides within-group predictions, we also formulate between-group predictions that shed light on how the different experimental groups should interact with each other.

3.5.3 Between-group predictions

We predict to find significant differences between the L1 French group and the L1 Dutch group in the ungrammatical presuppositional experimental items because, contrary to Dutch ER, French EN is allowed in sentences with presuppositional quantifiers. We also predict that we will not find a significant difference between the L1 French group and the L1 Dutch group in the grammatical non-presuppositional experimental items because the two languages act similarly. Moreover, we predict that we will find significant differences between the L1 English group and the L1 Dutch group in both the grammatical non-presuppositional items and the ungrammatical presuppositional items because we expect the L1 Dutch group to convincingly either accept or reject the sentences, and the L1 English group to guess due to the non-existence of a partitive pronoun in the home language. Lastly, we predict that we will find significant differences in the comparisons between the L1 French and the L1 English group, because we expect the L1 French group to convincingly accept the sentences, and the L1 English group to guess. This is described in predictions 6–8:

6. The L1 French group and the L1 Dutch group will accept the grammatical non-presuppositional experimental items equally often, while the L1 French group will accept the ungrammatical presuppositional items significantly more often than the L1 Dutch group.
7. The L1 English group will reject sentences in the grammatical non-presuppositional experimental items and accept ungrammatical presuppositional experimental items significantly more often than the L1 Dutch group.

8. Comparisons between L1 French and L1 English speakers will lead to significant differences in both conditions. The L1 French speakers will accept both the grammatical and the ungrammatical sentences significantly more often than the L1 English speakers.

4 Results

In subsection 4.1 we reflect shortly on the general outcomes of the questionnaire and the Dutch proficiency task (TDV). In subsection 4.2 we present a graph that visually represents the average acceptance rates per language group on partitive ER sentences modified with respect to [presuppositionality]. This graph will allow us to either confirm or reject the general group predictions and the between-group predictions. In subsection 4.3 we present a table that also represents the average acceptance rates per language group on partitive ER sentences that are modified by [presuppositionality], allowing us to answer the within-group predictions.

4.1 Questionnaire and TDV

In this subsection, we first reflect on the general outcome of the questionnaire and the TDV. The L1 French and L1 English learners of Dutch do not reveal influential inequalities relating to gender, age, years of exposure, highest degree obtained, method of acquisition, percentage of exposure to L2, or TDV score. The non-significant comparison of TDV scores, $p > .05$, means that both groups are equally proficient in Dutch. Nevertheless, we controlled for proficiency in all of the given p-values in the results below by including the TDV scores in our model. In the following two subsections, the linear regression models reveal the between-group and within-group differences.

4.2 General group results and between-group results

Figure 1 presents the average response rate in the two conditions: ER with a [non-presupposition] quantifier and ER with a [*presupposition] quantifier, as illustrated in (10a-b). The Y-axis represents acceptance rate.

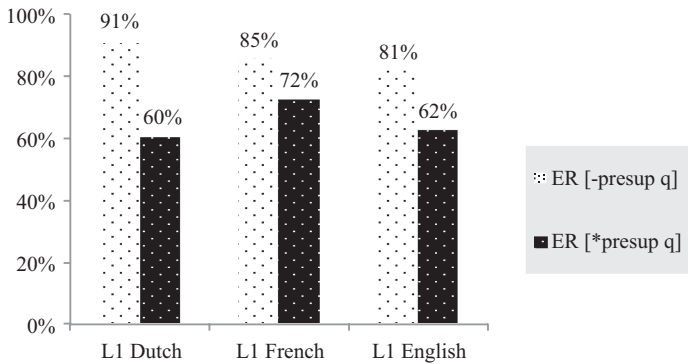


Figure 1: Judgement scores in percentages per language group in the grammatical [non-presup.] and the ungrammatical [*presup.] condition.

