

The L2 Acquisition of Spanish Passive and Impersonal *Se* by French- and English-Speaking Adults

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1. Introduction

A substantial number of studies in second language (L2) acquisition have shown that L2 learners come to acquire the grammatical constraints of structures which are neither present in their L1 nor salient in the input (e.g., Dekydtspotter & Sprouse, 2001; Kanno, 1999; Schreiber & Sprouse, 1998). Spanish reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals are a good example of two different constructions which instantiate a potential learnability problem because they are superficially very similar, i.e., they both display the sequence *se* V DP, but they each have idiosyncratic morphological and syntactic behavior:

- (1a) *Se contrataron los mejores profesores del país.* [reflexive passive]
SE.acc hired-pl. the best teachers.nom of the country
'The best teachers in the country were hired.'
- (1b) *Se contrató a los mejores profesores del país.* [reflexive impersonal]
SE.nom hired-sg. A the best teachers.acc of the country
'The best teachers in the country were hired.'

In the analysis adopted herein, *se* in reflexive passives checks accusative case, and the internal argument (DP) bears nominative case and triggers agreement on the verb. This is shown in (1a), where the plural subject *los mejores profesores del país* 'the best teachers in the country' triggers plural agreement on the verb *contrataron* 'hired-pl'. In contrast, *se* in reflexive impersonals checks nominative case and the internal argument (DP) bears accusative case (e.g., Belletti, 1982; Tremblay, 2002). This is illustrated in (1b), where *se* is the subject and triggers default (third-person singular) agreement on the verb *contrató* 'hired-sg'. Furthermore, in Spanish, [+animate] direct objects must be preceded by the object-marking preposition *a*. This explains why the internal argument *los mejores profesores del país* 'the best teachers in the country' in (1b), which checks accusative case, is preceded by *a*.

Very few studies have been conducted on the L2 acquisition of Spanish reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals. Bruhn de Garavito (1999a, 1999b), who carried out an experiment on the L2 acquisition of reflexive passive, reflexive impersonal, and alternating causative/inchoative

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constructions by advanced English- and near-native French- and English-speaking learners of Spanish, reports that L2 learners' grammaticality judgments were indistinguishable from those of the Control group. On this basis, she argues L2 learners' must have acquired the properties of reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals. The problem with this conclusion is that the participants in her Control group were from a variety of Spanish-speaking countries, and her grammaticality judgment task included items that are subject to dialectal variation. On those items, both the Control group and L2 learners were hesitant in their responses, with half of them accepting and half of them rejecting the constructions subject to dialectal variation. In this case, because Bruhn de Garavito does not specify to which variety of Spanish L2 learners were exposed, it is not clear whether they accepted certain constructions as a result of dialectal variation or because they have not acquired the structural and thematic properties of reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals.

The present study, a partial replication of Bruhn de Garavito (1999a, 1999b), investigates the L2 acquisition of Spanish reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals by advanced French- and English-speaking adults.¹ Its primary objective is to determine whether L2 learners can acquire the structural and thematic properties underlying *se* and the internal argument (DP) in reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals. It differs from Bruhn de Garavito's study in three respects. First, our participants have been assessed to be at an advanced level of proficiency, in contrast to Bruhn de Garavito's (1999a, 1999b) participants, who included one advanced and two near-native experimental groups. This means that the interlanguage grammar of our L2 learners is unlikely to be at its end state yet. Second, some of the test items on which our participants were tested differ from the test items used in Bruhn de Garavito's grammaticality judgment task. These differences were necessary in order to examine whether L2 learners have knowledge of the properties underlying *se* and the internal argument in reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals. Details on these differences will be provided in Section 4. Last but not least, our participants have learned Spanish as a foreign language in an instructional setting in Canada. Although one may not completely exclude the possibility that L2 learners have been exposed to different varieties of Spanish, the experimental groups in the present study have received instruction on standard Spanish only. Since our participants did not have extensive exposure to Spanish outside Canada, it seems reasonable to assume that dialectal variation should not be part of their grammar.

The article is organized as follows: Section 2 provides an analysis of reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals in terms of the structural and thematic properties of *se* and the internal argument in both constructions; Section 3 reviews Bruhn de Garavito's (1999a, 1999b) study on the L2 acquisition of reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals; Section 4 covers the details of the experiment and presents its results; and Section 5 discusses the significance of these results.

2. Properties of Spanish Reflexive Passives and Reflexive Impersonals

2.1 Reflexive passives

One way to express the passive in Spanish is with the reflexive passive construction, which is formed with the internal argument of the verb (*los libros* 'the books') appearing in a pre- or post-verbal position, the reflexive marker *se*, and the verb in its active form (*vendieron* 'sold-pl. '), as shown in (2a) and (2b):

- (2a) Los libros se vendieron rápidamente.
the books.NOM SE sold-pl. quickly
'The books were sold quickly.'
- (2b) Se vendieron los libros rápidamente.
SE sold-pl. the books.NOM quickly
'The books were sold quickly.'

¹ Note that Spanish is actually the third language of most of our participants. However, for reasons of convenience, the term "second language" (or L2) will be used throughout the article.

In (2a)-(2b), the internal argument *los libros* ‘the books’ is the subject and triggers a plural agreement on the verb *vendieron* ‘sold-pl.’. In Spanish, subjects are licensed in a pre- or post-verbal position. Reflexive passives do not have an external argument in subject position; instead, the subject (here *los libros* ‘the books’) undergoes the action(s) manifested by some implied Agent (the external argument—unexpressed).

Among various analyses proposed to account for reflexive passives (e.g., Belletti, 1982; Burzio, 1986; Dobrovie-Sorin, 1998; Raposo and Uriagereka, 1996), Belletti (1982) attributes two crucial properties to reflexive passive *se*. First, *se* is associated with the external theta-role (henceforth, ‘ θ -role’) of the verb otherwise assigned to the subject of a regular active sentence. This association is supported by a number of facts, for example, that the external argument cannot be expressed in an agentive PP introduced by *por* ‘by’:

- (3) *Los libros de la conferencia se vendieron *por algunos estudiantes*.
the conference books.NOM SE sold-pl. by some students

As shown in (3), reflexive passives cannot co-occur with an agentive PP, because *se* is already assigned the external θ -role of the verb, which leaves *algunos estudiantes* ‘some students’ without a θ -role. Yet, the presence of a covert Agent must be assumed, as it controls PRO in reflexive passives followed by an infinitival purpose clause:

- (4) Los libros de la conferencia se vendieron *PRO para promover la investigación en el medio académico*.
the conference books.NOM SE sold-pl. PRO to promote research in academic environments
‘The conference books were sold PRO to promote research in academic environments.’

