

The Acquisition of Future of Probability in L3 Spanish

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1. Background: L3A and the Future of Probability in Spanish

There are two questions which must be answered to understand the context of this study. The first question is: what is L3, and why is it an area of interest for recent developments in the field of generative linguistics? L3A refers to third language acquisition. The study of L3 or L_n (multilingual) language acquisition is an emerging field that, built on the base of L2 acquisition theories, offers new perspectives that allow researchers to take into consideration the additional factors at play when not just one previously acquired linguistic system, but rather two or more, are involved in the process of acquiring a new language. As Rothman (to appear) reports, “Historically, many researchers have not distinguished among adult non-native learners, including L3/ L_n learners in populations that are reported as L2 adult learners. [...] Failing to properly differentiate true L2 acquisition from L3/ L_n acquisition can have an inadvertent damaging impact for important questions studied under the guise of a broadly defined SLA ” (p.6). There are many reasons why the two populations should be considered separately. For example, it is crucial to consider all possible sources of transfer or cross-linguistic influence in third language acquisition. In addition, the consideration of L3 separate from L2 is especially important in a Canadian context where it is rare, when studying the acquisition of a language such as Spanish, to find participants who are not first bilingual to some extent in English and French.

A crucial question that has yet to be fully answered in the field of L3 acquisition is how to determine in a principled and verifiable manner which of the previous linguistic systems transfers to the third language in the process of acquisition, and if both can be shown to be available as sources for transfer, what conditions the selection of one over the other? Although L3A is a relatively new field of study, several models have already been proposed for what drives syntactic/ morphosyntactic transfer to the L3 or L_n : The Cumulative Enhancement Model (CEM) (Flynn et al., 2004), The L2 Status factor (Bardel & Falk, 2007) and the Typological Primacy Model (TPM) (Rothman, 2011).

The Cumulative Enhancement Model (CEM) (Flynn et al. 2004) predicts that transfer from the L1, the L2 or some type of enhancement via a compilation of both is possible and that transfer is either facilitative or remains neutral. That is, if the transfer does not provide some sort of helpful or bootstrapping effect, it does not take place at all. The L2 Status factor (Bardel and Falk, 2007) suggests that the L1 is largely impeded for transfer by the L2 and, as a result, the L2 is greatly preferred for transfer whether or not such transfer is the most economical given the L1 and L2 choices. Finally, the Typological Primacy Model (TPM) (Rothman, 2011) argues that regardless of the order of acquisition, typology is the determining factor for transfer between languages. The TPM predicts that Initial State transfer for multilingualism occurs selectively, and is most reliant on typological or psychotypological (i.e. comparative perceived typological) proximity of the language pairings involved.

The second question to address in this section brings us to the linguistic property investigated in this study. The question is: What is the future of probability? And why is it an interesting topic to look at in the acquisition of Spanish as a third language? First, it is important to understand that in Spanish, there are two ways to express the future. Spanish can express future time through the periphrastic

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future: *ir a + infinitivo* (to be going to + infinitive), and through future tense morphology. The periphrastic future can only be interpreted as future time. However, the morphological future tense can be interpreted in two ways: future time as in (1) or epistemic (i.e. probability) as in (2) (e.g. Gili Gaya, 1976; Bosque & Demonte, 2000). The following examples are from Bruhn de Garavito & Valenzuela (2007):

- (1) *Mañana **lloverá**.*
Tomorrow 3p.s. fut. to rain ‘Tomorrow it is going to/ it will rain’.
- (2) *¿Por qué en Londres la gente siempre lleva paraguas?*
-Lloverá mucho
Why do people in London always carry umbrellas?
-3p.s.fut to rain a lot. ‘It must rain a lot (there)’.