ER [non-presupposition]

Figure 1 shows that both the native Dutch controls and the two groups of L2 Dutch learners accepted sentences with ER and a [non-presupposition] quantifier, with an acceptability rate of higher than 80%: $M = 91\%$ for native Dutch; $M = 85\%$ and $M = 81\%$, respectively, for the L1 French group and the L1 English group. As a result, after controlling for language proficiency, none of the three separate linear regression models reveals a significant outcome: L1 Dutch – L1 French, ($t(146) = -0.779$, $p = 0.44$); L1 Dutch – L1 English, ($t(146) = 1.099$, $p = 0.27$); L1 French – L1 English, ($t(146) = 0.418$, $p = 0.68$).⁴

ER [*presupposition]

For sentences with ER and a [*presupposition] quantifier, none of the three experimental groups convincingly accepted or rejected them, with $M = 60\%$ for native Dutch, $M = 72\%$ for L1 French, and $M = 62\%$ for L1 English. The three separate linear regression models reveal one significant outcome: L1 Dutch – L1 French, ($t(146) = 2.34$, $p = 0.021^*$). The other groups do not differ significantly from each other, L1 Dutch – L1 English, ($t(146) = 0.739$, $p = 0.461$); L1 French – L1 English, ($t(146) = 1.516$, $p = 0.132$). This means that the only difference we find in the ungrammatical sentences is between the native Dutch group and the L1 French group, with the former rejecting ungrammatical sentences significantly more often than the latter.

⁴ We said at the beginning of this section that we included proficiency in our model in order to prevent it from leading to false significant findings. If we leave out this variable, the difference between L1 Dutch and L1 English is significant in grammatical sentences that include ER and a [non-presupposition] quantifier: ($t(146) = 2.524$, $p = 0.0127$). Nevertheless, we know that this difference is based on a difference in proficiency.

4.3 Within-group results

Table 2 provides the average acceptance rates per language group on the sentences that include ER with [non-presupposition/*presupposition] quantifiers.

Table 2: Within-group comparisons on sentences modified by [non-presup / *presup.].

Average acceptance rate per language group			
	Grammatical [non-presupposition]	Ungrammatical [*presupposition]	<i>p</i> -value
DU	4.62 (SD 0.52)	3.39 (SD 1.20)	0.000204 ***
FR	4.40 (SD 0.74)	3.88 (SD 1.02)	3.90e-05 ***
EN	4.23 (SD 0.98)	3.49 (SD 1.10)	0.00514 **

All language groups have significantly higher rates of acceptance on sentences in which partitive ER combines with a [non-presupposition] quantifier than on sentences in which partitive ER combines with a [*presupposition] quantifier.

5 Discussion

The hypothesis that similar relevant properties facilitate L2 acquisition, while different relevant properties hinder L2 acquisition, led to a number of predictions. In this section we will discuss these predictions, starting with the general predictions, followed by the within-group and between-group predictions.

- (1) The first general prediction was about the grammatical sentences in which ER appears with a [non-presupposition] quantifier. We predicted that the L1 Dutch speakers would accept these sentences (cf. De Jong 1983), just like the L1 French learners, who have EN in their home language, which does not distinguish between the presuppositional and non-presuppositional interpretations. The English learners are expected to guess (score at chance level); since there is no partitive pronoun in English, they presumably have no idea about any semantic constraints partitive ER is bound to. The results in Figure 1 indicated that all groups accepted the grammatical sentences at a level above 80%, an accepted cut-off point for native/near-native-like level of acquisition (e.g. Muneera & Wong 2011; Muneera & Rafik-Galea 2013; Spinner & Jung 2017), confirming our expectations regarding the L1 Dutch (91%) and L1 French (85%) groups. However, the L1 English learners of Dutch also accept this type of sentence (81%), whereas we predicted them to score at chance level, set between 40%

and 60%. To summarise, we might say that for the grammatical sentences, positive transfer has been found for the L1 French group, but negative transfer has not been found for the L1 English group.⁵ Prediction 1 is thus borne out for the L1 Dutch and L1 the French group, but not for the L1 English group.