In (4), it is understood that PRO is not an arbitrary one; it is controlled by an implied Agent, whoever sold the books. Thus, the only element that may receive the external θ -role in the sentence is *se*, since the subject DP (or internal argument) is already assigned the internal θ -role, that of Theme.

Another property of reflexive passive *se* observed by Belletti (1982) is that it checks the accusative case otherwise checked by the direct object. As a result, the internal argument, which may no longer check accusative case, must check nominative case. This is supported by the fact that the DP in reflexive passives triggers agreement on the verb (2a), it can be dropped (5a), but it cannot be replaced by a direct object clitic pronoun (5b) (Bruhn de Garavito, 1999a, 1999b):

- (5a) ¿Los libros_i? *pro_i* Se vendieron.
the books? *pro*.NOM SE.ACC sold-pl.
‘The books? They were sold.’
- (5b) ¿Los libros_i? **Se los_i* vendieron.
the books? SE.ACC them.ACC sold-pl.

The idea that *se* checks accusative case is also supported by the fact that unergative, unaccusative, and copulative verbs cannot co-occur with reflexive passive *se* since they cannot have a direct object, as illustrated in (6a)-(6c):

- (6a) *Ayer, Juan se lloró.
yesterday Juan.NOM SE.ACC cried-sg.
- (6b) *Ayer, los libros se llegaron.
yesterday the books.NOM SE.ACC arrived-pl.
- (6c) *Ayer, Juan se estaba furioso.
yesterday Juan.NOM SE.ACC was furious

These examples show that reflexive passives may be formed only with verbs which can assign the accusative case.

Whether it is difficult for native speakers of French and English to learn Spanish reflexive passives may depend on the typological proximity of L1 and L2, assuming that L1 transfer may facilitate or inhibit L2 acquisition (e.g., Schwartz & Sprouse, 1994, 1996). On the one hand, Spanish reflexive passives obey the same grammatical constraints as their French counterparts, except that the subject DP in French reflexive passives may only appear in a pre-verbal position, as shown in (7a)-(7b):

- (7a) Les livres se sont vendus rapidement.
the books.NOM SE.ACC are sold-pl. quickly
'The books were sold quickly.'
- (7b) *Se sont vendus les livres rapidement.
SE.ACC are sold-pl. the books.NOM quickly

On the other hand, Spanish differs from English, in that English does not have a reflexive marker to express the passive. Instead, it combines the copula *be* and the past participle *-en* to form the 'full' passive morphology.² Full passive constructions differ from reflexive passives not only in terms of morphology (the latter using an "active" verb form), but also because the former can appear with an agentive PP in (8), since the external θ -role is not assigned to any argument in the sentence:

- (8) The conference books were sold *by a few students*.

Hence, the typological proximity of Spanish to French (as opposed to English) may increase the ease with which French-speaking L2 learners can acquire Spanish reflexive passives.

2.2 Reflexive impersonals

Despite their similar superficial realizations, reflexive impersonals exhibit different properties from reflexive passives. First, they may be formed with unergative, unaccusative, and copulative verbs, as illustrated in (9a)-(9c), respectively:

- (9a) Siempre se llora en esta película.
always SE.NOM cries during this movie
'One always cries//We always cry during this movie.'
- (9b) Aquí nunca se llega con retraso.
here, never SE.NOM arrives late
'Here, one never arrives//we never arrive late.'
- (9c) En esta oficina, siempre se está furioso.
in this office always SE.NOM is furious
'In this office, one is//we are always furious.'

In (9a)-(9c), it is *se* that checks nominative case and triggers default (third person singular) agreement on the verb. Some varieties of Spanish also allow reflexive impersonals to be formed with transitive verbs whose internal argument is [-animate], as shown in (10).³

² While Spanish and French may also express the passive with full passive constructions, such structures tend not to be used as frequently as their reflexive counterparts.

³ For example, speakers from certain areas of Argentina accept and produce reflexive impersonals with a post-verbal [-animate] DP. Traditionally, speakers from Spain would, for the most part, reject sentences where agreement between the verb and the post-verbal DP is not present (Bosque and Demonte, 1999, p. 1676).

- (10) Aquí se vende libros de lingüística.
 here SE sells books of linguistics.ACC
 ‘Here one sells//we sell linguistics books. //Here linguistics books are sold.’

While (10) may be interpreted either as a reflexive passive or as a reflexive impersonal (as shown in the translation), reflexive impersonals with transitive verbs have now acquired the status of “active” sentences, since they require the presence of the object-marking preposition *a* if the internal argument is [+animate]. Moreover, they can host a direct object complement in lieu of the internal argument (DP) (Bruhn de Garavito, 1999a, 1999b; Hernanz and Brucart, 1987). These two supporting facts are exemplified in (11a)-(11b):

- (11a) Aquí se encuentra *a* muchos autores.
 here SE.NOM meets A many authors.ACC
 ‘Here one meets//we meet many authors.’
- (11b) Aquí se *los* encuentra.
 here SE.NOM them.ACC meet-sg
 ‘Here one meets//we meet them.’

In (11a), the internal argument *muchos autores* ‘many authors’ must be preceded by the object-marking preposition *a*, because it is [+animate] and checks accusative case. Given the latter, it can also be replaced by the accusative clitic *los* ‘them’ in (11b). Because the internal argument is marked with the accusative case, it cannot be dropped in (12), since object drop is not permitted in Spanish:

- (12) *Aquí se encuentra.
 here SE.NOM meets

The substitution of the internal argument for a direct object clitic, the insertion of the object-marking preposition *a*, and the impossibility for the internal argument to be dropped are direct consequences of the fact that the internal argument (thus not *se*) bears the accusative case.

Spanish reflexive impersonals possess a syntactic structure somewhat similar to their French and English counterparts. Nevertheless, French requires the use of the pronoun *nous* ‘we’ or *on* ‘one’ (or sometimes *tu* ‘you’) as the subject of the sentence, depending on whether the speaker is included or not. Likewise, English uses the pronoun *we* or *one* (or sometimes *you*), exhibiting the same pragmatic phenomenon. Examples of impersonals in French and English are provided in (13a)-(13b), respectively:

- (13a) Ici, on vend//nous vendons des livres de linguistique.
 here one sells//we sell some books of linguistics
 ‘Here one sells//we sell linguistic books//linguistic books are sold.’
- (13b) Here one sells//we sell linguistic books.

Importantly, neither French nor English has a reflexive marker that allows either language to form reflexive impersonals.

