L2 Acquisition of Focus Constructions in European Portuguese and the L2 Status of the Syntax-Discourse Interface

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1. Introduction

A growing body of research has been dedicated to characterizing the interlanguage of near-native speakers, L2 learners who have reached the "best attainable final state" (Sorace, 2003, p.130), and solving a query we can state informally as, "What causes a near-native to persistently be non-native?" or "In which area(s) of the grammar does the near-native speaker behave differently from the native?"

In better typifying near-native grammars, Sorace's (1993) seminal work on the L2 acquisition of Italian unaccusatives distinguished *divergent* behavior, that which is systematically different from native behavior, from *indeterminate* behavior, that which lacks some property of the L2 grammar. Both behaviors are in contrast to *convergent*, or native-like, behavior. This discrimination between qualitatively different grammars and its significance in studying a learner's capacity for reaching native-like comprehension has been more recently addressed within the domain of the grammar known as the *interface*, or meeting point, of different, interacting modules of the grammar. Current studies have addressed whether or not divergence is a consequence of difficulty in the narrow syntax or at the interface, such as that of syntax and pragmatics or syntax and discourse (Hertel, 2003; Belletti & Leonini, 2004; Hopp, 2004, 2005; Slabakova & Montrul, to appear; Valenzuela, 2006; Lozano, in press). The salient discovery of these efforts is that divergence, possibly caused by an impaired grammatical feature or processing deficit, occurs when learners are faced with acquiring properties of pragmatics or discourse representation, though a small number of advanced learners have evidenced that achieving native-like syntactic representations of interpretive elements is not impossible. Overall, L2 acquisition deficiencies appear to be dichotomized with respect to syntactic and interpretive features, and such deficiencies can persist until the near-native level. Following this trend in examining questions endemic to interface issues and divergence, this study investigated the L2 acquisition of focus in European Portuguese (EP). It will be shown that results support those of earlier studies: despite having target syntax, most non-natives failed to converge on native-like focus representations.

2. The Syntax of Focus in EP and English

EP has been defined as *discourse-configurational*, where the syntax allows for variant word orders which correlate with discourse functions.[1] English, however, is non–discourse–configurational, having a more rigid sentential word order. Accordingly, narrow– and multiple–foci contexts in EP are expressed with VOS and VSO orders, respectively; in English, these focus constructions surface only in SVO. What underlies these cross-linguistic differences and accounts for word order variance in EP?

[1] EP permits five word orders: SVO, the canonical order, VSO, VOS, OSV, and OVS.

The answer arguably lies in the outputs generated by the syntax proper and the prosodic and syntactic operations (not) permitted for focus-marking when interface conditions dictate a focus interpretation.

The syntax of EP can generate SVO (subject in [Spec, IP]) and VSO (subject in [Spec, vP]), while English syntax can only generate SVO. In *narrow subject focus contexts*, as in (1) below, in–situ subject Case licensing by Agree and object scrambling in EP yield the same semantic effect as stress-shift to the subject in English. These operations are shown below in (1b) and (1b'), respectively.[2] However, given a *multiple–foci context*, as in (2) below, EP and English both use heavy stress application at the interface. They differ with regard to what outputs the syntax can generate, SVO and VSO. This is seen in (2b) and (2b') below (Costa, 2004a, p.80, 82).

(1)   a. Who broke the window?   (2)   a. Who broke what?

      b. Partiu [OBJ a janela] [SUBJ O PAULO].   b. Partiu [SUBJ **O PAULO**] [OBJ A JANELA].
         broke   the window   the Paulo   broke   the Paulo   the window
         'Paulo broke the window.'   'Paulo broke the window.'

      b'. **PAULO** broke the window.   b'. **PAULO** broke the **WINDOW**.

This section will now expound on these focus–marking strategies, presenting evidence for a prosodically–driven account of focus, contra a feature-driven account. Firstly, we will review evidence in support of the available subject and object surface positions in EP.

Costa (2004a, b) argues that SV and VS word orders in EP are sanctioned by Nominative Case-licensing under Move (SVO, subject in [Spec, IP]) or Agree (VS, subject in [Spec, vP]), as set forth in the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1998, 1999). Firstly, evidence that subjects can surface pre–verbally in [Spec, IP] is demonstrated by the subject's A–binding behavior, shown here in (3):

(3)   Todos os coelhos_i comem a sua_i cenuoura.   (Costa, 2000, p. 95, ex. 3)
      all   the rabbits eat   poss. carrot
      'Each rabbit eats his own carrot.'