The epistemic interpretation of future tense morphology in Spanish is heavily reliant on context, and thus requires the acquisition of complex interfaces between morphosyntax and discourse. Recent research in second language acquisition has investigated the interaction between different modules of grammar and how interface phenomena can be more vulnerable in certain types of acquisition, particularly for contexts such as simultaneous bilingualism (Serratrice, Sorace & Paoli, 2004, among others) L2 acquisition (Montrul, 2002, among others). However, little research has been conducted on this topic from the perspective of third language (L3) acquisition. In L3A, the issue is further complicated by the presence of multiple linguistic systems, which interact, and in which typological differences and similarities between the languages may change the way in which L3 learners are able (or not able) to acquire these interface properties.

Another aspect of the future of probability in Spanish is that besides being limited to future tense morphology, the epistemic interpretation of the future is also restricted to certain aspectual classes of verbs. Bruhn de Garavito & Valenzuela (2007) explain that it is only possible with *activity* and *stative* verbs, and not with *accomplishment* and *achievement* verbs. Vendler (1967) first distinguished between these four classes of verbs, which are categorized based on telicity and aspect.

This study looks at the acquisition of future of probability in L3 Spanish, of learners whose first languages are English and French. So, how do English and French compare to Spanish? In contrast to Spanish, in English the future tense can only be expressed in a periphrastic construction (e.g. *it is going to rain/ it will rain*) and does not allow for an epistemic interpretation.¹ In French, there are two ways to express the future (periphrastic and morphological) and an epistemic interpretation of future tense morphology is less frequent than in Spanish, but is possible in specific contexts and especially with the verb *être* (to be) in the simple future indicative tense² (Rocci, 2002; Morency, 2010), as in (3):

¹ In British English, the modal *will* can express probability. For example, if the phone rings one might say something like “That’ll be John” (i.e. That will be John). Celle, in her (2004) paper “The French future tense and English *will* as markers of epistemic modality” discusses how the future tense in French and the modal auxiliary *will* in English can both express conjecture, but how this particular modal value is intrinsically related respectively to the tense system in French and to the modal system of English and consequently why no real correspondence may be posited between the two languages. The epistemic use of *will* is not a cause of concern for this paper, especially since it is not used at all in Canadian or American English. What interests us is the fact that in both French and Spanish, epistemic modality can be encoded in the verb morphology of the future tense.

² Morency (2010) reports that previous studies have established certain limitations on the epistemic use of the future tense in French. The first of these is that it is only possible with the verbs *être* ‘to be’ and *avoir* ‘to have’ (*avoir* being used only in the future perfect, which we have not explored at all in this paper). However, through an exploration of the topic, Morency determines that although it is most common to see the epistemic use of the future tense with *être* and *avoir*, it is indeed possible with other stative and activity verbs. Another restriction established in past research is that the epistemic use of the future is not current in contemporary French. Morency acknowledges that it may be more accepted in some regions than others, for e.g. in francophone Belgium. However, he argues that certain uses of future of probability are current in use, regardless of region. Rocci (2000) postulates that the constraints on the use of the epistemic future are more linguistic than contextual, because he perceives the aspectual restrictions that can block its use. Morency’s (2010) hypothesis is that a great deal of the difficulty surrounding the epistemic use of the future tense in French has to do with pragmatics.

- (3) *On a sonné. Ce sera le facteur.*
 Someone rang (the doorbell). 3p.s. fut.to be the mailman.
 ‘It must be the mailman.’

Thus, French is more typologically similar to Spanish than English is with regard to the linguistic property being investigated in this study. There are, of course, other ways to express probability in English, French and Spanish. Even though only French and Spanish share the typology of future tense morphology that can be interpreted as temporal or epistemic, all three languages can express probability by means of different constructions. For example, probability can also be expressed with a periphrastic construction, the modal *deber* ‘must’. This is possible in all three languages, as in (4):

- (4) a. Spanish: *deber (de)*
Llaman a la puerta. Debe (de) ser el cartero.
 b. English: *must*
Someone is (knocking) at the door. It must be the mailman.
 c. French: *devoir*
On a sonné. Ce doit être le facteur.