The properties of *se* and the internal argument in reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals, as discussed in this section, are summarized in Table 1.

However, this tendency has been changing over the last few decades, and reflexive impersonals followed by a post-verbal [-animate] DP are becoming more and more accepted (Christian Abello-Contesse and Mercedes Torres Cansino, personal communication, Nov. 7, 2003).

Table 1: Properties of reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals (summary)

	Reflexive passive		Reflexive impersonal	
	<i>se</i>	DP	<i>se</i>	DP
Thematic properties	External θ -role (Agent)	Internal θ -role (Theme/Patient)	External θ -role (Agent)	Internal θ -role (Theme/Patient)
Structural properties	Accusative case	Nominative case	Nominative case	Accusative case

The L2 acquisition of the properties outlined in Table 1 may give rise to a learnability problem for French and English L2 learners of Spanish, not only because reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals are very similar, but also because neither French nor English has constructions that are the exact grammatical counterparts. It is precisely this learnability problem that L2 learners must overcome.

3. Previous Research on the L2 Acquisition of Spanish *Se*

It is only recently that the L2 acquisition of Romance reflexive constructions within a generative framework has received the attention of L2 researchers (e.g., Bruhn de Garavito, 1999a, 1999b; Montrul, 1997, 1999; Toth, 1998, 1999). Bruhn de Garavito (1999a, 1999b) investigated the acquisition of reflexive impersonal, reflexive passive, and alternating causative/inchoative constructions by advanced English- and near-native French- and English-speaking learners of Spanish. Her participants included 10 English near-native speakers of Spanish, 10 French near-native speakers of Spanish, 10 advanced speakers of Spanish whose L1 was English, and a Control group made up of 11 native speakers of Spanish from Columbia (4), Mexico (3), Spain (1), Peru (1), El Salvador (1), and Guatemala (1). They completed a grammaticality judgment task of 90 items (50 grammatical and 40 ungrammatical), based on a five-point scale (–2 “sounds bad”; –1 “sounds bad, but not so much”; 0 “you cannot decide – try to avoid this answer”; 1 “sounds relatively good”; and 2 “sounds good”).

The test items assessing the participants’ knowledge of reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals are presented in Table 2. They include grammatical and ungrammatical reflexive passives with a pre-verbal [-animate] subject DP, grammatical reflexive impersonals with a post-verbal [+animate] object DP, and ungrammatical reflexive passives with a post-verbal [+animate] subject DP.⁴

Table 2: Test items on reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals (Bruhn de Garavito 1999a, pp. 269-272)

Sentence Type	Example
(i) Grammatical reflexive passives with pre-verbal [-animate] subject DP	<i>Unas casas se construyeron para vender.</i> some houses SE built-pl.to sell 'Some houses were built to sell.'
(ii) Ungrammatical reflexive passives with pre-verbal [-animate] subject DP	* <i>Unas casas se construyó para vender.</i> some houses SE built-sg. to sell
(iii) Grammatical reflexive impersonals with post-verbal [+animate] object DP	<i>Se arrestó a los García para impedir nuevos crímenes.</i> SE arrested-sg. A the Garcías to impede new crimes 'The Garcías were arrested in order to impede new crimes.'
(iv) Ungrammatical reflexive passives with [+animate] subject DP	* <i>Se arrestaron a los García para impedir nuevos crímenes.</i> SE arrested-pl. A the Garcías to impede new crimes

The reflexive passive in (ii) is ungrammatical, because the verb is third person singular and should be third person plural, given the plural subject *unas casas* ‘some houses’; and the reflexive passive in (iv) is ungrammatical, because the object marking preposition *a* should not precede [+animate] subjects,

⁴ Note that only the test items from Bruhn de Garavito (1999a, 1999b) that are pertinent to this study are presented, and they are labeled differently here, for consistency with the previous analyses. Bruhn de Garavito’s (1999a, 1999b) study included many more sentence types, which will not be discussed due to space limitations.

but [+animate] objects. Bruhn de Garavito (1999a, 1999b) did not categorize (iv) as ungrammatical, as it is produced and accepted in (a few) Spanish dialects.⁵

Table 3 indicates the number of Bruhn de Garavito's participants who accepted or gave a marginal response to the four sentence types (subject means ranging from -0.5 to $+2$ in the grammaticality judgment task) (Bruhn de Garavito, 1999a, 1999b).⁶

Table 3: Number of subjects who accepted grammatical and ungrammatical items (Bruhn de Garavito, 1999a, 1999b)

Sentence Type	Control	Near-Native French	Near-Native English	Advanced English
(i) Grammatical reflexive passives with pre-verbal [-animate] subject DP	6/6	4/4	2/2	1/7
(ii) Ungrammatical reflexive passives with pre-verbal [-animate] subject DP	0/6	0/4	0/2	0/7
(iii) Grammatical reflexive impersonals with post-verbal [+animate] object DP	9/11	10/11	6/10	2/10
(iv) Ungrammatical reflexive passives with post-verbal [+animate] subject DP	5/11	6/10	2/10	6/10

The results show that the participants in the Control group and in the three experimental groups accepted grammatical reflexive passives with a pre-verbal [-animate] subject DP (i), with the exception of the Advanced English group. On the other hand, none of the groups accepted ungrammatical reflexive passives with a pre-verbal [-animate] subject DP (ii). As for grammatical reflexive impersonals with a post-verbal [+animate] object DP (iii), only the Control group and the French near-native group have a high acceptability rate; the Advanced English group performed the worst on this sentence type. Finally, several participants accepted (ungrammatical) reflexive passives with a post-verbal [+animate] subject DP preceded by the object-marking preposition *a* (iv). The only group that seemed to behave a bit differently from all the others is the Advanced English group. This is likely to be the result of its lower proficiency level.

Bruhn de Garavito (1999a, 1999b) concludes that the near-native groups are indistinguishable from native speakers on most constructions and supports the claim that L2 learners can acquire the structural properties involved in the use of reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals. Yet, on reflexive passives with a post-verbal [+animate] DP preceded by the object-marking preposition *a* (iv), such a conclusion might not be warranted, since this sentence type is subject to dialectal variation. In view of the fact that Bruhn de Garavito's (1999a, 1999b) Control group is clearly not homogeneous—it includes participants from a variety of Spanish-speaking countries—it is possible that the participants' judgments in this group vary as a result of dialectal variation. On the other hand, Bruhn de Garavito (1999a) does not mention which variety of Spanish her L2 subjects had been exposed to when they learned Spanish. In particular, it is not clear whether they failed to reject ungrammatical reflexive passives with a post-verbal [+animate] subject DP preceded by *a* (iv) as a result of dialectal variation or because they have not acquired the structural properties associated with this construction. For this reason, it is necessary to look at (a greater number of) L2 learners who were exposed only to standard Spanish in order to determine whether they can acquire the structural (and thematic) properties involved in reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals.