- (2) The second general prediction was about the ungrammatical sentences in which ER appears with a [*presupposition] quantifier. We predicted that the L1 Dutch speakers would reject sentences with ER and a [*presupposition] quantifier (cf. De Jong 1983), that the L1 French group would accept these sentences as a result of the presence of EN in their home language and the possibility of interpreting EN in a presuppositional and non-presuppositional manner, and that the L1 English group would score at chance level due to the non-existence of a partitive pronoun in that language. Figure 1 shows that the L1 Dutch speakers do not convincingly reject this type of sentences but instead have an average acceptance rate of 60%, which is above the 20% cut-off point. We did not find an important difference between the L1 Dutch speakers or between the test sentences with respect to the scores. This off-target response rating had not been anticipated and disproves our prediction for the L1 Dutch group. Nonetheless, the uncertainty that the native speakers of Dutch seem to be having about the presence of partitive ER does not appear out of thin air: it relates to a finding in the Berends, Schaeffer & Sleeman (2017) paper, in which the L1 Dutch control group did not unanimously judge the sentences in which ER appeared with an adjective as incorrect, but instead they scored at chance. Thus, a Dutch sentence like **Ik heb er vijf rode geplukt*, ‘I have picked five red ones’, is considered correct in 56% of all instances. We might therefore hint that ungrammatical sentences with ER – at least in theory ungrammatical –, seem to cause more confusion than grammatical sentences with ER. For French learners of L1 Dutch we predicted that they would accept these sentences as a result of the presence of EN in their home language and the possibility of interpreting EN either in a non-presuppositional or a presuppositional way. Although they did not convincingly (72%) accept this ungrammatical type of sentence with a [*presupposition] quantifier – we take 80% to be the cut-off point, meaning that the prediction is not borne out – the difference with the L1 Dutch group is significant, meaning that the French learners of L2 Dutch accept these sentences significantly more frequently than the native speakers of Dutch, which may suggest a slight transfer effect. We will come back to between-group comparisons in predictions 6–8. We predicted that the L1

⁵ We are aware of the idea that positive transfer is not automatically obtained when no significant differences are found.

English learners of Dutch would guess at this type of sentence. This was not confirmed, given the average acceptance rate of 62%, while the chance level is set between 40% and 60%. Nonetheless, a strong tendency can be detected towards chance level. Prediction 2 is not borne out for the L1 Dutch group, almost borne out for the L1 French group, and slightly, if not completely, borne out for the L1 English group.

The previous two general predictions were about group performance, and we have seen that those that predicted ‘acceptance’ were more easily met than those that predicted ‘rejection’ or ‘guessing’. In the following three predictions we made assumptions concerning whether the various language groups would be sensitive to the semantic differences between sentences with ER and a [non-presupposition] quantifier and sentences with ER and a [*presupposition] quantifier.

- (3) The third prediction anticipated that the L1 Dutch group would be sensitive to the semantic differences between grammatical sentences with ER and ungrammatical sentences with ER. As shown in Table 2, the semantically correct sentences were accepted significantly more often in comparison with the semantically incorrect sentences. With 5 being the maximum level of acceptance, the L1 Dutch group reached 4.62 for the grammatical sentences and 3.39 for the ungrammatical sentences. This difference is highly significant, with $p < .001$. Thus, we found evidence that the native speakers of Dutch were sensitive to the semantic properties of quantifiers and how partitive ER relates to those properties. Prediction 3 is borne out.
- (4) In the fourth prediction we predicted that the L1 French group would not be sensitive to the semantic value of the quantifier. Thus, L1 French learners of Dutch were not expected to make a clear distinction in their responses between the grammatical [non-presupposition] condition and the ungrammatical [*presupposition] condition. The average rates of acceptance for the L1 French group lie at 4.40 for grammatical sentences and at 3.88 for ungrammatical sentences, as can be seen in Table 2. This difference is highly significant, with $p < .001$, perhaps because an acceptance rate of 72% is lower than expected for the ungrammatical [*presupposition] condition. Since the L1 French group does significantly discriminate between the two conditions, prediction 4 is not borne out.
- (5) The fifth prediction anticipated that the L1 English speakers would not be sensitive to the semantic differences between sentences with ER and a [non-presupposition] quantifier and sentences with ER and a [*presupposition] quantifier, because they have no partitive pronoun. Instead, we expected them to accept the grammatical and ungrammatical sentences equally as bad or as good, at chance level. Nevertheless, with an average acceptance