The possessive pronoun *a sua* is properly A–bound by the subject QP. If the subject had been raised to a higher CP–internal Spec position (i.e., a non–argument position), the interpretation in (3) would not be viable; therefore, the subject must be in [Spec, IP]. Secondly, and of greater concern, evidence for subjects in [Spec, vP] is illustrated below with embedded clauses (4) and adverb ordering (6).

(4)   O Paulo disse que comeu a Maria a sopa.   (Costa, 2004a, p. 26, ex. 10)
      the Paulo said that ate the Maria the soup
      'Paulo said that Mary ate the soup.'

In (4), a post–verbal subject appears in the embedded clause. If the argument is that subjects are in [Spec, IP] and surface post–verbally because of V–to–C movement, as in this structure (5),

(5) $[_{CP} V_i [_{IP} Subj_j [_{I'} t_i [_{vP} t_j t_i Obj]]]]$,

then we should not find post–verbal subjects in embedded clauses, as V–to–C movement would be obviated by the complementizer occupying V's target landing site: C°. In fact, we do find a post–verbal subject in an embedded clause (4). V has presumably moved to T; the subject has stayed low. Next, as 'monosyllabic adverbs are a reliable test for marking the left–edge of the VP' (Costa, 2004a, p.28), observe the distribution of *bem* ('well') in V–initial structures (6):

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[2] Constituents marked with all capital letters signal focus. Boldfaced items represent prosodic stress application.

(6)   a. *Bem comeu o Paulo maçãs.   (Costa, 2004a, p. 28, ex. 18)
          well ate   the Paulo apples
          'Paulo ate the apples well.'

        b. ?*Comeu o Paulo **bem** maçãs.
        c. *Comeu o Paulo maçãs **bem.**
        d. Comeu **bem** o Paulo maçãs.

If the subject were in [Spec, IP], (6a–c) are expected to be grammatical. The only position available for the adverb, though, is between the verb and subject, as in (6d); thus, the subject must be in [Spec, vP].

As noted earlier, that subjects in EP can surface in [Spec, IP] or [Spec, vP] is a consequence of the availability of both Move and Agree. In SVO, subjects are Case–marked by Move, while in VS, subjects are Case–marked in situ by Agree, in which local Agree is established via a Probe–Goal relationship: the uninterpretable Φ–features of finite Iº are matched with the interpretable Φ–set of the subject DP in [Spec, vP] (Chomsky, 1999, 2001). Additional evidence Costa proposes for the claim that subjects can remain in their external Merge position for feature identity, deletion, and Case-assignment is provided by copular inversion constructions (i.e., specificational sentences), as illustrated here:

(7)   O assassino sou/devo ser eu.   (Costa, 2004a, p. 100, ex. 71, 73a)
        the murderer am/must-1sg be I
        'The murderer is/must be me.'

In (7), we see that both a main verb and a modal agree with the Nominative case pronoun, *eu,* to the right. Conversely, agreement to the right is not possible in English, as (8) exemplifies:

(8)   a. *The murderer am I.   (Costa, 2004a, p. 101, ex. 75)

        b. The murderer is me.

Unlike EP, Agree as a subject Case–licensing mechanism is not available in English, and thus agreement to the right is not possible in English. Also unlike EP, English does not permit A–bar object scrambling. In (9a) below, the object in VOS does not bind the possessive anaphor *seu*, as is expected if the object is in a VP–adjoined position. However, a VSO structure does permit binding (9b).

(9)   a. *Viu [Obj o Paulo_i] [Subj o seu_i irmão].   (Costa, 2004a, p.33, ex. 33a)
          saw   the Paulo   his brother
          'His_i brother saw Paulo_i.'

        b. Viu [Subj o Paulo_i] [Obj o seu_i irmão].   (Costa, 2004a, p. 33, ex. 33b)
          saw   the Paulo   his brother
          'Paulo_i saw his_i brother.'