This research has been based on a previous study conducted specifically on the acquisition of future of probability in Spanish, from an L2 perspective (Bruhn de Garavito & Valenzuela, 2007). They tested advanced L2 learners of Spanish (L1 English), using two experimental tasks. On the first test (an Oral Sentence Conjunction Task), the L2 group did not distinguish between the verb classes to the same extent as the native controls, whereas on the second test (a Truth Value Judgement Task), the results were consistent with authors’ predictions in that the L2 group correctly distinguished between grammatical and ungrammatical contexts for the future of probability and future time. Overall, they found that L2 learners were able to acquire the epistemic interpretation of future morphology in spite of the ambiguity of the input. However, the present study will examine the acquisition of future of probability from a different perspective, that of L3 acquisition.

2. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions this study seeks to answer are the following:

1. Are L3 learners of Spanish able to correctly interpret temporal and epistemic uses of future tense morphology?
2. What drives morphosyntactic transfer to L3 Spanish with respect to the acquisition of the epistemic interpretation of future tense morphology? (Will group results differ according to the order in which the L1 and L2 are acquired?)
3. Will the L3 groups’ results differ from those of the L2 group?

In response to RQ1, our prediction is that, in accordance with the results from Bruhn de Garavito & Valenzuela (2007), L3 learners of Spanish will be able to correctly interpret temporal and epistemic uses of future tense morphology. Their responses will be >3 on conditions targeting a response of ‘completely acceptable’ and <3 on conditions targeting a response of ‘completely unacceptable’ on a scale of 1 to 5. If learners are able to overcome the interface properties involved in the interpretation of temporal and epistemic uses of future tense morphology, and if transfer occurs from the language typologically most similar to Spanish (i.e. French), they will be able to correctly interpret these two uses of the morphological future tense.

In response to RQ2, our prediction is that following the Typological Primacy Model (Rothman 2011) for morphosyntactic transfer to the L3, typology will be the determining factor for transfer between languages. The order of acquisition of the L1 and L2 will not make a difference. To confirm this, the ENGL1 group’s results should correspond to those of the FREL1 group. Since both the

ENGL1 and FREL1 groups have a language typologically similar to Spanish available for transfer (i.e. French) they should perform consistently and demonstrate knowledge of the epistemic interpretation of future tense morphology in Spanish. We do not expect the ENGL1-F (English L1 minus French)³ group to perform as well on the tests, since they do not have the facilitative advantage of French to assist them in acquiring the epistemic interpretation of future morphology and the interfaces involved in the acquisition of this property will remain problematic for them.

Finally, in response to RQ3, our prediction is that yes, the L2 group's results will differ from those of both the L3 groups and this will show that French is facilitative for the acquisition of future of probability in Spanish.

3. Experimental Design

A total of 33 participants completed two experimental tasks: a Truth Value Judgment Task and a Probability Scale Selection Task. There were four test groups:

- 1) 'ENGL1': L1 English/ L2 French/ L3 Spanish (n= 8)
- 2) 'FREL1': L1 French/ L2 English/ L3 Spanish (n= 8)
- 3) 'ENGL1-F': L1 English/ L2 Spanish (no French) (n= 8)
- 4) 'SPAL1': native speaker control group (n= 9)

The study features a mirror image methodology, since the two L3 groups have the same L3 and also the same L1 and L2, but the order in which each group learned their first two languages differs (they learned either English first or French first). The third test group consists of English L1 learners of Spanish L2 (with no knowledge of French), and the fourth group is a control group of native speakers of Spanish. All participants were University students in either Canada or the United States.

Participants first completed a language background questionnaire and language proficiency tests in their two non-native languages. In order to be included in the study, that had to score at a high intermediate to advanced level in both their L2 and L3. We did not include age of acquisition as a variable in our analysis, but for the sake of interest, consider the following. Groups 1 and 2 began learning their L2 (either English or French) between the ages of 3 and 13. Groups 1 and 2 began learning their L3 (Spanish) between the ages of 12 and 27. The participants in the ENGL1-F (minus French) group began learning Spanish between the ages of 7 and 18.