rate of 4.23 for the grammatical sentences and 3.49 for the ungrammatical sentences, they do significantly discriminate between the two conditions, $p < .01$, perhaps because an acceptance rate of 81% is higher than expected for the grammatical [non-presupposition] condition. This significant difference means that prediction 5 is not borne out.

The third to fifth predictions were within-group predictions that concerned the sensitivity of the various language groups to the semantic differences between sentences with ER and a [non-presupposition] quantifier and sentences with ER and a [*presupposition] quantifier. Although we only expected the L1 Dutch group to be sensitive to this difference, it turned out that in fact all three language groups were. In the following three predictions we take a look at the between-group results. The outcomes will tell us how the different language groups relate to each other and hopefully give an answer to our two hypotheses that positive transfer is expected in constructions that are similar in L1 and L2 and negative transfer is expected in constructions that are different in L1 and L2.

- (6) The sixth prediction anticipated not finding a significant difference between L1 Dutch and L1 French with regard to the grammatical [non-presupposition] condition – as a consequence of the two languages behaving similarly on a semantic level – but anticipated finding a significant difference in the ungrammatical [*presupposition] condition, because contrary to Dutch ER, French EN is allowed in sentences with presuppositional quantifiers. Figure 1 and Table 2 show that the Dutch native speakers accepted the grammatical [non-presupposition] sentences in 91% of all cases, or equivalently, gave an average score of 4.62 on a 5-point Likert scale, while the French learners of Dutch accepted the sentences in 85% of all cases, or equivalently, gave an average score of 4.40. These results are similar and do not differ from each other, exactly as we predicted. Regarding the ungrammatical [*presupposition] sentences, the Dutch native speakers accepted the sentences in 60% of all cases, or equivalently, gave an average score of 3.39, while the French learners of Dutch accepted the sentences in 72% of all cases, or equivalently, gave an average score of 3.88. This difference is significant ($p < .05$), meaning that the L1 French group accepted the ungrammatical sentences significantly more than the L1 Dutch group. This makes prediction 6 borne out for both conditions.
- (7) In the seventh prediction we predicted that the L1 English group would reject sentences belonging to the grammatical [non-presupposition] condition significantly more often than the L1 Dutch group and that they would accept sentences belonging to the ungrammatical [*presupposition] condition significantly more often than the L1 Dutch group. Figure 1 and Table 2 show that the Dutch native speakers accepted the grammatical [non-presupposition] sentences in 91% of all cases, giving them an average score of 4.62 on a 5-point

Likert scale, while the English learners of Dutch accepted the sentences in 81% of all cases, giving them an average score of 4.23. Despite the L1 Dutch group accepting these grammatical sentences at ceiling level, the L1 English group also accepted these sentences. Thus, the L1 Dutch group performed as we expected, but the L1 English group approved of sentences that we assumed they would reject more often (at chance level). As a result, the two language groups do not differ significantly from each other: $p > .05$ in the grammatical sentences. In the ungrammatical [*presupposition] sentences, the Dutch native speakers accepted 60% of all cases (thus rejected 40%), resulting in an average score of 3.39 on a 5-point Likert scale, while the English learners of Dutch accepted the sentences in 62% of all cases (thus rejected 38%), with an average score of 3.49. Thus, the L1 Dutch group did not reject these sentences as often as we expected them to, while the L1 English group scored nearly at chance level like we did expect. Therefore, these numbers are too close together to reveal a real difference between them: $p > .05$. This means that prediction 7 is not borne out for any condition.