The interpretation in (9a) is not possible; only that associated with VSO is possible (9b): 'Paulo saw his brother,' where *seu* is bound by *Paulo* in [Spec, vP]. These examples are significant, as this study used VSO/VOS binding to test knowledge of in situ subjects and object scrambling.[3]

3.   The Syntax-discourse Interface: Prosody-driven Focus Articulation

Contra the view that focus is marked by feature-driven movement to e.g., FocP, (Rizzi, 1997, among others), Costa (2004a) maintains that the structural realization of focus is triggered by prosodic considerations – the need for (a) focus to be the most prosodically prominent element and (b) to satisfy a universal unmarked prosodic configuration, in which all sentences are realized with neutral stress on

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[3] The interested reader is directed to Costa (2000, 2004a, b) for additional data in support of subjects in [Spec, IP] and [Spec, vP] and A-bar object scrambling.

the most embedded (here, rightmost) constituent (Cinque, 1993), following the Neutral Stress Rule (NSR): 'Assign the most prominent stress to the rightmost element' (Costa, 2004a, p.88). If a language can produce more than one possible output in the syntax proper, interface conditions filter those outputs and choose the most economical of them. For focus, the output selected will be that in which focus is in rightmost position, where it can receive prosodic prominence via the NSR. If the syntax is unable to generate such an output, a disambiguation strategy (e.g., stress-shift) may be enforced. Though prosodic strategies are less economical for marking focus, as they nullify the work of the NSR, they are permitted in order that the structure at LF is congruent with the discourse requirements.

The focus contexts relevant to this study are narrow- and multiple-foci contexts. In the former, EP syntax produces a VOS structure by means of Agree and object scrambling, while English produces SVO with stress being shifted to the subject (observed in §2 (1)). For multiple foci, EP generates VSO via Agree, and English generates SVO (§2 (2)). Both languages utilize prosodic disambiguation strategies imposed by interface conditions so that S and O are focus-marked.[4] Taking these facts into consideration, we will now discuss the study design and experiment procedures.

4. The Study

Sorace (2003) has noted that advanced and near-native L2ers often display divergent behavior in interface-conditioned syntax, not necessarily in the narrow syntax, in the form of *residual optionality*.[5] This may be due to the prolonged use of L1 options and/or the lack of unambiguous input (Sorace, 1999, 2000, 2003; Papp, 2000). This proposal is in line with a provision of the Full Transfer/Full Access Hypothesis (FT/FA) (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996), which asserts that some L1 properties may persist until the end state, fossilizing in the L2 grammar. With these theoretical considerations, the research questions for this study were (a) can learners acquire the syntactic constraints associated with EP focus? (b) can learners acquire the EP focus-marking strategies? and (c) will near-natives display optionality? In acquiring focus in EP, L2ers must learn the following: Agree is sufficient for subject Case-licensing; A-bar object scrambling is allowed; and both syntactic and prosodic strategies are employed for focus marking. In addition to this learnability task, the input is not transparent, focus is rarely, if ever, taught in the classroom, and the fact that SVO is the dominant word order of EP and English may be a source of confusion. Also, VOS may be less frequent in the input (Costa, p.c.), since EP permits null objects in VOS. Moreover, the probable dearth of these non-interrogative VS orders, as they are exploited only in very specific situations, adds to the complexity of the learner's task.

According to the notions of divergence at the interface and optionality and considering the nature of the input, the following predictions (10–11) were made:

(10)   beginners and intermediates may not perform above chance on any of the experimental tasks; they may show more knowledge of syntactic properties than of focus-marking strategies; and

(11)   advanced and near-native learners may show signs of residual optionality, or they may consistently resort to their L1 SVO option for focus, despite knowledge of the syntax.

4.1 Participants and Experiment

Fourteen English L2 speakers and 15 native speakers (NS) of EP were recruited and tested predominantly in Portugal. L2ers were allocated to beginner (n=2), intermediate (n=4), advanced (n=4) and near-native (n=6) groups, as determined by two proficiency tests: (1) a 58-item pencil-and-paper task (cloze, reading comprehension, and writing); and (2) a spontaneous speech task (White & Genesee, 1996; Valenzuela, 2006), included as an additional assessment tool for accurately identifying near-natives; accordingly, learners who scored in the NS range on the pencil-and-paper task were not considered 'near-native' unless they scored a mean of at least 9.0/10.0 in the spontaneous speech task.