After completing the preliminary tests, participants completed two experimental tasks: a Truth Value Judgment Task, which is a scaled judgment task featuring a context scenario followed by a stimulus sentence, and a Probability Scale Selection Task which is a multiple choice sentence completion task. For the purpose of this paper, we will focus on the methodology and results relating to the first experimental task only.

The purpose of the Truth Value Judgment Task was to examine participants' sensitivity to temporal versus epistemic interpretations of future tense morphology in Spanish. Participants were given a short dialogue as a context scenario followed by a stimulus sentence, which had to be judged on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being completely unacceptable, 5 being completely acceptable). The stimulus sentence represented either an epistemic (probability) or a future time interpretation, corresponding to a verb used in the context scenario. There are conditions in which each type of interpretation is targeted as either correct or incorrect. The test also included distractors, which were meaning-changing verbs in preterite and imperfect with stative versus eventive interpretations.

The task was designed to have four main conditions, organized by construction and grammaticality. Condition A was 'epistemic, correct', Condition B 'epistemic, incorrect', Condition C 'future time, correct' and Condition D 'future time, incorrect'. Each of these four main conditions was also divided into three subconditions organized by verb type: stative and activity verbs, accomplishment and achievement verbs, and finally a periphrastic construction (either the modal *deber* 'must' for the epistemic conditions, or the periphrastic future for the future time conditions). Recall

³ A detailed description of the participant groups will follow in section 3.

that the epistemic interpretation of future tense morphology in Spanish is possible with stative and activity verbs but not with accomplishment and achievement verbs. Thus, the test also probed for participants' sensitivity to the aspectual class restrictions. For each of the 12 subconditions, there were 6 items, for a total of 72. Figure 1 illustrates the organization of the conditions for the Truth Value Judgment Task.

Figure 1: Conditions - Truth Value Judgement Task

CONSTRUCTION (stimulus sentence)		
	GRAMMATICALITY (according to context scenario)	
Epistemic (A, B)		VERB TYPE
	Correct (A, C)	Stative/ Activity (A1, B1, C1, D1)
Future Time (C, D)	Incorrect (B, D)	Accomplishment/ Achievement (A2, B2, C2, D2)
		Periphrastic construction (A3, B3, C3, D3)

The following two examples are from the conditions A 'epistemic, correct' (5) and D 'future time, incorrect' (6):

(5) CONDITION A - EPISTEMIC, CORRECT

A1- With stative and activity verbs (*n*: 6)

Carolina: ¿Por qué no contesta mi padre el teléfono?

Juan: Estará leyendo el periódico.

Carolina: Why is my father not answering the phone?

Juan: *3p.s. fut. to read* the newspaper 'he is probably reading the newspaper'.

Es probable que el Padre de Carolina esté leyendo el periódico.

Carolina's father is probably reading the newspaper.

1 2 3 4 5

(6) CONDITION D - FUTURE TIME, INCORRECT

D1- With stative and activity verbs (*n*: 6)

Profesora: ¿Sabes por qué no ha venido Juan a clase?

Pati: Estará enfermo.

Profesor: Do you know why Juan did not come to class?

Pati: *3p.s. fut. to be sick*. 'He is probably sick'.

Juan va a estar enfermo.

Juan is going to be sick.

1 2 3 4 5

These two conditions are a mirror image of one another, since in both conditions the verb in the future tense in the context scenario has a meaning of probability, and the stimulus sentence that follows is either a correct epistemic interpretation of this context (Condition A), or an incorrect future time interpretation (Condition D). Learners who are only aware of the future time meaning of future tense morphology would be more likely to accept items in Condition D instead of rejecting them. In Conditions B and C, the verb in the context scenario has a future time meaning, and the interpretation is either epistemic, incorrect (Condition B) or future time, correct (Condition C). See examples (7) and (8):

(7) CONDITION B - EPISTEMIC, INCORRECT

B1 - With stative and activity verbs: (*n*: 6)

Juan: Mañana Pedro tiene una reunión ¿Cómo va a llegar a tiempo?