⁵ Nevertheless, this sentence type is not part of standard Spanish and falls outside the analysis presented in Section 2. In addition, it was rejected by most of our Control group, as shall be shown in Section 4. For these reasons, I consider this sentence type ungrammatical.

⁶ Note that this scoring procedure overestimates the participants' rate of acceptability of the different sentence types.

4. The Experiment

4.1 *Research questions and predictions*

The research questions addressed in the present study are:

- A. Do advanced (L1 French and English) L2 learners of Spanish show grammatical knowledge of the different properties underlying *se* and the internal argument in reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals? If so, are they indistinguishable from native speakers?
- B. Does L1 (French or English) shape L2 learners' interlanguage grammar? If so, how?

If L2 learners have acquired the structural and thematic properties underlying *se* and the internal argument in Spanish reflexive passives, they will correctly assume that *se* checks accusative case and the internal argument checks nominative case. Likewise, if they have acquired the properties involved in the use of reflexive impersonals, they will know that *se* checks nominative case and the internal argument checks accusative case. They will also know that, because *se* is associated with the external θ -role of the verb, neither reflexive passives nor reflexive impersonals can co-occur with an agentive PP. Finally, if the L1 shapes L2 learners' interlanguage grammar, it will be easier for French L2 learners of Spanish to acquire the properties of reflexive passives than for English learners, given the typological proximity of French and Spanish.

4.2 *Elicitation materials*

The participants of this study completed a grammaticality judgment task, whose format was based on Bruhn de Garavito's (1999a, 1999b) grammaticality judgment task. The test included 64 sentences: 20 grammatical items, 28 ungrammatical items, and 16 distracters. Participants were asked to circle the number that best corresponded to their judgments with regard to specific sentences. The possible judgments included -2 ("sounds bad"), -1 ("sounds bad, but not so much"), 0 ("you cannot decide – try to avoid this answer"), 1 ("sounds relatively good"), and 2 ("sounds good"). Participants were specifically told not to pay attention to spelling, punctuation, style, or elegance of the sentences. They were also asked to circle only one number and not change their answer after doing so. Table 4 summarizes the sentence types that were included in the task.

Table 4: Sentence types (grammaticality judgment task)

Type	<i>se</i>	DP	Examples
Reflexive passive (agreement)	Object	<u>Subject</u>	(14a) <i>Las entradas para ese concierto se venden en las tiendas de música.</i> the tickets.NOM for this concert SE.ACC sell-pl. in the stores of music 'The tickets for this concert are sold in the music stores.'
			(14b) * <i>Muchos martinis se consumió en la fiesta.</i> many martinis.NOM SE.ACC consumed-sg. at the party
Reflexive impersonal (agreement) V+CP	<u>Subject</u>		(15a) <i>Se aconseja que los estudiantes estudien antes del examen.</i> SE.NOM advises that the students study-pl. before the exam 'It is advisable that students study before the exam.'
			(15b) * <i>No se aceptan que los pacientes traigan animales al hospital.</i> not SE.NOM accept-pl. that the patients bring-pl. animals to the hospital
Reflexive impersonal (agreement) V+PP			(15c) <i>No se come muy bien en este restaurante.</i> not SE.NOM eats very well in this restaurant 'One does not eat very well in this restaurant.'
			(15d) * <i>Se lloran mucho en ciertas películas.</i> SE.NOM cry-pl. a lot in some movies
Reflexive passive [+animate] DP	Object	<u>Subject</u>	(16a) <i>Se aceptaron muchos candidatos para el concurso.</i> SE.ACC accepted.pl. many candidates.NOM for the contest 'Many candidates were accepted for the contest.'
			(16b) * <i>Se arrestaron a los ladrones en menos de dos horas.</i> SE.ACC arrested.pl. A the thieves.NOM in less than two hours
Reflexive impersonal [+animate] DP	<u>Subject</u>	Object	(16c) <i>Se consulta a los profesores antes de los exámenes.</i> SE.NOM consults A the professors.ACC before the exams 'One consults the teachers before the exams.'
			(16d) * <i>Se conoce los amigos porque están dispuestos a ayudar.</i> SE.NOM meets the friends.ACC because (they) are willing to help
Reflexive passive	Agentive PP		(17a) * <i>Se vendieron unos libros por familias con dificultades económicas.</i> SE.acc sold-pl. some books.nom by families with financial difficulties
Reflexive impersonal			(17b) * <i>Se baila con mucha gracia por los profesionales de salsa.</i> SE.nom dances with grace by professionals of salsa

One set of grammatical and ungrammatical sentences tested whether L2 learners know that the internal argument in reflexive passives checks nominative case and triggers agreement on the verb (14a)-(14b). Items included four grammatical (14a) and four ungrammatical sentences (14b), where the subject triggers agreement on the verb and where it does not, respectively. The DPs were singular in four sentences and plural in four others. This set of reflexive passives follows a canonical (DP-verb) word order and its DPs are all [-animate].⁷

A second set of grammatical and ungrammatical items tested the participants' knowledge of the structural properties of *se* in reflexive impersonals (15a)-(15d), namely that it checks nominative case and triggers third person singular agreement on the verb. Items included eight grammatical and eight ungrammatical sentences, eight of which were formed with transitive verbs followed by a CP (henceforth, V+CP) (15a)-(15b), and eight of which were formed with intransitive verbs followed by a

⁷ [+Animate] DPs were not included in these sentence types because the sentence would no longer receive a passive interpretation, but a reflexive/reciprocal one.

PP (henceforth, V+PP) (15c)-(15d). Grammatical items have the correct third person singular agreement, and ungrammatical items have third person plural agreement.

A third set of grammatical and ungrammatical sentences was used to determine whether participants were sensitive to the structural properties of a [+animate] DP in reflexive passives (i.e., that it checks nominative case) (16a)-(16b) and in reflexive impersonals (i.e., that it checks accusative case) (16c)-(16d). They included eight reflexive passives and eight reflexive impersonals with a plural [+animate] DP appearing in post-verbal position. In grammatical reflexive passives (16a), the DP was not preceded by the object marking preposition *a*, since it does not check accusative case; in ungrammatical reflexive passives (16b), the subject was preceded by *a*. As for impersonals, grammatical items (16c) were sentences where the object DP was preceded by the object marking preposition *a*, because it has the feature [+animate] and checks accusative case, and ungrammatical items (16d) did not have such preposition. Reflexive passives also differ from reflexive impersonals in terms of subject-verb agreement, where the internal argument in the former triggers agreement on the verb, as opposed to in the latter.