- (8) In the eighth prediction we predicted that the comparisons between L1 French and L1 English speakers would lead to significant differences in both conditions. The two languages have different properties regarding partitive constructions, so we predicted that the L1 French group would accept the Dutch sentences in both conditions and that the L1 English group would score at chance level in both conditions. Nonetheless, neither in the grammatical [non-presupposition] condition, $p > .05$, nor in the ungrammatical [*presupposition] condition, $p > .05$, did we find a significant difference between the two languages. This is in line with the results from the syntactic paper in which, despite different predictions for both groups per condition, the L1 French group and the L1 English group never differed significantly from each other.

These last, unforeseen outcomes that the two language groups did not differ significantly from each other could mean that both the L1 French and the L1 English groups have acquired the L1 property [non-presuppositionality/*presuppositionality] rather well and that they map this property to L2 Dutch partitive ER correspondingly. Possibly they subconsciously know how to differentiate between the non-presuppositional and the presuppositional interpretation in Dutch, because of the distinctions they make in their L1: the L1 French group features EN that is polyfunctional between the non-presuppositional and the presuppositional interpretation – with the interpretative distinction being undeniably present below the surface –, while the L1 English group makes a direct comparison with the ‘some’ versus ‘some of them’ distinction from their home language. This idea expresses itself by the fact that both groups make a significant distinction

between the Dutch grammatical and ungrammatical sentences with partitive pronoun constructions, so clearly they do have a grasp of the semantic properties of ER and how these relate to those of the quantifier. For a similar finding for the L2 acquisition of the French partitive clitic *en* by L1 German learners, see Sleeman & Ihsane 2021, this volume.

More influence of the L1 is observed when looking at the relative high acceptance rates of the L1 French group on both grammatical and ungrammatical partitive constructions, which may be due to positive influence of the L1, or target-level performance and negative influence of the L1, respectively. For the L1 English group the almost at chance judgements of the ungrammatical condition may also be due to L1 influence. Furthermore, the unexpected finding that the L1 Dutch speakers also accepted the ungrammatical sentences at chance level, needs more investigation and has, in this study, led to a non-significant English-Dutch between-group comparison, and probably to a less strong significant French-Dutch between group comparison.

6 Conclusion

The focus of this exploratory study has been on the L2 acquisition of Dutch partitive pronoun ER constructions in various semantic referential contexts and how this acquisition is influenced by the properties of partitive constructions in L1 French (EN) and L1 English (Ø).

Primarily, although De Jong (1983) and De Hoop (1992) claim that partitive ER encodes the referential characteristic [non-presupposition] and that the pronoun can only appear in sentences in which the quantifier encodes the same property, the native speakers of Dutch do not convincingly demonstrate this. They are unanimous in their judgements regarding grammatical sentences, but do not convincingly reject the ungrammatical sentences in which partitive ER appears with quantifiers that encode [*presupposition] properties. In future research this should be investigated more thoroughly by including similar sentences without partitive ER as well, so that a more complete picture will emerge.

For the L1 French group, positive transfer or target-level performance and a slight negative transfer effect were found for respectively grammatical and ungrammatical constructions with partitive ER. For the L1 English group, a slight transfer effect was found for the ungrammatical constructions with partitive ER. Evidence of L1 transfer is furthermore shown in the within-group analyses: both the L1 French group and the L1 English group discriminate significantly between grammatical and ungrammatical Dutch partitive constructions. This may be

the result of ‘subconsciously knowing’ the difference between the referential characteristics of the quantifier from the L1.

In conclusion we might say that signs of semantic influence of L1 are visible in both L1 groups, emanating from the significant within-group comparisons in both L1 groups. Moreover, it has been revealed that for the L1 French group a semantic presuppositionality difference in partitive constructions between the home and target language will create difficulties in learning the target language, while a semantic presuppositionality similarity between the home and target language will lead to enhanced scores on grammaticality judgements. This finding is partly in line with our previous study about the syntactic influence of L1 in similar constructions.

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