Silvia: Correrá.

Juan: Tomorrow Pedro has a meeting. How will he arrive on time?

Silvia: *3p.s.fut. to run*. 'He will run'.'*Es probable que Pedro esté corriendo.**Pedro is probably running.*

1

2

3

4

5

(8) CONDITION C- FUTURE TIME, CORRECT

C2 – With accomplishment and achievement verbs: (*n*: 6)

Luis: Cuando llegue mi esposa, ¿notará el césped?

Juan: Sí, lo notará.

Luis: When my wife arrives, will she notice the lawn?

Juan: Yes, *3p.s.fut. to notice* the lawn. 'Yes, she will notice the lawn'.*La esposa de Luis va a notar el césped.**Luis' wife will notice the lawn.*

1

2

3

4

5

Conditions A and D are the true experimental conditions that are of most interest, while conditions B and C are each a type of distractor condition which are included to maintain balance in the number of correct and incorrect items present in the experiment and to test for learners' sensitivity to the aspectual classes. For a list of the verbs used in both experimental tasks, see Appendix A. The above examples correspond to each of the four main conditions of the experiment. The subconditions used different verb types (stative/ activity verbs, accomplishment/ achievement verbs, periphrastic construction). In the following section, we will discuss the results for Truth Value Judgment Task.

4. Results

We ran four two-way ANOVAs: one for each main condition (A, B, C and D). We used a 4x3 factorial design for each ANOVA, according to group (4) and verb type (3). The dependent variable is the response (1-5) and the *p* is significant at the 0.05 level.

For condition A, which targeted a correct epistemic interpretation of the context scenario, all groups correctly accepted items, overall. (See Figure 2). However, the ANOVA did show a significant effect for verb type: $F(3,582) = 48.454$, $p < 0.001$. This reflects the problematic aspect of subcondition A2, which should actually be rejected because of the aspectual class restriction on accomplishment and achievement verbs. The analysis shows that participants are in fact distinguishing between these verb types. In addition, pairwise comparisons indicate that there is a significant difference between: ENGL1-F and ENGL1, $p = 0.05$, and that there is no significant difference between FREL1 and ENGL1, $p = 0.53$ and FREL1 and ENGL1-F, $p = 0.19$. Thus, the results in this condition follow our predictions in that there is no significant difference between the two L3 groups, and there is a significant difference between the ENGL1-F and ENGL1 groups. The pairing of FREL1 and ENGL1-F, however, did not quite make it to the level of statistical significance.

For condition B, which targets the rejection of the epistemic interpretation of the context scenario, we can see that overall, all groups are correctly rejecting items in the three subconditions (Figure 3). However, there is an observable difference between groups. It is clear, first of all, that the ENGL1-F group is not rejecting items as strongly as the other groups. There is also a difference between the ENGL1 and FREL1 groups, but this is not as great of a difference as that which we can observe with the ENGL1-F group. The two L3 groups are still patterning together overall. Condition B3, which used a verb in the periphrastic future, seems to be problematic for all groups.