Finally, a fourth and last set of sentences tested whether the participants know that the external θ -role (that of Agent) cannot be overtly expressed in either reflexive passives or reflexive impersonal (17a)-(17b). Sentences included four ungrammatical reflexive passives (17a) and four ungrammatical reflexive impersonals (17b) with an agentive PP introduced by *por* 'by'.

4.3 Participants

Two groups of third-year university-level Spanish students at the University of Ottawa were selected for this study. The final number of participants was 29: 13 native speakers of English and 16 native speakers of French, whose age ranged from 19 to 22 years, with the exception of one 26- and one 55-year-old participants (mean = 22;3). Most participants had knowledge of either French or English as a second language. The level of proficiency of each experimental group in Spanish corresponded to the university level in which the participants were when the experiment was conducted: since they were taking the second course of the third-year Spanish level (sixth semester), they were classified at an advanced level of proficiency.⁸ The program in which the participants were enrolled included three hours of instruction weekly, which focused on grammar, written skills, comprehension, and communicative interaction in the classroom. Grammar instruction was limited to textbook exercises. A review of the textbooks used within the Spanish program, as well as individual consultations with the Spanish teachers in the program, indicated that L2 learners did not receive formal instruction on the differences between reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals.⁹

The results of the two experimental groups were compared to those of a Control group, made up of 27 native speakers of Spanish from Valladolid (Spain), ranging from 19 to 30 years of age (mean = 24;9). Participants in the Control group were specialized in fields other than linguistics, started learning a second language only during high school, and had very few contacts with other languages outside academic settings.

4.4 Scoring procedures

Mean scores were computed for each sentence type from the participants' grammaticality judgments (4 tokens per sentence type). In order to compute the mean scores, the participants' judgments were simply averaged. The numbers of participants who provided an accurate response to grammatical and ungrammatical items are also provided. In order to compute the latter, grammatical judgments (1 "sounds relatively good" and 2 "sounds good") were collapsed, as were ungrammatical judgments (-1 "sounds bad, but not so much" and -2 "sounds bad"). To be considered accurate, participants needed to provide three accurate judgments (i.e., grammatical or ungrammatical) out of four tokens. Statistical differences were established on the basis of the mean scores only.

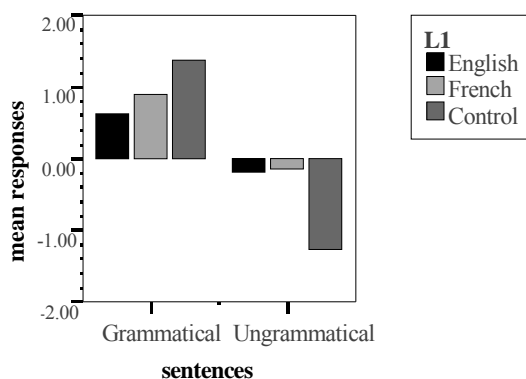
⁸ I am quite aware that as a result of this classification, the experimental groups might not be homogeneous.

⁹ However, it is impossible to control for the kind of instruction that L2 learners might go get themselves outside the classroom.

4.5 Results

Figure 1 shows the total mean judgments of participants on grammatical and ungrammatical items for both reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals. Overall, all the groups were able to differentiate grammatical from ungrammatical items.

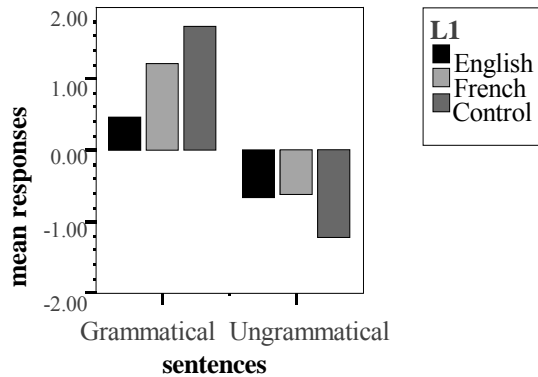
Figure 1
Reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals



A one-factor ANOVA performed on the mean grammaticality judgments reveals a main effect of language groups ($F[2, 53] = 7.152, p < .001$), and a one-way ANOVA conducted on the mean scores of the experimental groups indicates a main effect of grammaticality ($F[1, 29] = 76.771, p < .001$). A Fisher's LSD correlation coefficient conducted on both grammatical and ungrammatical items separately indicates that the three groups performed significantly differently from each other on grammatical items ($p [C/E] < .000, p [C/F] < .000, p [E/F] < .046$), and the French and English groups performed significantly differently from the Control group on ungrammatical items ($p < .000$), but not from each other ($p < .540$). These results show that the experimental groups were generally able to differentiate grammatical from ungrammatical items, despite the fact that their judgments were significantly different from those of the Control group, with the French group outperforming the English group on grammatical items.

The first set of sentences (14a)-(14b) tested whether L2 learners would know that the internal argument in reflexive passives checks nominative case and triggers agreement on the verb. Recall that these sentences aimed to determine if the participants would correctly assume that the internal argument in reflexive passives checks nominative case and triggers agreement on the verb (e.g., *Las entradas para ese concierto se venden en las tiendas de música* 'The tickets for this concert are sold in music stores' (14a)), and that reflexive passives where agreement is not triggered on the verb are ungrammatical (e.g., **Muchos martinis se consumió en la fiesta* 'Many martinis were consumed in the party' (14b)). Figure 2 shows the participants' mean scores on grammatical and ungrammatical items of this kind.

Figure 2
Reflexive passives and agreement



A one-factor ANOVA reveals a main effect of language groups only on grammatical items ($F[2,53] = 18.041, p < .000$), with the three groups performing significantly differently from one another ($p [C/E] < .000, p [C/F] < .013, p [E/F] < .002$). On ungrammatical items, only the French and the Control groups are significantly different ($p < .038$). A one-factor ANOVA conducted on the mean judgments of the experimental groups reveals a main effect of grammaticality ($F[1, 29] = 37.885, p < .001$). These results indicate that L2 learners judged grammatical items statistically differently from ungrammatical items, despite the fact that the two experimental groups differ significantly from the Control group on grammatical items. The French group outperformed the English group on grammatical items, but the experimental groups do not differ from each other on ungrammatical items.