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[4] This prosodic strategy in EP is a last resort, since two constituents cannot concomitantly be rightmost and simultaneously receive neutral sentence (NSR) stress. The object is in the focus set by virtue of being c-commanded by the prosodically-marked subject in VSO (Reinhart, 1995, p.87). See (1–2) above, §2.

[5] This optionality is characterized as the prolonged use of an L1 option which surfaces occasionally, together with use of the successfully-acquired L2 option.

Three tasks were administered. Firstly, a grammaticality judgment task (GJT) tested knowledge of Agree with specificational sentences (five grammatical, five ungrammatical, ten fillers), as in (12) below. Participants rated sentences on a five-point naturalness scale and provided corrections for sentences rated a 1 or 2. The option of 'I don't know' was also available.

(12)   O mãe sou/*é eu.
         the mother am/is I
         'The mother is me.'

In a truth-value judgment task (TVJT), knowledge of object scrambling was tested. A context was presented; learners decided if the sentence truthfully described the story by circling *yes* or *no*.[6] Five contexts were given in each of these two conditions: VSO binding (grammatical) and VOS binding constructions with a scrambled object (ungrammatical), as in (13).[7] Five fillers were also included.

(13)   Gabriela and Carla are friends. They are going to a party tonight. The party is far away. Carla must drive there. Carla does not have a car, though. Gabriela does have a car. So Carla calls Gabriela to ask for a ride to the party.

         Chamou a Gabriela a sua amiga.   (*'Her$_i$ friend called Gabriela$_i$.')

         Is this statement a true description of the situation above?   Yes   (No)

In (13), a *no* response is taken as an indication that the individual has acquired A-bar object scrambling. Since the VSO interpretation *Gabriela$_i$ called her$_i$ friend* is impossible given the context, we do not expect learners to accept the sentence, marking *yes*, on the basis of this impossible interpretation. Rather, learners should get the target VOS interpretation, in which *Gabriela* is the object and *a sua amiga* is the subject: 'Her$_i$ friend called Gabriela$_i$.' If learners do not know that object scrambling is of the A-bar variety, they will incorrectly accept this sentence. Conversely, learners with the VOS interpretation who have acquired A-bar scrambling should reject the sentence, responding *no*.

A discourse interpretation task (DIT) tested focus-marking knowledge in narrow subject- (VOS) and multiple-foci (VSO) contexts (five items per condition). A false summary statement followed each story. After deciding if the statement was true or false, participants corrected it by choosing from three options representing the range of English and EP focus structures: SVO+stress, VOS, or VSO. To control for intonation, options were presented visually and aurally. A narrow-focus item is in (14).[8]

(14)   Ana, Berta, and Maria are shopping at the shoe store. Ana finds a pair of red shoes. Ana loves red shoes. So, Ana buys the shoes. Berta and Maria do not like red shoes. Berta and Maria prefer black shoes.

         Ninguém neste grupo gosta de sapatos vermelhos.   ('No one in this group likes red shoes.')

         ▪ Is this statement true or false? ____*false*____

         A. A Ana gosta de sapatos vermelhos.   _____   **SVO**[9]
         B. Gosta a Ana de sapatos vermelhos.   _____   **VSO**
         C. Gosta de sapatos vermelhos a Ana.   ___X___   **VOS**

In (14), the false statement dictates a response which corrects the fact that someone in the group does like red shoes, namely *Ana*, the subject and the only new information; VOS is thus the correct choice.

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5. Individual results and discussion

Table 1 below provides the GJT results. Though NS results are not reported here, note that 14/15 controls had significant differences in IC vs. *IC ratings, ranging from $p < .0001$ to $p < .03$, where most speakers had p values less than .0001.

Focusing on IC/*IC ratings and not the VSO/VOS fillers, we see the beginners' trends are in the wrong direction. Intermediate C is on par with natives, but D gave indeterminate judgments. Speakers F and H were on par with natives, as were all near-natives, most of whom had highly significant contrasts. E showed no contrast, and though G appears to have no contrast, her corrections to grammatical IC constructions were for word order only. Together with her TVJT success, it was concluded that G has knowledge of Agree.