Figure 2: Descriptive statistics, Condition A

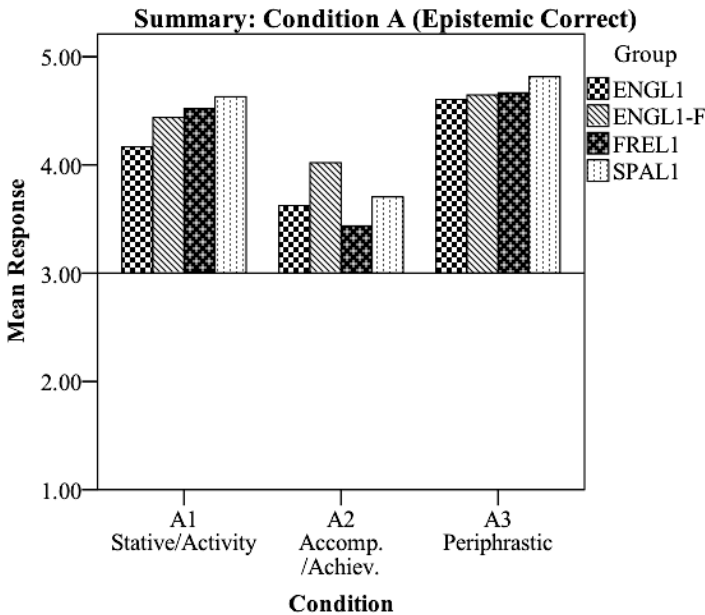
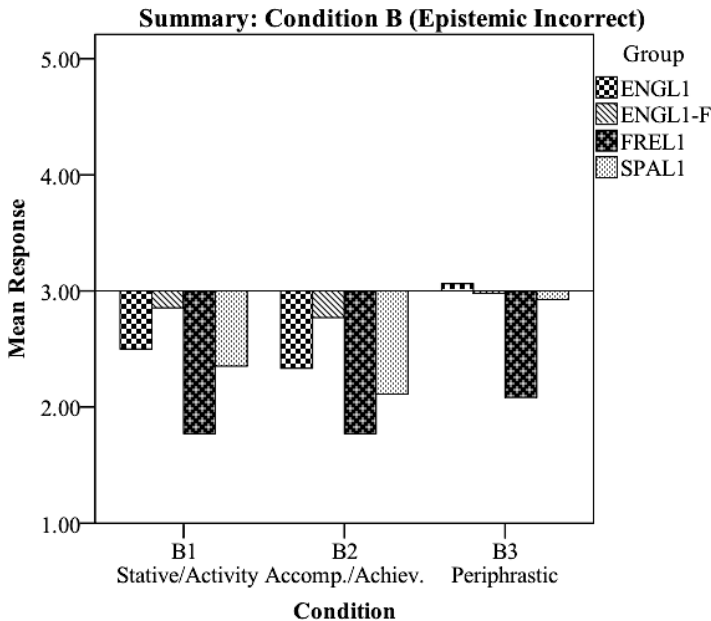


Figure 3: Descriptive statistics, Condition B

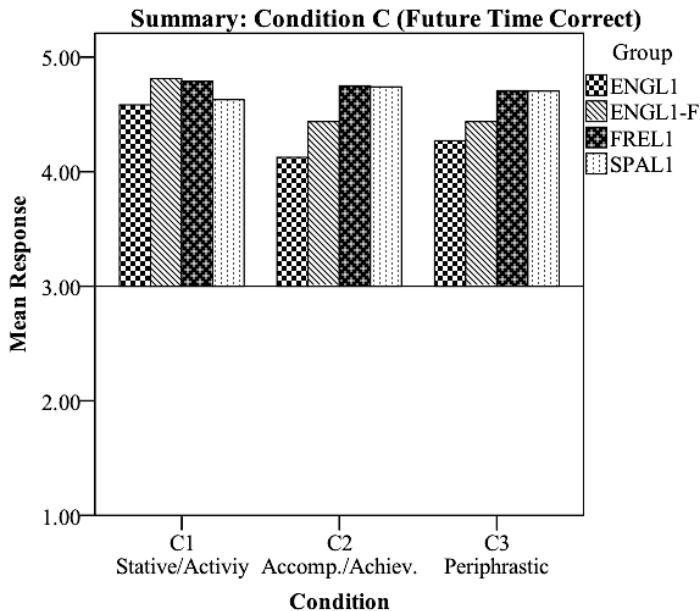


The analysis for condition B shows that there is a significant effect for both group: $F(3,582)=13.369$, $p<0.001$ and for verb type: $F(2,582)=7.431$, $p<0.001$. The pairwise comparisons indicate that there is a significant difference between ENGL1-F and FREL1, $p<0.001$, which supports our predictions, but also between ENGL1 and FREL1, $p<0.001$, which is against our predictions.