Table 5 indicates the number of participants in each group who provided an accurate judgment on grammatical and ungrammatical reflexive passives testing agreement.

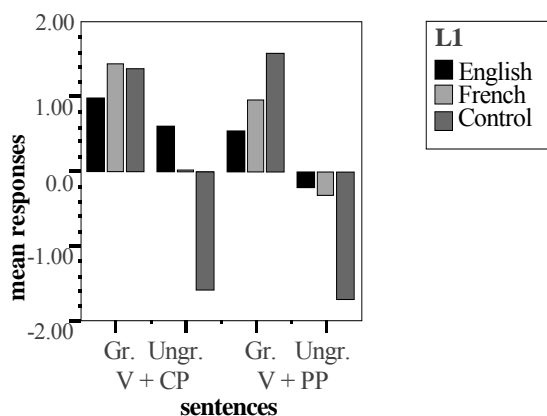
Table 5: Number of participants who provided an accurate judgment to reflexive passives testing agreement

	Grammatical	Ungrammatical	Both
English	6/13	5/13	2/13
French	12/16	9/16	7/16
Control	26/27	23/27	23/27

A look at the participants' accuracy rates shows that over half of the participants in the French group and in the Control group performed accurately on grammatical and ungrammatical items (separately), in contrast to the participants in the English group. Yet, few L2 learners provided the appropriate grammaticality contrasts between reflexive passives with agreement and reflexive passives without agreement. The French group outperformed the English group on these sentence types.

The second set of sentences (15a)-(15d) was used to determine whether L2 learners would know that *se* in reflexive impersonals checks nominative case and triggers a third person singular agreement on the verb. Recall that test items included sentences whose verb had the correct third person singular agreement, both in the case of transitive verbs followed by a CP (e.g., *Se aconseja que los estudiantes estudien antes del examen* 'It is advisable that students study before the exam' (15a) and intransitive verbs followed by a PP (e.g., *No se come muy bien en este restaurante* 'One does not eat well in this restaurant' (15c)), as well as sentences where agreement was plural, and thus, incorrect (e.g., **No se aceptan que los pacientes traigan animales al hospital* 'It is not acceptable that patients bring animals to the hospital' (15b); **Se lloran mucho en ciertas películas* 'One cries a lot during some movies' (15d)). Figure 3 shows the participants' mean scores on reflexive impersonals with transitive (V+CP) and intransitive (V+PP) verbs.

Figure 3
Reflexive impersonals and agreement



A one-factor ANOVA reveals a main effect of language groups ($F[2, 53] = 4.965, p < .008$), with the experimental groups performing significantly differently from the Control group, but not from each other ($p [C/E] < .018$; $p [C/F] < .006$; $p [E/F] < .856$). A one-factor ANOVA conducted on the grammaticality judgments of the experimental groups reveals a main effect of grammaticality ($F[1, 29] = 33.324, p < .000$). These results indicate that statistically, L2 learners were able to distinguish grammatical from ungrammatical items. Nevertheless, on reflexive impersonals followed by a CP, the English group judged both grammatical and ungrammatical items as grammatical.

Table 6 summarizes the number of participants in each group who provided an accurate judgment on grammatical and ungrammatical reflexive impersonals testing agreement.

Table 6: Number of participants who provided an accurate judgment to reflexive impersonals testing agreement

	V+CP			V+PP		
	Grammatical	Ungrammatical	Both	Grammatical	Ungrammatical	Both
English	10/13	1/13	1/13	5/13	7/13	2/13
French	15/16	6/16	5/16	11/16	6/16	4/16
Control	26/27	23/27	22/27	26/27	27/27	26/27

The participants' accuracy rates show that over half of the participants in both experimental groups performed accurately on grammatical reflexive impersonals followed by a CP, and over half of the participants in the French group and the Control group provided an accurate judgment on grammatical reflexive impersonals with intransitive verbs. In contrast, few L2 learners performed accurately on ungrammatical items, with the exception of the English group on ungrammatical reflexive impersonals with an intransitive verb followed by a PP. Crucially, very few L2 learners provided the appropriate contrasts between grammatical and ungrammatical items. These results show that ungrammatical items were more problematic for L2 learners than grammatical items, with most L2 learners failing to provide the correct grammaticality contrasts.

The third set of sentences (16a)-(16d) tested whether the participants would know that the [+animate] internal argument in reflexive passives must not be preceded by the object marking preposition *a* as it checks nominative case, in contrast to reflexive impersonals, where it must be preceded by *a* as it checks accusative case. Recall that grammatical items were sentences where the internal argument is preceded by the object-marking preposition *a* when it is [+animate] and checks accusative case (e.g., *Se consulta a los profesores antes de los exámenes* 'One consults the teachers before the exams' (16c)), but not when it checks nominative case (e.g., *Se aceptaron muchos candidatos para el concurso* 'Many candidates were accepted for the contest' (16a)). Ungrammatical items were sentences where *a* is absent when the internal argument checks accusative case (e.g., **Se*

conoce los amigos, porque están dispuestos a ayudar ‘One meets friends because they are willing to help’ (16d)), and where *a* is present when the internal argument checks nominative case (**Se arrestaron a los ladrones en menos de dos horas* ‘The thieves were arrested in less than two hours’ (16b)). Figures 4 and 5 show the mean scores of participants on reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals with a post-verbal [+animate] DP preceded or not by the preposition *a*.

Figure 4

Reflexive passives with a [+animate] DP

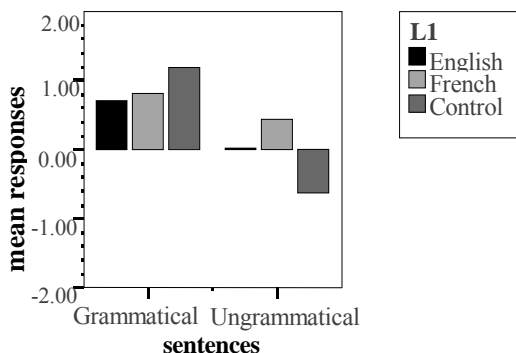
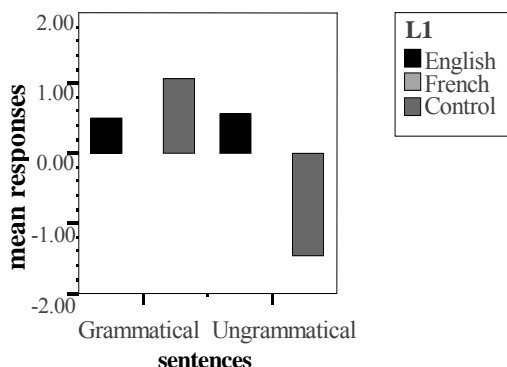


Figure 5

Reflexive impersonals with a [+animate] DP



A one-factor ANOVA, repeated measure, does not reveal a main effect of language groups ($F[2, 53] = 2.455, p < .088$), with only the English group performing statistically differently from the Control group ($p < .040$). Similarly, a one-factor ANOVA conducted on the mean scores of the experimental groups does not indicate a main effect of grammaticality ($F[1, 29] = 2.661, p < .106$). Hence, L2 learners judged both grammatical and ungrammatical items the same, either as grammatical or marginal.