Participant Group ID	IC, Agree (n=5)	*IC, no Agree (n=5)	VSO (n=5)	VOS (n=5)	Frequency of correction to SVO
Beginner					
A[†]	1.8	2.4	2.2	1.6	8
B	2.6	3.2	3.2	2	4
Intermediate					
C*	3.8	1.6	2.6	3.6	4
D	3.4	3.6	3.8	2.6	3
Advanced					
E	2.2	1.2	2.4	3	4
F*	5	2	3.6	3.2	0
G	2	1.2	4.4	2.2	2
H*	5	1	2	3.8	1
Near-native					
I*	4.8	1	1.4	1.6	10
J*	4.8	1.8	2.8	3	5
K*	2.6	1	1.6	2	8
L*	5	1	2	2	10
M*	4.4	1	2.4	2.6	5
N*	5	1	4.4	4	1

[†] Hereafter, participants will be referred to by these IDs.
*Mean IC/*IC ratings were significantly different from each other at $p < .02$ - .0001, according to paired t-tests ($p < .05$).
Table 1. L2 individual mean ratings (1 = *most unnatural* - 5 = *most natural*) on the GJT

Moving to the TVJT results, overall performances for all groups are presented below in Table 2. No L2 group had more than 50% of its members at success in VOS, and only 53.3% of the NSs had VOS success. As most individuals performed better with VSO and SVO than with VOS, poorer VOS performance must not be due to a problem with Principle A. Low VOS accuracy here combined with VOS acceptance in GJT fillers and/or the DIT may reflect a non-target-like scrambling operation (i.e., scrambling to an A-position). Overall low accuracies may be an indication of test difficulty.

Participant Group	VOS		VSO		SVO (fillers)	
L2 groups	5/14	(35.7%)	6/14	(42.9%)	11/14	(78.6%)
Beginner	1/2	(50%)	1/2	(50%)	1/2	(50%)
Intermediate	0/2	(0%)	1/2	(50%)	2/2	(100%)
Advanced	1/4	(25%)	0/4	(0%)	2/4	(50%)
Near-native	3/6	(50%)	4/6	(66.7%)	6/6	(100%)
Native controls	8/15	(53.3%)	12/15	(80%)	11/15	(73.3%)

Table 2. Total individual successes (80% accuracy) on the TVJT, $n_{successes}/n_{total\ individuals}$ (percent)

Turning to the DIT results in Table 3, word order choice frequencies and accuracies are reported. Shading indicates either success (80% accuracy) or optionality with a target preference.

Participant Group ID	Narrow Focus (n=5)				Multiple-Foci (n=5)			
	VOS[†]	#VSO[††]	SVO	Accuracy	#VOS	**VSO**	SVO	Accuracy
Beginner								
A*	0	0	5	0%	0	0	5	0%
B*	1	0	4	20%	0	0	5	0%
Intermediate								
C*	0	0	5	0%	0	0	5	0%
D*	0	0	5	0%	0	0	5	0%
Advanced								
E*	0	0	5	0%	0	0	5	0%
F*	0	0	5	0%	0	0	5	0%
G	3	0	2	60%	1	0	4	0%
H	5	0	0	100%	4	1	0	20%
Near-native								
I*	0	0	5	0%	0	0	5	0%
J	3	0	2	60%	1	0	4	0%
K*	0	0	5	0%	0	0	5	0%
L	1	0	4	20%	3	1	1	20%
M	0	0	5	0%	1	1	3	20%
N	1	3	1	20%	1	3	1	60%
Native controls								
1*	0	0	5	0%	0	0	5	0%
2*	0	0	5	0%	0	1	4	20%
3*	0	0	5	0%	0	0	5	0%
4*	0	0	5	0%	0	0	5	0%
5	3	0	2	60%	1	3	1	60%
6	5	0	0	100%	1	3	1	60%
7*	0	0	5	0%	0	0	5	0%
8	4	0	1	80%	1	4	0	80%
9	4	0	1	80%	1	4	0	80%
10	4	0	1	80%	1	3	1	60%
11	5	0	0	100%	1	4	0	80%
12	4	0	1	80%	1	3	1	60%
13	4	0	1	80%	1	3	1	60%
14	4	0	1	80%	1	3	1	60%
15*	0	0	5	0%	0	0	5	0%

[†] Boldfaced items indicate the preferred EP word order (i.e., the target response) for the given focus construction.
[††] A pound sign indicates that this choice is the wrong inversion structure, given the context. SVO with stress is not permissible for any test item.
* An asterisk indicates that this individual chose the English SVO+stress option 4–5/5 times in both conditions.