Condition C is very straightforward. All groups correctly accepted the future time interpretation of the context scenario in the three subconditions (Figure 4). The analysis does show a significant effect for group: $F(3,582)=6.967$, $p<0.001$, and according to pairwise comparisons, there is a significant

difference between: ENGL1 and ENGL1-F, $p=0.020$ and ENGL1 and FREL1, $p<0.001$. However, for this condition this effect is not a cause of concern since the results do show a clear acceptance of test items by all groups despite the statistical differences stated above.

Figure 4: Descriptive statistics, Condition C

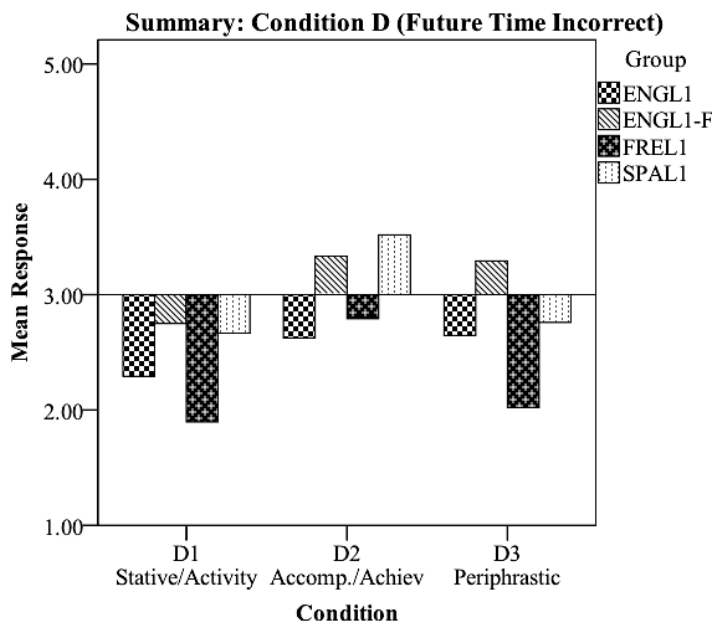


The results for the final condition, Condition D, are the most telling for this experiment. Once again, this is the condition that targets a rejection of the future time interpretation of the context scenario. Overall, all groups are correctly rejecting items in this condition (Figure 5). However, there are important differences between the groups. We can see very clearly that in condition D1, the ENGL1-F group is not rejecting items as strongly as the FREL1 and ENGL1 groups, and in conditions D2 and D3, they are actually accepting items. On the other hand, the ENGL1 and FREL1 groups are patterning together.

There is a peculiarity for condition D2, which is that the Spanish native speakers accepted this condition to some extent. This is due to a problem with the design of the test. We expected the items in this subcondition to be rejected because of how strange the context scenario sounds, however it is understandable that native speakers would accept the future time interpretation since in this case it is actually the only grammatical possibility due to the aspectual class restrictions associated with temporal and epistemic uses of the morphological future tense.

It is important to note that the reason why the ENGL1-F group and the SPAL1 group accepted items in condition D2 likely differs: while the SPAL1 group accepted items because they are sensitive to the aspectual class restrictions, the ENGL1-F group may have accepted items in this condition because future time is more natural sounding to them, according to their knowledge of future tense morphology.

With regard to the comparison between the two L3 groups and the L2 group, the statistical analysis showed what was predicted. That is, according to pairwise comparisons, there is no significant difference between ENGL1 and FREL1, $p=0.088$, and there is a significant difference between both ENGL1-F and ENGL1, $p<0.001$, and ENGL1-F and FREL1, $p<0.001$. In addition, the analysis shows a significant effect for both group: $F(3,582)=12.369$, $p<0.001$ and verb type: $F(2,582)=11.066$, $p<0.001$.