Table 7 indicates the number of participants who provided an accurate judgment on reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals with a post-verbal [+animate] DP.

Table 7: Number of participants who provided an accurate judgment on reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals with a post-verbal [+animate] DP

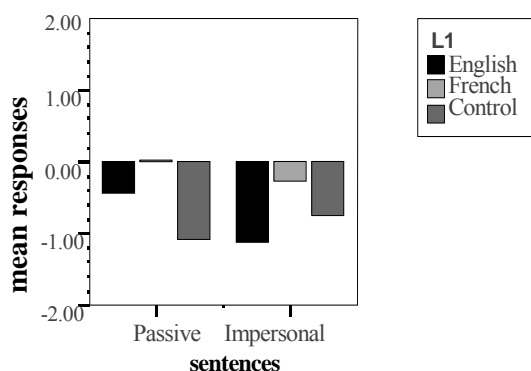
	Reflexive passive			Reflexive impersonal		
	Grammatical	Ungrammatical	Both	Grammatical	Ungrammatical	Both
English	7/13	3/13	0/13	4/13	2/13	1/13
French	9/16	4/16	0/16	4/16	4/16	0/16
Control	23/27	21/27	15/27	21/27	24/27	18/27

The participants' accuracy rates show that other than on grammatical reflexive passives, very few L2 learners in each experimental group performed accurately on grammatical and ungrammatical reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals with a post-verbal [+animate] DP preceded or not by the preposition *a*. In addition, virtually none of the participants provided the appropriate contrasts between grammatical and ungrammatical items. Even the Control group's responses are lower than one would expect, a point to which I will return in the discussion section. Overall, neither of the experimental groups was able to distinguish grammatical from ungrammatical items.

The fourth set of sentences (17a)-(17b) was used to determine whether L2 learners would know that the external θ -role or Agent cannot be overtly expressed in either reflexive passives or reflexive impersonals, as it is already associated with *se*. Recall that test items included sentences where the Agent is expressed in an agentive PP in both reflexive passives (e.g., **Se vendieron unos libros por familias con dificultades económicas* ‘Some books were sold by families with financial difficulties’ (17a)) and reflexive impersonals (e.g., **Se baila con mucha gracia por los profesionales de salsa* ‘One

dances with grace by professionals of salsa' (19b)). Figure 6 shows the mean scores of participants on both ungrammatical reflexive passives and ungrammatical reflexive impersonals.

Figure 6
Reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals with an agentive PP



A one-factor ANOVA reveals a main effect of language groups ($F[2, 53] = 6.727, p < .002$), with the French group performing significantly differently from the English group ($p < .012$) and from the Control group ($p < .000$). The English group, on the other hand, did not perform statistically differently from the Control group ($p < .586$). The mean grammaticality judgments show that the English group categorized both reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals with an agentive PP as ungrammatical, in contrast to the French group, whose mean judgments were marginal.

Table 8 gives the number of participants who provided an accurate judgment on both sentence types.

Table 8: Number of participants who provided an accurate judgment to reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals with an agentive PP

	Reflexive passive	Reflexive impersonal
English	6/13	9/13
French	3/16	6/16
Control	23/27	22/27

A look at the participants' accuracy rates indicates that less than half of the participants in each experimental group performed accurately on reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals with an agentive PP, with the exception of the participants in the English group on reflexive impersonals. On these sentence types, the French group seemed more willing to accept an agentive PP in both reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals than any other group.

Finally, and most importantly, a look at the participants' accuracy rate across sentence types indicates that none of the participants in either experimental group provided the appropriate grammaticality contrasts across sentence types (English: 0/13; French: 0/16).

5. Discussion

The present study aimed to address the question of whether advanced French and English L2 learners of Spanish show grammatical knowledge of the different properties underlying *se* and the internal argument in reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals, and if so, whether they are indistinguishable from native speakers. The results of this experiment can be discussed in terms of L2 learners' mean scores on the grammaticality judgment task as well as their accuracy rates on grammatical and ungrammatical items.

On the one hand, the mean scores indicate that on reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals testing agreement, L2 learners were in general able to distinguish grammatical from ungrammatical items, although on most sentence types, they performed significantly differently from the Control group. This, however, is not true of reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals with a post-verbal [+animate] DP preceded or not by the object-marking preposition *a*, where no significant difference was found between grammatical and ungrammatical items, with L2 learners failing to reject the latter. On reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals with an agentive PP, only the English group provided accurate (ungrammatical) judgments. In general, the experimental groups seem to have experienced greater difficulty in recognizing the ungrammatical items as ungrammatical.

On the other hand, a look at the participants' accuracy rates indicates that few L2 learners performed accurately on most sentence types, with the exception of: (a) grammatical reflexive impersonals (V+CP) and grammatical reflexive passives with a post-verbal [+animate] DP, where over half of the participants in each experimental group provided accurate judgments; (b) reflexive passives testing agreement and reflexive impersonals (V+PP), where over half of the participants in the French performed accurately; and (c) (ungrammatical) reflexive impersonals with an agentive PP, where over half of the participants in the English group provided accurate judgments. These sentence types represent only 35% of all test items. In addition, most L2 learners failed to provide the appropriate contrasts between grammatical and ungrammatical items, and those who did failed to do so consistently across sentence types.