Table 3. L2 and native speaker response frequencies and accuracies in the DIT

In the L2 group, A–F exhibited reliance on their L1 in both conditions, while G showed optionality with a marginal preference for inversion in narrow focus. H achieved success with narrow focus but had a preference for the infelicitous VOS order with multiple foci. In the near–native group, results varied. Some speakers relied on their L1 option, some had optionality with an L1 preference in one or both conditions, and others had optionality with an EP preference in one or both conditions.

The NS results reveal a crucial finding: while 8/15 NSs achieved success in at least one condition, only three of those eight (8, 9, 11) performed at ceiling-level in both conditions, and just two reached 100% accuracy. Six NSs consistently chose SVO, which was not predicted by the current theoretical account for EP focus-marking.[10] In the narrow focus condition, individuals who performed at 80% also chose SVO+stress for one test item.[11] One NS (5) displayed optionality, choosing VOS 3/5 times and SVO two times.[12] In the multiple-foci condition, NS accuracy rates decreased overall–only 3/15 NSs performed at 80%; none performed at 100%. Nine controls permitted VSO, VOS and SVO as options for multiple-foci (5–6, 10, 12–14); others chose only VSO and VOS (8–9, 11).[13] Importantly, for these nine natives with optional focus-marking strategies for multiple-foci structures, it is the case that they prefer VSO, choosing VSO 3–4/5 times. This pattern of optionality with a VSO preference was observed in only one L2 speaker, near-native N.

Let us now proceed with a discussion of these results by first reviewing Table 4 below, which provides an overall view of the experiment. The properties tested and target responses are noted. Where an individual exhibited target-like behavior, the respective box is shaded. In Table 4, we see a developmental trend, moving from the least target-like patterns (1–2) to patterns (6–7), corresponding to behavior which approximates the target grammar. Such results are similar to Hertel (2003), who discovered a developmental trend in knowledge at the syntax-discourse interface in the L2 acquisition of Spanish word order. The advanced speakers here had recourse to their L1 option, despite knowledge of the syntax, and H performed in target-like fashion with narrow focus and VOS order, most likely due to his L2 Dutch grammar. He has not fully acquired the interface conditions which constrain the use of VOS, though, as he also preferred VOS for multiple foci.[14] The near-native behavior exposes a division in interlanguage comprehension: though they converged on the L2 syntax, they diverged in focus-marking. Such results provide support for the claim that syntactic and pragmatic/interpretive knowledge are of unequal status in the L2 speaker's grammar.

Not shown in Table 4 are the finer details of the optionality in patterns 6-7. Importantly, while most of these L2ers had an L1-biased optionality, G, J, and N (pattern 7) minimally converged on native-like optionality, choosing SVO but marginally preferring inversion, confirming that knowledge at the interface, even optionality, is not unattainable, as found by Slabakova and Montrul (to appear).

Recall that while some NSs chose SVO for focus, others chose inversion; others still demonstrated optionality. Based on these judgments, EP natives use both the English-type prosodic strategy and inversion for focus-marking.[15] Thus, L2ers must learn that not only is their L1 strategy L2–sanctioned, but another option, inversion, is available as well. In such a superset(L2)–subset(L1) situation, restructuring their grammar so that SVO+prosody is no longer a categorical rule may be problematic. As discussed by Schwartz and Sprouse (1996, p.49) under the FT/FA, when target input does not signal the unacceptability of an L1 property, "forc[ing] the delearning" of it, that property will be prone to fossilization in the L2 grammar.

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[10] It does not appear to be the case that knowledge of English affected the NSs' focus-marking strategies, thus influencing their use of prosody with EP canonical SVO. Some individuals who (consistently) chose SVO+prosody were self-described 'advanced' speakers of English, and yet others were self-described 'beginners.' Further, some natives who consistently chose VSO/VOS labeled themselves 'advanced' speakers of English.

[11] Individual results confirmed that these six individuals did not choose SVO+stress for the same test item.

[12] Two L2ers (G, J) displayed the same pattern (cf., Table 3 above).

[13] Nine NSs chose VOS for the same test item, likely due to the fact that the object was mentioned in the associated context. Though the object is contrastive information (and should thus be focused with the subject, deriving VSO), NSs may have considered it a topic, leading to scrambling, a de-focusing operation (Costa, p.c.)