Figure 5: Descriptive statistics, Condition D

Now that the results have been presented for the Truth Value Judgment Task, in the following section we will propose an answer to each of the research questions introduced in section 2, and discuss the implications of the outcome of the experiment.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In response to RQ1 (Are L3 learners of Spanish able to correctly interpret temporal and epistemic uses of future tense morphology?), the research hypothesis is confirmed. L3 learners of Spanish were able to correctly interpret temporal and epistemic uses of future tense morphology.

In response to RQ2 (What drives morphosyntactic transfer to L3 Spanish with respect to the acquisition of the epistemic interpretation of future tense morphology? Will group results differ according to the order in which the L1 and L2 are acquired?), our prediction was that, following the Typological Primacy Model (Rothman, 2011) the ENGL1 and FREL1 groups should perform consistently with one another since they each possess a language typologically similar to Spanish to choose from for transfer to the L3 (i.e. French). This prediction is confirmed. There was no significant difference in results between the ENGL1 and FREL1 groups in conditions A and D. There was a significant difference between these groups in conditions B and C, but due to the nature of these conditions (that each of them is a type of distractor condition compared to conditions A and D) this does not discount our hypothesis. Since conditions A (epistemic correct) and D (future time incorrect) are the most important in terms of showing whether learners have acquired the difference between the temporal and epistemic interpretations of future tense morphology, we do not consider the differences found in conditions B (epistemic incorrect) and C (future time correct) to be problematic.

For the L2 Status Factor (Bardel and Falk, 2007) to have been supported by this experiment, the FREL1 group would not have performed as well on the tests, since their L2 (English) would have blocked their L1 (French) for transfer. The ENGL1 group, in turn, would have outperformed the FREL1 group, since their L2 (French) would have been selected for transfer over their L1 (English). However, this was not the case. Of the three models for syntactic/ morphosyntactic transfer to the L3, the results support most strongly the Typological Primacy Model (TPM) (Rothman, 2011), because they provide evidence for transfer from French for both the ENGL1 and FREL1 groups. However, the Cumulative Enhancement Model (CEM) (Flynn et al., 2004) could also be supported by the results of this experiment, since it states that facilitative transfer can occur from either of the previously acquired

languages. It also states that transfer does not occur at all if it is not facilitative in nature. For this reason, it is not possible to truly tease apart the TPM and CEM in this experiment since there is no evidence of negative transfer to the L3, and the transfer that does occur is facilitative (from French). To tease apart these two models, evidence of non-facilitative transfer in the L3 would have to be established.

In response to RQ3 (Will the L3 groups' results differ from those of the L2 'control' group?), the research hypothesis is confirmed. The ENGL1-F group's responses differed significantly from at least one of the L3 groups' results in all four conditions and their results differed from both L3 groups' in Condition D, which is the most telling condition overall given the methodological design. Overall, L2 learners of Spanish without knowledge of French were able to distinguish between temporal and epistemic uses of the morphological future, but the results indicate that they have not acquired this as fully as the L3 groups.

In conclusion, the present study has provided new evidence regarding what drives morphosyntactic transfer to the L3. The study of L3A is especially relevant in the Canadian context for studying the acquisition of a third language other than English and French. However, more participants should be tested in order to solidify and clarify the results. Future research should further investigate these topics, with the goal of developing formal models for L3 acquisition specific to the developmental stages and ultimate attainment.

Appendix A: Verb List

<u>STATIVE</u> ser, estar, brillar, amar, oler	<u>ACTIVITY</u> estudiar, cantar, correr, hacer ejercicio, practicar
<u>ACCOMPLISHMENT</u> comer la manzana, ver la película, correr 1 km beberse el café, hacer la tarea	<u>ACHIEVEMENT</u> notar, nacer, encontrar, descubrir

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