With such results, it is clear that at this point in the L2 acquisition process, none of the participants in French or the English group has acquired the structural and thematic properties of *se* and the internal argument in either reflexive passives or reflexive impersonals. An obvious source of difficulty comes from reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals with a [+animate] DP and the presence or absence of the object-marking preposition *a*. Possibly, the fact that the sentence type **Se arrestaron a los ladrones en menos de dos horas* 'The thieves were arrested in less than two hours' (16b) is accepted in some dialects of Spanish might have induced L2 learners to accept ungrammatical reflexive passives with a post-verbal [+animate] DP preceded by *a*. This may also be why the number of participants in the Control group who provided an accurate judgment on this sentence type is much lower than one would expect. On the other hand, grammatical or ungrammatical reflexive impersonals with a post-verbal [+animate] DP (e.g., *Se consulta a los profesores antes de los exámenes* 'One consults the teachers before the exams' (16c); **Se conoce los amigos, porque están dispuestos a ayudar* 'One meets friends because they are willing to help' (16d) have not (to my knowledge) been reported to be subject to dialectal variation. Yet, the Control group's grammaticality judgments on these sentence types are not as high as one would expect. It is not clear why this is so.¹⁰ If (16c) and (16d) are not subject to dialectal variation, then there is no reason to expect inaccurate judgments from the experimental groups on these sentence types. Thus, L2 learners' general difficulty with reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals with a [+animate] DP preceded or not by *a* might not lie in the fact that (16b) is subject to dialectal variation.¹¹

Alternatively, it is possible that L2 learners have not yet mastered the use of the object-marking preposition *a*. As neither French nor English marks accusative [+animate] DPs with a preposition, the presence or absence of such preposition might be completely irrelevant in the L2 learners' interlanguage grammar. That the L2 acquisition of this preposition is problematic has indeed been acknowledged in other studies (e.g., Liceras, 1994). Nonetheless, if this were the sole cause of L2 learners' poor performance on the task, better results would have been found in reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals without a [+animate] internal argument. I have shown that very few L2 learners provided the appropriate grammaticality contrasts on several other sentence types. Hence, it seems that L2 learners do not (yet) show knowledge of the structural and thematic properties of *se* and the internal argument in either reflexive passives or reflexive impersonals. Their proficiency level might not have been advanced enough at the time of testing.

¹⁰ Possibly, other elements in the sentences influenced the Control group's judgments.

¹¹ Nevertheless, further research is needed in order to determine the status of reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals with a post-verbal [+animate] DP in L1 Spanish, with particular attention to the object-marking preposition *a*.

This study also attempted to address the question of whether L1 (here, French and English) shapes L2 learners' interlanguage grammar. The mean scores indicate few instances of significant differences between the French and the English groups. A somewhat significant difference was found on L2 learners' overall mean responses on grammatical items ($p < .046$), with the French group outperforming the English group. A closer look at individual sentence types indicates that the French group outperformed the English group to a significant extent on grammatical reflexive passives with pre-verbal [-animate] DP testing agreement ($p < .002$), and to a somewhat significant extent on grammatical reflexive impersonals with a transitive verb followed by a CP ($p < .05$). On ungrammatical reflexive impersonals with an agentive PP, however, it is the English group that outperformed the French group ($p < .039$). More differences were found in L2 learners' accuracy rates, with the French group outperforming the English group also on ungrammatical reflexive passives testing agreement.

This means that the French group outperformed the English group on three out of 12 sentence types. These sentences have one element in common: they tested L2 learners' knowledge of the nominative-case checking of *se* or the internal argument, and the agreement it triggers on the verb. The fact that French has richer agreement than English seems to have helped the French group on test items involving agreement. It is not clear, however, why the English group outperformed the French group on ungrammatical reflexive impersonals with an agentive PP. A greater effect of L1 was not observed, perhaps because most L2 learners had some knowledge of either French or English as a second language. Another possibility is that L2 learners at an advanced level of proficiency might not rely so much on their L1 when operating in the target language.

It is difficult to make a direct comparison between the results of this experiment and those of Bruhn de Garavito (1999a, 1999b), since they differ in terms of participants (namely their level of proficiency), test items, and experimental design. One comparison that can be established is between her advanced group (L1 English) and our English group.¹² The participants in Bruhn de Garavito's study responded to her grammaticality judgment task more or less like the English group in this experiment: in both experiments, L2 learners performed better on grammatical items than on ungrammatical ones. This discrepancy is more salient for grammatical and ungrammatical reflexive passives involving agreement in Bruhn de Garavito's experiment than in ours. Ungrammatical reflexive passives with a post-verbal [+animate] DP preceded by the object-marking preposition *a* were also problematic for her experimental groups as well as her Control group. Grammatical reflexive impersonals with a post-verbal [+animate] DP preceded by *a*, on the other hand, were problematic only for her advanced and near-native English groups. Dialectal variation is therefore not sufficient to explain the difficulty that her two English groups encountered with reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals involving a post-verbal [+animate] DP, as the great majority of the participants in her Control group accepted this sentence type (see Table 3). This suggests that the L2 acquisition of the object-marking preposition *a*, as well as of the constructions at issue, is subject to difficulties even at near-native levels of proficiency.

Of course, this research is not without limitations. First, the two experimental groups of this study might not be homogeneous, since their level of proficiency in Spanish was not assessed independently. Second, although the textbooks that the L2 learners used within the Spanish program (i.e., over three years) did not include grammar lessons on what differentiates reflexive passives from reflexive impersonals, one cannot control for the instruction that the participants might have received outside the classroom. At last, firmer conclusions could have been drawn, had L2 learners' knowledge of agreement and of the use of the object-marking preposition *a* been assessed independently.

6. Conclusion

The present study, a partial replication of Bruhn de Garavito (1999a, 1999b), investigated the L2 acquisition of Spanish reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals by French- and English-speaking adults at an advanced level of proficiency. I have shown that Spanish reflexive passives and reflexive

¹² Naturally, there is a possibility that the level of proficiency of the advanced group in Bruhn de Garavito (1999a, 1999b) is not equivalent to that of our English group.

impersonals instantiate a potential learnability problem, because (1) the constructions are superficially very similar (*se* V DP) but display distinct idiosyncratic morphological and syntactic behavior; (2) neither exists in English, and the reflexive impersonal does not exist in French; and (3) differences between the two are typically not subject to explicit instruction. The results of the grammaticality judgment task indicated that L2 learners have not (yet) acquired the structural and thematic properties underlying *se* and the internal argument in either construction. These results contrast with the findings of studies showing that adult L2 learners come to know subtle grammatical properties of the target language which are not present in the L1 nor salient in the input (e.g., Dekydtspotter & Sprouse, 2001; Kanno, 1999; Schreiber & Sprouse, 1998). The proficiency level of L2 learners in the present study is perhaps not advanced enough for them to have acquired the structural and thematic properties involved in the use of reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals, since the input to which they are exposed is limited to classroom time. The findings reported herein confirm that the adult L2 acquisition of Spanish reflexive passives and reflexive impersonals by native French and English speakers instantiates a learnability problem, not yet overcome at an advanced level of proficiency.

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