[14] This may be evidence for positive L2 transfer, without L1 interference, during L3 development. Importantly, a learner's knowledge of discourse-constrained word order may be misleading: while H appears to have acquired the target representation for narrow focus, his poor TVJT performance reveals a lack of A-bar scrambling knowledge and may point to a non-native-like mental representation of the VOS order.

[15] How one strategy becomes dominant with respect to another and how a theory of grammar can account for optionality is beyond the scope of this study and will not be addressed here.

For those near-natives exhibiting optionality in their focus judgments, most preferred SVO over inversion. Rather than the residual optionality often observed in near-natives, this divergent behavior might be better termed *subset-constrained optionality*, wherein the learners have acquired both L2 options but deviate from target preferences in favoring that L1 option which represents the subset of the L2. Similar to residual optionality, results here suggest that subset-constrained optionality may persist until the end state.

| | GJT
Agree
(contrast) | TVJT
A-bar Scrambling
(rejection) | DIT | | *Number of Subjects* | *Proficiency Levels* |
			Narrow Focus (VOS)	*Multiple-Foci* (VSO)		
(1)	no contrast	rejection	SVO	SVO	1	beginner (A)
(2)	no contrast	acceptance	SVO	SVO	2	beginner –intermediates (B, D)
(3)	contrast	acceptance	SVO	SVO	3	Intermediate-advanced (C, E, F)
(4)	contrast	acceptance	VOS	VOS	1	advanced (H)
(5)	contrast	rejection	SVO	SVO	2	near-native (I, K)
(6)	contrast	rejection	SVO	optionality	1	near-native (M)
(7)	contrast	rejection	optionality	optionality	4	advanced-near-native (G, J, L, N)

Table 4. Distribution of L2 speakers across behavioral patterns in the GJT, TVJT, and DIT

So is native-like treatment of the optionality demonstrated by NSs possible? It has been shown that a few L2ers did converge (minimally) on native preferences, but most diverged from native judgments.[16] It is certainly difficult to adequately ascertain why this might be without more information about the status of the NS optionality; although, the natives' judgments lead us to believe that the input is inconsistent. In particular, if some native speakers use only SVO+prosody, some natives use only VSO/VOS, and other natives use both constructions with an inversion preference, it is conceivable that a learner is exposed to only one of these input varieties. Even if learners are exposed to the optionality, the learnability task is no less demanding, as learners must overcome a paucity of input, and complex processing is involved at the interface.[17] Divergence may not be the case for all, but L2ers who converge on native-like optionality in the interpretive domain may be in the minority.

6. Conclusion

This study's results verify that knowledge in the narrow syntax does not necessarily feed knowledge at the interface. Despite methodological shortcomings (e.g., few test items, few participants), results are not in conflict with those of previous studies addressing the interpretive stratum of the grammar: a dichotomy of grammatical and pragmatic knowledge exists in advanced and near-native speakers. The new evidence here pertains to the acquisition of optionality. If the L1 constitutes a subset of the L2, convergence on native optionality at the interface is not impossible, but results suggest that it is more likely that L2 grammars are prone to fossilization in this area. More research is undoubtedly needed, but this study offers evidence from an understudied L1–L2 pair. Alongside the results obtained from other related research efforts, this study will hopefully serve as a catalyst for continued work in L2 acquisition at the syntax-discourse interface.

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[16] In light of these issues and the results, it may not be entirely accurate to label the advanced and near-native speakers' grammars as divergent (i.e., in contrast to 'incomplete' *vis-à-vis* Sorace, 1993) and thus no longer able to develop. In studying L2 divergence and incompleteness in Hungarian, Papp (2000) suggested that end-state grammars, and even NS grammars, are not static (183, fn. 8). Under this view, we would predict that with more time and exposure to input, L2 learners can converge on target optionality for focus. However, the near-natives and one advanced speaker in this study have lived in worked in Portugal for 10+ years, and all are married to an EP NS. It is not clear that more L2 exposure would promote target behavior.

[17] Furthermore, in a natural setting, a non-native speaker using SVO+prosody for focus would never be corrected, since this appears to be acceptable in the L2, though maybe not preferred by all natives.

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